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## CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS NUMBER

### WRITERS:

Joshua Bloor	Ph.D. Candidate, University of Manchester
Greg Coates	Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary
Barry W. Hamilton	Northeastern Seminary
Morna Hooker	Robinson College
Craig Keen	Azusa Pacific University
Rex Matthews	Candler School of Theology
Major Dean Smith	Booth College
Nell Becker Sweeden	George Fox Evangelical Seminary
Don Thorsen	Azusa Pacific University
Laurence W. Wood	Asbury Theological Seminary
Kelly Diehl Yates	Nazarene Theological College

### BOOK REVIEWERS:

David Bundy, Barry L. Callen, David C. Cramer, John Culp, B. Craig Drurey, Charles L. Harrell, John Daniel Holloway III, Tyler R. Huson, William Kostlevy, E. Jerome Van Kuiken, Joshua McNall, Brent A. Strawn, Jennifer L. Woodruff Tait

## EDITOR'S NOTES

This issue of the Journal features essays on a range of topics that should be of interest to most Wesleyans, including the Wesleys' use of Scripture, John Wesley's understanding of Christian perfection, and Wesley's ethics. Unfortunately, in the time that has passed since the publication of the spring issue, Rob Staples, a past President and longstanding member of the Wesleyan Theological Society, entered the communion of saints in glory. The sacraments were central to Dr. Staples' life and work, so it is especially fitting that the present issue includes three essays on the sacramental life of the church. The issue also includes a very personal tribute to Rob that highlights his demeanor and work as a gifted teacher, theologian, and friend.

Jason E. Vickers, Editor  
Fall, 2015



# SCRIPTURAL HOLINESS: THE WESLEY'S USE OF SCRIPTURE\*

by

Morna Hooker

A few years ago, I was asked to take part in a series of talks to Cambridge Methodist Society on Charles Wesley's Hymns, and took as my theme their scriptural basis. To my dismay, I discovered that the students were not only unfamiliar with more than half a dozen of his hymns, but possessed an equally abysmal lack of knowledge of scripture. I found myself explaining one unknown by appealing to another. It is therefore a pleasure to find myself today addressing a very different audience, confident that I shall encounter no such problem.

## The Use of Scripture in the Hymns

I have taken as my sub-title "the Wesleys' use of scripture," but the word *use* is perhaps an inadequate term. Charles Wesley's hymns, certainly, are *soaked* in scripture, to the extent that some have a biblical echo in every line. Take the first verse of "Behold the servant of the Lord," for example:

Behold the Servant of the Lord,  
I wait thy guiding eye to feel,  
To hear and keep thy every word,  
To prove and do thy perfect will.  
Joyful from my own works to cease,  
Glad to fulfil all righteousness.

That verse draws on the KJV of six different verses of scripture.<sup>1</sup>

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\*A version of this article was presented as the tenth annual Manchester Wesley Research Centre Lecture, Nazarene Theological College, Manchester, UK, June 2014.

<sup>1</sup>Luke 1:38: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord*; Ps. 32:8: I will *guide* thee with *mine eye*; John 14:23: if a man love me, he will *keep my words*; Rom. 12:2: that ye may *prove* what is that good and *perfect will*; Heb. 4:10: he that has entered into his rest . . . hath *ceased from his own works*; and Matt. 3:15: for thus it becometh us to *fulfil all righteousness*.

Or turn to that most widely sung of all his hymns, “Love divine, all loves excelling,” the last verse of which runs:

Finish then thy new creation  
 Pure and spotless let us be;  
 Let us see thy great salvation  
 Perfectly restored in thee.  
 Changed from glory into glory  
 Till in heaven we take our place,  
 Till we cast our crowns before thee,  
 Lost in wonder, love, and praise!

Again, the sources are found in six different passages of scripture.<sup>2</sup>

One of the remarkable things about these two verses—both of which set out our theme of “holiness”—is the wide *range* of texts on which they are based. Wesley made use, as we shall see, of passages from every book of the Old Testament, as well as the New. Sometimes we can trace the way in which one passage leads him.

As with the last 4 lines of “Jesus, Lover of my soul”: it is easy to see how the association of ideas leads him from Ps. 26:9, “For with thee is the fountain of life,” to Rev. 22:17, “Let him take the water of life freely,” and so to write:

*Thou of life the fountain art;*  
*Freely let me take of thee;*

From here it is a short step to Israel’s song in Num. 21:17, “Spring up, O well,” and so to John 4:14. “The water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life.” And so we get:

*Spring thou up within my heart,*  
*Rise to all eternity.*

It is typical that Wesley begins from an Old Testament image, “fountain of life,” but transfers it to the context of the New.

Turn from water to fire, and the hymn “O Thou who camest from above,” and we find Charles again beginning with an Old Testament image: the “inextinguishable blaze” which burns for God’s glory is the fire

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<sup>2</sup> Cor. 5:17: If anyone is in Christ, there is a *new creation*; 2 Pet. 3:14: strive to be found in him . . . *without spot or blemish*; Ps. 51:12: *restore in me the joy of your salvation*; 2 Cor. 3:18: we are being *changed* into the same image, *from glory to glory*; Phil. 3:20: *our citizenship is in heaven*; and Rev. 4:10: the 24 elders . . . *cast their crowns before the throne*.

in Lev. 6:15, which burns for ever on the altar. The task of the priests was to guard the fire so that it never went out, an idea taken up in the line “Still let me *guard* the holy fire”; this idea leads immediately to “And still stir up thy gift in me,” an echo of 2 Tim. 1:6, where Timothy is urged to “stir up the gift of God which is in thee”—a reference to the gift of the Holy Spirit. Was it the association of fire with the Holy Spirit that led Charles to this verse? Or was it perhaps the fact that the Greek word used here can be translated to rekindle, i.e., to stir up the fire?

We find another example of his knowledge of the underlying Greek text in that most famous of all his hymns, “And can it be?” The line “*emptied* himself of all but love,” is an echo of Phil. 2:7; the KJV translated the verb “he made himself of no reputation,” but the literal meaning is simply “emptied.” Charles seems to have had one eye, either on the Greek or on a commentary. Or take “Soldiers of Christ arise, and put your armour on,” which is based on Eph. 6:10-17, where the Christian is urged to put on the “whole armour of God.” But Charles renders it: “But take, to arm you for the fight, the *panoply* of God.”

There are signs, too, that Charles was familiar with the vulgate, which would not be surprising since we know that John was urged by his father to compare the Hebrew text with the vulgate. As for Hebrew, he seems to have been using that, too. We are all familiar with the idea that Elijah heard “a still, small voice,” as the KJV of 1 Kings 19:12 puts it. But the Hebrew refers to “a sound of sheer silence.” And we find Charles writing:

Never in the whirlwind found,  
Or where earthquakes rock the place,  
*Still and silent is the sound,*  
The whisper of thy grace.

Charles is aware of the scholarly work of the time, and his hymns are based on solid exegesis. In the Preface to his two-volume work entitled *Short Hymns on Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures*, published in 1762, he comments that “many of the thoughts are borrow'd from Bengelius on the New Testament”—the textual critic and commentator often quoted by John Wesley in his *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*. The “short hymns” published in these two volumes demonstrate how comprehensive Charles' knowledge of scripture is, and how systematically he uses it. There are hymns based on all 66 books of the Bible—1,480 on Old Testament passages, and 870 on the New, often on the most unlikely of texts. His use of the Bible is not haphazard, but deliberate. These hymns are indeed short—many no more than one verse. Looking through the two

volumes, I recognized only 13 of them, though some lines in other verses were strangely familiar. He seems to have recycled many of these, making the most of a particularly good phrase.

Clearly these hymns are the result of systematic study, and this can be seen in the John Rylands Library here in Manchester. I remember looking there at a notebook in which he jotted down the drafts of various hymns. At the top of each page he put the scriptural reference, and if my memory serves me right, in the notebook on display he worked systematically through the Gospel of Matthew—though unfortunately I can't remember whether he found any inspiration in the genealogy in chapter 1! There must have been many such notebooks.

John's own hymns, like his brother's, often contain a scriptural allusion in every line. Take, for example, his translation of the hymn by Count von Zinzendorf which begins:

Jesus, thy blood and righteousness  
My beauty are, my glorious dress.

Here he begins from Paul's enigmatic words in 2 Cor. 5:21, "Christ became sin, that we might become the righteousness of God," and combines them with Isa. 52:1: "Put on your beautiful garments O Jerusalem." In this brief couplet, he conveys the essence of Paul's teaching that Christian believers, those who are "in Christ," share his death and his righteousness.

One can understand, then, why, in the preface to *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People called Methodists*, published in 1780, John Wesley claimed that nowhere else could one find "so distinct and full an account of Scriptural Christianity." The Methodist people, it has often been said, sang their theology—and here it was. And it was, as John claimed, thoroughly scriptural. What the glass in mediaeval churches had done in familiarizing the ordinary people with biblical stories and images was now done by the Wesleys' hymns.

This emphasis on scripture is hardly surprising. John Wesley famously described himself as *homo unius libri*, "a man of one book." In one sense, of course, this is an exaggeration, for he quotes widely from other texts. He had studied and taught the works of the fathers and of philosophers at Oxford, and was profoundly influenced by Jeremy Taylor's *Rule and Exercise of Holy Living* and *Rule and Exercise of Holy Dying*, by Thomas à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*, and by William Law's *On Christian Perfection* and his *Serious Call to the Devout Life*. But Wesley was faithful to the reformation principle of *sola scriptura*. In *A Plain Account of Christian*

*Perfection*, he describes how “In the year 1729 I began not only to read but to study the Bible, as the one, the only standard of truth, and the only model of religion.”<sup>3</sup> Here was the beginning of the change that culminated in the experience in May 1738. It is not surprising, then, that in his *English Dictionary* of 1753,<sup>4</sup> he defined a Methodist as “one who lives according to the method laid down in the Bible.” But it is interesting to compare the explanation given by Charles of the origin of the name; this “harmless nickname” had first been used, he wrote, of those young Oxford scholars who had joined with Charles in trying “to observe the method of study prescribed by the Statutes of the University.”<sup>5</sup> The method based on the Statutes had become the method based on the Bible! The change is significant, for it is indicative of the change in the brothers’ mindset. The Christian life was no longer lived according to a set of statutes, but in conformity with a pattern seen in scriptures.

Nor was this Wesley’s only definition of a Methodist. In his pamphlet *The Character of a Methodist*, he writes: “A Methodist is one who loves the Lord his God with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his mind, and with all his strength,”<sup>6</sup> an Old Testament summary approved by Jesus himself. What that meant for the Methodist people was set out in the hymns, in John’s sermons—based, like Charles’s hymns, on scripture—and in his *Notes on the New Testament*, which reflect his engagement with the commentaries of the best exegetes of his day.

So what *were* the marks of this “scriptural Christianity”? As we might expect from a man who felt his heart strangely warmed while listening to Luther’s *Preface to Romans*, John’s theology is strongly influenced by Paul’s. Nor is it any surprise that throughout Charles’ hymns we find a constant emphasis on Arminianism. “For all, for all my Saviour died, for all, my Lord was crucified,” he cried, echoing Paul’s words,<sup>7</sup> and stressing the *universality* of God’s grace, and the mercy which is “immense, unfathomed, unconfined.”<sup>8</sup> The work of the Holy Spirit in the believer

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<sup>3</sup>A *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 5.

<sup>4</sup>*The Complete English Dictionary, explaining most of those Hard Words which are found in the best English Writers*. By a Lover of Good English, and Comon Sense.

<sup>5</sup>Charles Wesley, in a letter written to Dr Chandler from London on April 28<sup>th</sup> 1785. The letter is now located in the Methodist Archives and Research Centre at the John Rylands Library, Manchester.

<sup>6</sup>*The Character of a Methodist*, 5.

<sup>7</sup>2 Cor. 5:14f.

<sup>8</sup>The words are used in the hymn which begins “Father, whose everlasting love.”

and the church is also emphasized by both brothers, leading them to speak of Christian assurance and fellowship within the community. But above all, “scriptural Christianity” meant “scriptural holiness.” As Charles put it:

That I Thy mercy may proclaim  
That all mankind Thy truth may see,  
Hallow Thy great and glorious Name,  
And perfect holiness in me.

### Sermon on Scriptural Christianity

If I have chosen to focus today on the idea of “scriptural holiness,” it is, of course, because it lies at the heart of the Wesleys’ theology. According to John, Methodism had been raised up by God to be “a holy people,”<sup>9</sup> called “to spread scriptural holiness over the land.”<sup>10</sup> By “scriptural holiness” he means what he elsewhere describes as “scriptural Christianity,” for in his Sermon on *Scriptural Christianity*, which was included in the core volume of *Forty-Four Sermons*, we find him explaining that by “Christianity” he is referring, *not* to “a set of opinions,” and *not* to “a system of doctrines,” but to something which concerns “men’s hearts and lives”<sup>11</sup>—namely, “*the mind which was in Christ*,” formed in them through the holy fruits of the Spirit.<sup>12</sup> The heart of Christianity is to be *like Christ*. The sermon takes as its starting point a text from Acts 4:21: “And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.” Wesley points out that this chapter tells us nothing about the *extraordinary* gifts of the Spirit described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12. To what purpose, then, were they filled with the Holy Ghost? “It was,” he declares, “to give them . . . *the mind which was in Christ*, those holy fruits of the Spirit, which whosoever hath not, is none of His.” The purpose of these “ordinary gifts” of the Spirit, as listed by Paul in Galatians 5, is to ensure that they “*walk as Christ also walked*.”<sup>13</sup> This, though he does not use the term here, is what Wesley understands by “scriptural *holiness*.” His insistence that holiness is the *gift* of the Holy Spirit shows how much his thinking has changed since the days at Oxford, when the members of the Holy Club saw holiness as something to be achieved.

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<sup>9</sup>John Wesley, “The Large Minutes, in *Works*, ed. Thomas Jackson, 1829-31, Vol. VIII, 300.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 299.

<sup>11</sup>*Scriptural Christianity* 5.

<sup>12</sup>*Scriptural Christianity* 4.

<sup>13</sup>*Scriptural Christianity* 5.

After commenting on some of the Spirit's gifts—faith, peace, joy, and hope—hope, that is of *bearing the image of God*, and of the soul's full renewal “in righteousness and true *holiness*,”<sup>14</sup> Wesley turns to the gift of love. The true love of God involves the love of others, for he who has “loved God could not but love his brother also”<sup>15</sup>—and that meant “all mankind.” Christians must love them “even as Christ loved us.”<sup>16</sup> Such a faith inevitably leads to mission, and though that might bring suffering, God would finally reign, and his Kingdom be established on earth.

This sermon was preached before the University of Oxford in 1844, in the presence of the Vice Chancellor, Heads of Houses, Professors, Fellows, scholars, and undergraduates, as well as city officials and magistrates. Charles, who was present on this occasion, commented that he'd never seen a more attentive congregation—though whether they were attentive because they approved and were enthralled by Wesley's arguments or because they were waiting for him to say something of which they could *disapprove* is not clear. The eminent Hebraist, Benjamin Kennicott, commented afterwards that “Under three heads he expressed himself like a very good scholar, but a rigid zealot; and then he came to what he called his plain, practical conclusion. Here was what he had been preparing for all along.”<sup>17</sup>

The “plain, practical conclusion” was a denunciation of his congregation, reminiscent of John the Baptist denouncing his hearers as a “brood of vipers.” Where, Wesley asked, “does this Christianity now exist?” There were, he said, no Christian countries.<sup>18</sup> “Is *this* a Christian city?” he asked.

Are all the Magistrates, all Heads and Governors of Colleges and Halls . . . ‘of one heart and one soul’? Is ‘the love of God shed abroad in our hearts’? Are our tempers the same that were in Him? . . . Are we ‘*holy as He who hath called us is holy* in all manner of conversation?’<sup>19</sup>

Here we have Wesley's key definition of what it meant to be “holy”—it meant living holy lives, *being holy as God is holy*. But he has not yet finished his attack. He turns next to the “venerable men, who are more espe-

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<sup>14</sup>*Scriptural Christianity* I:2-3.

<sup>15</sup>1 John 4:11.

<sup>16</sup>*Scriptural Christianity* I:5.

<sup>17</sup>Quoted by John Lawson, in *Notes on Wesley's Forty-Four Sermons* (London: Epworth, 1946), 25.

<sup>18</sup>*Scriptural Christianity* IV:1.

<sup>19</sup>*Scriptural Christianity* IV:3.

cially called to form the tender minds of youth,” that is, to those teaching in the University, and asks whether they are filled with the Holy Spirit.<sup>20</sup>

Do ye, brethren, abound in the fruits of the Spirit, in lowliness of mind, in self-denial and mortification, in seriousness and composure of spirit, in patience, meekness, sobriety, temperance; and in unwearied, restless endeavours to do good in every kind unto all? . . . Is this the general character of Fellows of Colleges? I fear it is not.<sup>21</sup>

After accusing them of “pride, haughtiness, impatience, peevishness, sloth and indolence, gluttony and sensuality,” he turns his wrath on ministers of religion.

This time he includes himself in his questioning. “Do we know God? Do we know Jesus Christ? *Hath God revealed His Son in us?*”<sup>22</sup> Wesley’s last question echoes words used by Paul in Gal. 1:15, a passage to which we must return. Finally, he attacks “the youth of this place,” many of whom are “stubborn, self-willed, heady, and high-minded.”<sup>23</sup> The sermon ends with a plea to God to save his people.

It is hardly surprising if the congregation was outraged by Wesley’s words. Benjamin Kennicott, to be sure, approved of the description of undergraduates as “a generation of triflers,” but he did not like the remaining denunciations. The Vice-Chancellor sent for a copy of his sermon, wondering how to discipline him. Wesley was never invited to preach in St Mary’s again.

But for our purposes, it is the *positive* statements in this sermon that are relevant. What does scriptural Christianity mean? It means having “the mind which was in Christ,” “bearing the image of God,” loving God and loving others as Christ loved us, being “holy as God is holy”; it means God revealing himself “in us.” These are ideas which reappear in other sermons, and hardly surprisingly, since these phrases sum up what Wesley meant by scriptural holiness. So was he justified in terming this “scriptural”? We must turn next to a consideration of what scripture itself means by “holiness.”

### Scriptural Holiness

The roots of the biblical concept of holiness are found in Israel’s conviction that she was called to be the people of God, who had commanded

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<sup>20</sup>*Scriptural Christianity* IV:6.

<sup>21</sup>*Scriptural Christianity* IV:7.

<sup>22</sup>*Scriptural Christianity* IV:8.

<sup>23</sup>*Scriptural Christianity* IV:9.

her to “Be holy as I am holy.”<sup>24</sup> Holiness was what differentiated God from men and women, so that in summoning Israel to be his people, to “consecrate” themselves to him, God demanded that they should share his “otherness” and be *like* him. They must make themselves holy—separate themselves from other nations. The call came, however, not to individuals, but to the whole nation. As John Wesley later aptly expressed it, biblical holiness is essentially *social* holiness: it concerns the whole community.<sup>25</sup> The demand is set out in Lev. 11:

I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves, therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. . . . For I am the Lord who brought you up from the land of Egypt, to be your God; you shall be holy, for I am holy.<sup>26</sup>

You will notice that what God demands is based on what God has already done—on “prevenient grace.” God has graciously chosen Israel as his special people, and her holiness depends on her relationship with him. She is to be holy as he is holy, to be *like* him. *To speak of his holiness is to speak, in effect, of what he is*, so being holy means living according to the revealed character of God. In Leviticus, “being holy” is defined mainly in cultic terms. Israel is separated from other nations by rules about cleanliness. But there was another aspect to this holiness—what we have termed the “social” aspect—which was present already in the Ten Commandments, and could be summed up in the command to love your neighbour as yourself,<sup>27</sup> and it was this dimension that came to be emphasised, in particular, by the prophets.

But *why* was Israel chosen as God's people? What was the *purpose* of her call? There are two kinds of answer. The first concentrates on the relationship between God and Israel. She is the recipient of his grace, and must therefore serve him by her worship and in her manner of life. Although this answer rightly sees that God's holiness demands purity on the part of his worshippers, and can lead to devotion and piety, it can also result in a community that is turned in upon itself and excludes outsiders. It takes the idea of separation from outsiders so seriously that it cuts them off. “Be holy” is understood to mean “keep aloof”—or form a “Holy Club.” According to Deuteronomy, when Israel entered the Promised

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<sup>24</sup>Lev. 19:2. Cf. the command to be a “holy nation” in Ex. 19:6.

<sup>25</sup>Preface to 1739 Hymns and Sacred Poems (John Wesley, *Works*, ed. Thomas Jackson, 1829-31, Vol. XIV), 321.

<sup>26</sup>Similarly Lev. 19:2; 20:26. Cf. Ex. 19:6; 21:31; Deut.7:6.

<sup>27</sup>Lev. 19:18.

Land, God drove out the nations already there, and instructed his people to exterminate those who were delivered into their hands. They must not intermarry with other nations, lest they draw them away from serving Yahweh, their God. They must pull down their altars and burn their idols, since they, Israel, were “a people holy to the Lord.”<sup>28</sup>

We see a later example of this attitude in the exclusive policy adopted by Nehemiah and Ezra, who rigorously separated their community from other nations: they were God’s people—they alone—and they were concerned to keep their community pure. Later still, the members of the Dead Sea community at Qumran had a similar understanding of the meaning of holiness, endeavouring to keep themselves separate from anyone who was unholy.<sup>29</sup> This was how the Pharisees—the name means “the separated ones”—understood holiness—and how Paul the Pharisee had understood it.<sup>30</sup> God has called his people to be holy, but God’s grace apparently stopped there, with them. The relationship between God and his people is seen as an exclusive one. Loving your neighbour meant loving your fellow-Israelite.

The alternative approach understood God’s purpose in choosing the Jews as extending *beyond* Israel to the other nations. Certainly God had separated them from other nations—but it was for a purpose, and this purpose, paradoxically, *involved* the other nations. This triangular relationship is adumbrated already in God’s covenant with Abraham, who was chosen by God to be the ancestor of a great nation, but who was promised that he would be the source of blessing to *all* the nations of the earth.<sup>31</sup> But it is the prophets who spell out the implications of Israel’s call. One of them wrote the book of Jonah, a story that symbolizes Israel’s mission to other nations—and her reluctance to undertake the task given her.<sup>32</sup>

Another prophet who shared the vision of Israel’s call was the prophet who wrote some of the later chapters of Isaiah. Convinced that Yahweh, the God of Israel, was the only true God, and that the gods worshipped by other nations did not in fact exist, he understood God’s call of Israel to be

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<sup>28</sup>Deut. 7:1-6.

<sup>29</sup>See in particular IQS—*The Community Rule*.

<sup>30</sup>See Phil. 3:4-6.

<sup>31</sup>Gen. 12:3; 18:18.

<sup>32</sup>Jonah, after initially *refusing* God’s commission, and taking flight, is depicted as finally obeying God’s summons to go to Nineveh, where he proclaims the message entrusted to him—a message of coming judgement. When his words are effective, the people of Nineveh are—to Jonah’s great annoyance—saved.

his people as a call to *reveal* him to the other nations. If this God—the Holy One of Israel<sup>33</sup>—was the God of all the earth and all its peoples, should not they, too, be taught about him, and should they not worship and serve him? God's purpose was that his salvation should “reach to the end of the earth,”<sup>34</sup> and Israel's task was to be a witness to God's power and love—to be “a covenant to the people, a light to the nations.”<sup>35</sup>

On Sinai, God had called Israel to be his people and made a covenant with her. Now, Israel is herself a covenant—the means of binding together God and the nations of the world. Israel herself had been brought out of darkness and slavery in Egypt, and her task now is to assist in doing for others what has been done for her: to open blind eyes, release prisoners, and establish justice on the earth.<sup>36</sup> In other words, Israel is called to act as God's representative on earth.

In place of the nationalism which arises from the command to be holy being interpreted as a command to keep aloof, the prophets insisted that God's grace did not stop with Israel, but extended to the whole human race. Israel's task was to *reflect* that grace: this is what it meant to act as God's representatives on earth. This task had originally been entrusted to Adam in the Garden of Eden and according to Jewish legend, Adam—created in the image of God—originally reflected God's glory.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>33</sup>Isa. 43:3, 14; 45:11; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7.

<sup>34</sup>Isa. 49:6. Even earlier, another prophet had prophesied that the day would come when all the nations would flock to Jerusalem to worship God and learn his ways. Isa. 2:2-4=Mic. 4:1-3. Cf. Isa. 55:5 and 60:1-3. This idea was picked up by yet another prophet, who declared that on that day,

the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord,  
to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord,  
and to be his servants. . .

these I will bring to my holy mountain

and make them joyful in my house of prayer. . .

for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples (Isa. 56:6-7).

The prophet who spoke these words believed that God had chosen Israel as his people, and that her role was to reveal his glory to other nations.

<sup>35</sup>Isa. 42:6.

<sup>36</sup>Isa. 42:7.

<sup>37</sup>This is referred to in various Jewish writings, e.g., in Apoc. Moses (the Greek version of the Life of Adam and Eve) 20-21. By sinning, Adam lost his likeness to God. But in time the hope arose that one day this likeness would be restored, and men and women would once again reflect God's glory. We find this hope expressed in Dan. 12:3 and 2 Cor. 3:18. According to Ex. 34:29-35, Moses' face shone with the reflected glory of God after speaking to God on Mount Sinai.

In commanding his people to “Be holy as I am holy”—in other words, to be like him—God was calling Israel to be what Adam had failed to be. No wonder, then, that God’s purpose did not stop with Israel. The nation’s commission was to reveal God to his world—to *all* the descendants of Adam.

### What kind of God?

God’s command to his people to “be holy as I am holy” is a command to *be like God*, to reflect his character to the world. So what was God like? What kind of a God was Israel worshipping?

If we turn to the scene in Exodus where God establishes his covenant with Israel, we find God revealing himself to Moses as

a God merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger,  
and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,  
keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation,  
forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.<sup>38</sup>

If God himself is loving and merciful, compassionate and just, what he requires of his people is, above all, love, mercy, justice, and compassion for others. It is not surprising, then, to find Micah declaring:

What does the Lord require of you  
but to do justice and to love kindness  
and to walk humbly with your God?<sup>39</sup>

For Christians, the answer to the question “What kind of God?” is answered in God’s self-revelation in Christ. Nowhere is this spelt out more clearly than in the Gospel of John. “The word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory”<sup>40</sup>—seen, that is, what God is like. The true nature of God has been revealed in one who is truly human.<sup>41</sup> The doctrine of incarnation lies at the heart of the Christian faith, but all too often that humanity is not taken seriously. Artists portray Jesus with a halo, to emphasize his *otherness*, his holiness, and in the process make him less than human. But the incarnation reminds us that God’s holiness is revealed in one who was fully human. God is *not* a God who stands apart, but a God who *identifies himself* with humanity, a God

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<sup>38</sup>Ex. 34:6-7.

<sup>39</sup>Mic. 6:8.

<sup>40</sup>John 1:18.

<sup>41</sup>Cf. Gal. 4:4; Phil. 2:6-8; Heb. 1:1-4; 2:5-18.

who gets involved with his creation. "The word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory." For John, this means that those who have seen Jesus have seen God,<sup>42</sup> and that the things Jesus says and does are the words and works of God.<sup>43</sup> Jesus is the Logos—the Word—a word that is not only spoken but which accomplishes what is said. As Genesis puts it: "God spoke, and it was so." It is not so strange, then, that those who believe in Jesus, who is described as "the truth,"<sup>44</sup> are said, not only to *believe* the truth but to *do* it.<sup>45</sup> The way and the truth are revealed in Jesus, and his followers must "walk"—that is, live—in accordance with what they see in him. In other words, believing *in* God and being *like* God are inextricably bound up together.

The link between the two is seen clearly in Jesus' reply to the scribe who asked him which was the greatest commandment. In reply he quotes first from Deuteronomy<sup>46</sup>—"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength"—then from Leviticus:<sup>47</sup> "and the second is this: you shall love your neighbour as yourself."<sup>48</sup> Asked for one command, he has given two—but the reason is clear. The second command is the corollary of the first, and the first cannot be separated from it.<sup>49</sup> If you love God, you *must* love your neighbours, and Jesus maintained that "neighbours" included *Gentiles* as well as Jews. As the author of 1 John later insisted, you cannot claim to love God if you hate others.<sup>50</sup>

For the Christian, the command to be holy as I am holy is a command to be like Christ. Not surprisingly, it is in the letters of Paul that we find the fullest description of what that might mean in terms of everyday life, since Paul was concerned to spell out what the gospel meant—not simply in matters of belief, but in questions of behaviour. For Paul, the

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<sup>42</sup>John 14:9.

<sup>43</sup>John 14:10.

<sup>44</sup>John 14:6.

<sup>45</sup>John 3:21. The Greek reads literally "doing the truth." See also 1 John 1:6. Cf. the words of the Psalmist: "Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth."

<sup>46</sup>Deut. 6:5.

<sup>47</sup>Lev. 19:18.

<sup>48</sup>Mark 12:28-34.

<sup>49</sup>To be sure, Paul quotes the "second" command, saying that it contains "the whole law," in Gal. 5:14, and makes no reference to the "first"; cf. also Rom. 13:9f. Love for God is apparently taken for granted. But this is because love for one's neighbours is the corollary which needs to be spelt out.

<sup>50</sup>1 John 4:20.

Jew, the link between faith and behaviour is axiomatic; but as a Christian, his faith is now centred on what God has done in Christ, and the behaviour which goes with it is what he terms in Romans “the obedience of faith.”<sup>51</sup> Protestant interpretation of Pauline theology was dominated for centuries by “Justification by faith,” the watchword of the Reformation. Sadly, Luther’s stress on the antithesis between faith and works as a means of salvation had the unfortunate result that some later interpreters stressed faith to the exclusion of everything else. Personal belief was seen as all-important, and this led to an understanding of religion which concentrated on personal salvation and forgot that—in Paul’s words—salvation needed to be “worked out” in one’s manner of life.<sup>52</sup> Paul’s letters demonstrate how important the obedience based on faith—that is, holiness—is. Righteousness and sanctification go together.

### Becoming Like Christ

One of the remarkable features of Paul’s letters is that he regularly addresses his *Gentile* readers as “saints” or “holy ones,” the term once used for Israel. In doing so, he takes for granted what he argues for in Romans and Galatians—that they are members of God’s people and so holy. Elsewhere, Paul boldly applies to Christians words once addressed to Israel: “I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”<sup>53</sup> Through their baptism into Christ they share his death and resurrection; they have died to their old way of life and been raised to a new one—a life lived “in Christ.”<sup>54</sup>

Another way of expressing this is to describe it as a new creation. According to Genesis, Adam had been created after the image of God, but those who belong to Christ have been transferred into a *new* creation,<sup>55</sup> and they are being changed into the image of Christ<sup>56</sup>—who is himself the *true* image of God.<sup>57</sup> Look at Christ, and you will see what God is like; look at Christians, and what you *should* see is what Christ is like. For Paul, therefore, the Christian life was a matter of imitating Christ—or rather, of being *conformed* to Christ.<sup>58</sup> And that is in fact a better way of

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<sup>51</sup>Rom. 1:5; 15:15-19.

<sup>52</sup>Phil. 2:12. For the idea that Christians will have to give an account of their actions on the Day of Judgement see, e.g., 1 Cor. 3:13-15; 2 Cor. 5:10.

<sup>53</sup>2 Cor. 6:16-18.

<sup>54</sup>See Romans 6.

<sup>55</sup>2 Cor. 5:17.

<sup>56</sup>2 Cor. 3:18.

<sup>57</sup>2 Cor. 4:4.

<sup>58</sup>Paul uses the Greek verb meaning “conformed” in relation to the goal of Christian life in Rom. 8:29; Phil 3:10, 21.

putting it, since what we are talking about is not merely a matter of imitation—like copying the fashions worn by the latest celebrity—for it is not something that we can ourselves do, but rather is for Paul always the work of the Holy Spirit in the Christian.

One of the best known of all New Testament stories is that of Paul's so-called "conversion" on the Damascus Road. I say "so-called," since the term "conversion" suggests that Paul was converted from one religion to another, whereas, of course, he continued to worship the same God—the God who, he now believed, had revealed himself in the death and resurrection of Christ.<sup>59</sup> Luke—who thinks the story so significant that he tells it at length three times, links it each time with Paul's commissioning as an apostle to the Gentiles. Paul does not recount the story of the Damascus Road, but in each of his three brief references to his encounter with the Risen Lord<sup>60</sup> he, too, speaks of his commission as an apostle. In one of them he describes how the time came when, as he puts it:

God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son *in me*, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles.<sup>61</sup>

Most translators understand Paul to be saying that God was pleased to reveal his Son *to* him, but I suspect that they do so because that is what they think Paul *ought* to have written. Is Paul not describing the revelation of Christ which was given *to* him on the Damascus Road? The problem is that the Greek preposition that Paul uses—the word *en*—normally means "in." Was that perhaps what Paul meant? If not, why did he use *en*, rather than the normal Greek construction?

Let us suppose that what Paul intended to say was, indeed, that God was pleased to reveal his Son *in* him, in order that he might proclaim him among the Gentiles. If we—together with John Wesley<sup>62</sup>—are right in doing so, then Paul understood himself to have been commissioned, not simply to *preach* the gospel, but to *live* it. From that moment the Son of

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<sup>59</sup>The term "conversion" suggests that Christianity was a separate religion, whereas at the time that Paul became a Christian, it was still a sect within Judaism. Indeed, the terms "Christian" and "Christianity" had not yet been coined. Unfortunately the notion that Paul was "converted" contributed to the later belief that Judaism and Christianity were opposed, and to enmity between them.

<sup>60</sup>See also 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8-11.

<sup>61</sup>Gal. 1:15f.

<sup>62</sup>*Scriptural Christianity* IV:8.

God had, as it were, taken over his life.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, it would seem that Paul believed that it was *necessary* for him to live the gospel in order to preach it: God revealed his Son in him, *in order* that he might proclaim him. Christ was to be revealed *in* him—through his words and actions, his behaviour and his suffering.<sup>64</sup> He even claims to have “the mind of Christ.”<sup>65</sup> No wonder, then, that he stresses again and again that what he has done is to try to live in conformity to the gospel.

This calling was not confined to apostles, however, but was the path for all who are “called to be saints,” and “sanctified in Christ Jesus.”<sup>66</sup> We see an example of this in Paul’s letter to the Philippians. In chapter 2, we have the famous Philippian ‘hymn,’ which sets out the gospel about the one who was in the form of God, but emptied himself, and was obedient to death. It is introduced with these words:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look to the interests of others, not to your own. Let the same mind be in you that is found in Christ Jesus.<sup>67</sup>

For many years, New Testament scholars debated how best to translate those last few words. The problem is that there is no verb in the Greek. Literally, it reads “Think this among yourselves which also in Christ Jesus.” So is Paul telling the Philippians that they should have “the mind that *was* in Christ Jesus”—the mind that they see reflected in the way in which he behaved?<sup>68</sup> Or is he talking about the mind which they, the members of his body, already possess, by virtue of the fact that they are “in Christ”? As so often, when confronted with an either/or, the answer may be “both”!<sup>69</sup> The hymn tells us about what Christ himself did. But Paul’s appeal is based on the assumption that those who are “in

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<sup>63</sup>Cf. Gal. 2:20.

<sup>64</sup>Cu 2 Cor. 4:7-15. He can even speak of the fact that “the marks of Christ” are “branded” on his body (Gal. 6:17).

<sup>65</sup>1 Cor. 2:16.

<sup>66</sup>1 Cor. 1:2.

<sup>67</sup>Phil. 2:3-5.

<sup>68</sup>This is the way in which the Authorized Version understood it: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”

<sup>69</sup>I have discussed this issue in “Philippians 2:6-11,” 151-64 in *Jesus und Paulus, Festschrift für Georg Kümmel zum 70. Geburtstag*, edd. E. Earle Ellis & Erich Grässer, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen; reprinted in *From Adam to Christ: Essays on Paul*, Cambridge: CUP 1990, 88-100.

Christ” ought to share his mind, his attitudes, his love and concern for others. This is not something they do in their own strength, however, for it is in fact God who is at work in them.<sup>70</sup> Nor, indeed, is it simply a matter of their own salvation, since the *result* will be that they will shine like stars in a dark world—a light to others.<sup>71</sup>

Paul goes on to remind the Philippians of the way that his own ministry has been modelled on Christ’s self-giving;<sup>72</sup> for this reason he urges them to imitate him.<sup>73</sup> And he, as he says elsewhere, is the imitator of Christ.<sup>74</sup>

The gospel is spread, not simply by word of mouth, but by *actions*. Here is one more example from the many we could choose. Writing to the Thessalonians, Paul reminded them that when he brought them the gospel they had seen what kind of people the apostles were. It was their *actions*, as much as their message, that had impressed the Thessalonians. And they, in turn, became *imitators* of Paul and of the Lord, and so became an example to others, with the result that the word of the Lord rang out throughout the whole region.<sup>75</sup> They had, says Paul, “turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God,”<sup>76</sup> and in the last two chapters of the letter, he spells out something of what that meant. It can be summed up as personal holiness, *and* a concern for one’s neighbour. Paul ends the letter with a prayer for the Thessalonian community:

May the God of peace *sanctify* you entirely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept *blameless* at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>77</sup>

God’s demand to his people had been that they should “Be holy as I am holy.” This command is addressed now to Christians—to those who, as Paul puts it, are “called to be saints.” They, like Israel before them, are called to be God’s representatives on earth—to bring salvation and healing, justice, and peace. The Church must be holy—God’s holy people—in order to witness to the world.

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<sup>70</sup>Phil. 2:13.

<sup>71</sup>Phil. 2:15. Some commentators believe that Paul is here simply contrasting light with darkness. But echoes of Dan. 12:3, Isa. 42:6 and 49:6 suggest that he thinks of the Philippians as a source of illumination to others.

<sup>72</sup>Phil. 3:4-11.

<sup>73</sup>Phil. 3:17.

<sup>74</sup>1 Cor. 11:1.

<sup>75</sup>1 Thess. 1:5-6.

<sup>76</sup>1 Thess. 1:9.

<sup>77</sup>1 Thess. 5:23.

Paul's so-called "conversion" was certainly a dramatic turning-point in his life. From then on he was convinced that Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of God, and that God had raised him from the dead. But his "conversion" can be seen, I suggest, not as a move to a new religion, but rather as a change from one understanding of "holiness" to another. As a Jew, Paul had been a Pharisee—a term which means "separated." Pharisees took the call to be holy seriously, and for Paul, holiness had meant personal piety: living strictly according to the law, avoiding contamination, preserving a relationship with God. But with his conviction that Christ was alive and his call to take the gospel to Gentiles, this understanding of holiness had been destroyed. "Be holy as I am holy" now meant "be what I have revealed myself to be in the person of Jesus Christ, who loved you and gave himself up for you." He now saw holiness, not as a *separation* from others, but rather as an *engagement* with others. God's holy people were called, not to keep God to themselves, but to take him out into the world, to offer the gospel to the nations, to share their knowledge of a loving and compassionate God with all.

You will undoubtedly have noticed the close parallels between Paul and John Wesley, whose so-called "conversion," like Paul's, is celebrated every year. Like Paul, Wesley did not "convert" from one religion to another, nor did he abandon an immoral life for an upright one. Both men had pursued personal holiness *before* their "conversions." Both now believed that holiness was *offered* to them through a personal relationship with Christ. And because their understanding of the God they worshipped had been radically transformed, both now understood holiness to be not only a becoming-like-Christ, but a commission to evangelize the world.

Wesley's description of holiness echoes in many ways what we find in scripture, and in particular in Paul. It means being "holy as God is holy," having "the mind which was in Christ," being "like Christ," "walking as Christ walked," "bearing the image of God," loving God and loving others as Christ loved us; it means God revealing himself "in us," as Gal 1:15 puts it. Like his brother's hymns, John's sermons express the essence of "scriptural Christianity," summing up what it means for those who are God's people to be holy as he is holy. The Wesleys' mission to spread "scriptural holiness" throughout the land was the result of detailed study of the scriptures, and a profound insight into their meaning.

# JOHN WESLEY'S IDEA OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION RECONSIDERED

by

Rex D. Matthews

## The Problem of “Perfection”

All candidates for ordination in The United Methodist Church, whether as deacons or as elders, are asked these questions (among others) by their bishop:

1. Have you faith in Christ?
2. Are you going on to perfection?
3. Do you expect to be made perfect in love in this life?
4. Are you earnestly striving after perfection in love?<sup>1</sup>

The ordination candidates are of course expected to answer “Yes” to all four of these questions (usually coupled with a mental if not verbal qualification, such as “by God’s grace” or “with God’s help”)—but what do they really mean when they do give the expected affirmative answer? We have a problem in The United Methodist Church, and perhaps in other parts of the Wesleyan/Methodist family. We’ve largely lost touch with the meaning of John Wesley’s teaching about Christian perfection.<sup>2</sup>

There is a widespread consensus in modern culture that rejects the very idea of the “perfection” of any individual person as *prima facie* evidence of psychotic delusion. We have learned from modern psychology just how very far from “perfect” all human beings are. Any claim of human “perfection” is usually met with great suspicion and cynical dismissal. We have also learned just how imperfect all our human social, political, and economic systems and institutions are—including our churches. Dishon-

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<sup>1</sup>*The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, 2012 (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2012); deacons, ¶330, 250; elders, ¶336, 262.

<sup>2</sup>An earlier version of this article was published as “‘The Words Get in the Way’: Rethinking John Wesley’s Idea of Christian Perfection,” in *Revista Caminhando* [the scholarly journal of the Faculty of Theology of the Methodist University of São Paulo, Brazil] 18.2 (2013): 97–114.

esty, corruption, and lack of integrity seem almost universal in both public and private life. Consequently the notion of “perfection” of any sort, whether of individuals or of institutions, is a very “hard sell” today.

This general cultural suspicion of “perfection” is exacerbated among Methodist people by the unfortunate consequences of the Holiness movement of the nineteenth century. First in America, and then in England and elsewhere, the Holiness movement gave rise to what mainstream Methodists regarded as serious distortions of John Wesley’s teachings about Christian perfection. As Kenneth J. Collins has noted, Wesley himself disliked and preferred not to use the term “sinless perfection.”<sup>3</sup> However that idea, understood simplistically as the power not to commit sinful acts, took root in some parts of the Holiness movement. The result was the eventual reduction of Christian perfection to a kind of legalistic and behavioristic moralism. This gave rise to popular notions that a “perfect” Christian was one who refrained from certain actions that were considered to be sinful. Lists of such actions varied but often included (for example) drinking, smoking, cursing, gambling, and having sex outside of marriage. The message was clear: “Good (= holy) people don’t . . .”—and vice versa.<sup>4</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century, a number of Holiness groups had split off from the major American Methodist denominations, and mainstream Methodists were becoming alienated by the “increasingly sectarian and schismatic extremism characteristic of much of the Holiness movement.”<sup>5</sup> As a result, they tended to abandon the doctrine of Christian perfection altogether because of what they perceived as “over-emphasis and misinterpretation of entire sanctification and a flouting of

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<sup>3</sup>Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009), 298.

<sup>4</sup>For an excellent case study of this sort of development in the American Holiness tradition, see Paul M. Bassett, “Culture And Concupiscence: The Changing Definition of Sanctity in the Wesleyan Holiness Movement, 1867-1920,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 23 (Spring-Fall 1993): 59-127. Cf. the broader historical accounts by John L. Peters, *Christian Perfection and American Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1956), and Melvin E. Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, second edition (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1996). For British Wesleyan traditions, the brief sketches provided by David Bebbington, *Holiness in Nineteenth-Century England* (London: Paternoster Press, 2000), are useful.

<sup>5</sup>Douglas M. Strong, “The Nineteenth Century: Expansion and Fragmentation,” in *The Cambridge Companion to American Methodism*, ed. Jason E. Vickers (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 63-96; quotation from 86.

ecclesiastical authority” by Holiness movement proponents.<sup>6</sup> The consequence has been, as Albert Outler once put it, that

the keystone in the arch of Wesley's own theological “system” came to be a pebble in the shoes of standard-brand Methodists” . . . leaving them “alienated even by the bare terms—“holiness,” “Christian perfection,” “sanctification”—not to speak of an aversion toward persons who actually profess such spiritual attainments.<sup>7</sup>

Scott J. Jones provides a very similar assessment, and William J. Abraham expresses an even more pessimistic view: “John Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection is at best a dead letter and at worst a political delusion among contemporary Methodists.”<sup>8</sup> Randy Maddox has perceptively identified a key factor in this history:

In significant part because of losing touch with Wesley's mature moral psychology, his North American descendants found it increasingly hard to make sense of his affirmation of the possibility of Christian perfection. Many sought to distance themselves from his perceived unrealistic claim about the goal of sanctification. In the process his emphasis on the centrality of spiritual transformation to salvation was muted. Add to this the impact of popular expositions of genetic determinism, psychological determinism, and the like, and it is little wonder that Wesley's current descendants are as likely as anyone else to doubt that we can expect much transformation in our character.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Priscilla Pope-Levison, “Holiness and Pentecostal Movements Within Methodism,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to World Methodism*, ed. William Gibson, Peter Forsaith, and Martin Wellings (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), 141-55; quotation from 143.

<sup>7</sup>Albert C. Outler, “Theology in the Wesleyan Tradition,” in *Evangelism and Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1996), 118; cf. 117-31.

<sup>8</sup>Scott J. Jones, *United Methodist Doctrine: The Extreme Center* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 215; cf. 210-16; William J. Abraham, “Christian Perfection,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*, ed. William J. Abraham and James E. Kirby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 587.

<sup>9</sup>Randy L. Maddox, “Reclaiming Holistic Salvation: A Continuing Wesleyan Agenda,” in *Holy Imagination: Thinking About Social Holiness*, ed. Nathan Crawford, Jonathan Dodrill, and David Wilson (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2015), 41-54; quotation from pp. 53-54. For a more complete exposition of this insight, see Maddox, “Holiness of Heart and Life: Lessons from North American Methodism,” *Asbury Theological Journal* 51/1 (1996): 151-72.

To further complicate the picture, calling someone a “perfectionist” or saying that someone exhibits “perfectionism” is not always considered a compliment in areas of life other than science and sports and music. Being a “perfectionist” can have some positive dimensions, as psychologist Adrian Furnham recently noted:

Perfectionists value and foster excellence and strive to meet important goals. In certain areas, like sports and science, perfectionism is not just tolerated but encouraged. To some, perfectionism is about high standards, persistence, and conscientiousness. Perfectionists are organized. They have self-imposed high standards, and in the role of parent, teacher, or mentor, they tend to impose those standards on others. Combined with ability and stability, perfectionists can, should, and do, reach their ultimate level of performance.<sup>10</sup>

However, as Furnham continued, there is a dark side:

Perfectionism is seen as a cause and correlate of serious psychopathology. At worst, perfectionists believe they should be perfect—no hesitations, deviations, or inconsistencies. They are super-sensitive to imperfection, failing, and weakness. They believe their acceptance and lovability is a function of never making mistakes. And they don’t know the meaning of “good enough.” For them, it’s always all or nothing. . . . They are driven by a fear of failure; a fear of making mistakes; and a fear of disapproval. . . . Psychologists see perfectionism almost always as a handicap. They see perfectionists as vulnerable to distress, often haunted by a chronic sense of failure; indecisiveness and its close companion procrastination; and shame.<sup>11</sup>

Perfectionism is recognized by the American Psychological Association as a component of Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Disorder (OCPD), which is defined as follows:

A personality disorder in *DSM-5* characterized by a pervasive pattern of preoccupation with orderliness, perfectionism, and control, at the cost of flexibility, openness, and efficiency, beginning by early adulthood and indicated by such signs and symptoms as excessive preoccupation with details, rules, and

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<sup>10</sup>Adrian Furnham, “The Curse of Perfectionism,” *Psychology Today* blog (12 February 2014), online at (accessed 1 June 2015).

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

order; perfectionism that interferes with task completion; excessive devotion to work at the expense of leisure; excessive conscientiousness and scrupulousness; tendency to hoard worthless objects; reluctance to delegate tasks to others; thrifty or stingy attitude towards money; rigidity and stubbornness.<sup>12</sup>

Psychologists disagree about whether or not perfectionism should be divided into categories of “adaptive” and “maladaptive” (or “nonadaptive”), but perfectionism is generally regarded as “a vulnerability factor for unipolar depression, anorexia and suicide” and the weight of current opinion in the world of psychology seems clearly to be that “no form of perfectionism is completely problem free.”<sup>13</sup>

In the realm of philosophy, as H. P. Owen has written, the concept of perfection has two closely allied and often overlapping meanings:

First, it means “completeness,” “wholeness,” or “integrity”: X is perfect when he (or it) is free from all deficiencies. Second, it means the achievement of an end or a goal. This meaning emerges most clearly from the connection between the Greek words *teleios* (“perfect”) and *telos* (“end” or “goal”). An entity is perfect when it has achieved its goal by actualizing its potentialities and realizing its specific form. Bringing these two meanings together, one would say that a thing is complete or entire when it has fulfilled its nature and thereby reached its “end.”<sup>14</sup>

Samuel Blackburn continues this line of discussion, commenting on the “powerful but difficult tradition” in philosophy (and theology) that “associates reality, perfection, absence of change or eternity, and self-sufficiency”:

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<sup>12</sup>Andrew M. Colman, ed., *A Dictionary of Psychology*, fourth edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). *DSM-5* is the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, fifth edition; this is the most recent (2013) update to the American Psychiatric Association’s standard classification and diagnostic tool.

<sup>13</sup>Etienne Benson, “The Many Faces of Perfectionism,” *American Psychological Association Monitor on Psychology* 34/10 (November 2003): 18-20, online at <http://www.apa.org/monitor/nov03/manyfaces.aspx> (accessed 1 June 2015); see also Brit Lizabeth Lippman, “Problematizing Perfectionism: A Closer Look at the Perfectionism Construct,” *Applied Psychology OPUS*, NYU Steinhardt Department of Applied Psychology (undated), online at <http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/opus/issues/2012/fall/problematizing> (accessed 5 June 2015).

<sup>14</sup>H. P. Owen, “Perfection,” in Paul Edwards, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 8 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 6:87-88.

A perfect being would be that which is most real; there is a departure from perfection if anything that could be real is not. Hence a perfect being has no potential that is unrealized, and undergoes no change. Evil is downgraded to mere defect, or absence or lack of something positive: criminality is the failure of some genuine potentiality to be actual, and all such actualization is good.<sup>15</sup>

The result of all this taken together is that many (most?) of John Wesley's spiritual descendants, at least in North America and perhaps elsewhere, have largely abandoned the language of "perfection," even when (or perhaps especially when) it is modified by the adjective "Christian."<sup>16</sup> The question is whether or not it may be possible to reclaim the Wesleyan theme of "holiness of heart and life" for our lives and our churches today by rethinking and reframing Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection. I believe that it is important to try to do this, and want to suggest here some ways in which we might begin.

### **Christian Perfection in Wesley's Writings**

The single most consistent theme in John Wesley's thought over the entire span of his life and ministry was "holiness of heart and life" (or more simply, "holy living") and its cognate goal, Christian perfection. His interest in the theme of "holiness of heart and life" is evident from what Albert Outler has characterized as his "first conversion" in 1725, "a conversion to the ideal of holy living."<sup>17</sup> That interest continued through every phase of his life, until his death in 1791. *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (1766) is Wesley's most important single work on the

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<sup>15</sup>Simon Blackburn, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, second revised edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), online at <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199541430.001.0001/acref-9780199541430> (accessed 9 June 2015). As Blackburn goes on to note, this line of thought is "crucial in creating the climate of thought for the ontological, cosmological, and degrees of perfection arguments for the existence of God."

<sup>16</sup>It is interesting to note that the recent (2006) Holiness Manifesto, which grew out of a three-year consultation among representatives from a consortium of self-identified Holiness denominations sharing a Wesleyan theological heritage as an effort to provide "a compelling articulation of the message of holiness" for the church today, makes no use of the terms "perfect" or "perfection"; see the text on the webpage of the Wesleyan Holiness Consortium: (accessed 1 June 2015).

<sup>17</sup>Outler, *Theology in the Wesleyan Tradition*, 120.

topic.<sup>18</sup> It was published to try to demonstrate the consistency of his teaching across the years. However, one can see over time evidence of a subtle but significant shift in Wesley's thinking about the *nature* of Christian perfection. Through the 1730s and 1740s Wesley used mostly what can be characterized as a *negative* language in talking about perfection, describing it primarily as freedom from, or the absence of, a host of bad things: *freedom from sin*; *freedom from fear*; *freedom from doubt*; *freedom from guilt*; *freedom from sorrow*; and so on. Beginning in the 1750s and 1760s, the negative language largely (though not entirely) disappeared and Wesley characteristically began to use a more *positive* language, describing Christian perfection as the *presence of* love filling the heart and governing all one's words and actions.<sup>19</sup> This more positive language about Christian perfection as the presence of love filling the heart is dominant in his later writings. Both the negative language and the positive language occasionally occur together, as in the following example from one of his very latest sermons, "On the Discoveries of Faith" (1788):

But what is the "perfection" here spoken of [in Heb. 6:1]? It is not only a deliverance from doubts and fears, but from sin, from all inward as well as outward sin; from evil desires and evil tempers, as well as from evil words and works. Yea, and it is not only a negative blessing, a deliverance from all evil dispositions implied in that expression, "I will circumcise thy heart" [Deut. 10:16; 30:6], but a positive one, likewise, even the planting all good dispositions in their place, clearly implied in that other expression, "To love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul" [Deut. 13:3, etc.].<sup>20</sup>

*A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* was the product of a period of significant controversy within Methodism about the nature of Chris

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<sup>18</sup>John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, in *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 13: *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II*, ed. Paul Wesley Chilcote and Kenneth J. Collins (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013), 132-91. Hereafter *Treatises II*.

<sup>19</sup>David B. McEwan captures this dynamic nicely in *Wesley as a Pastoral Theologian: Theological Methodology in John Wesley's Doctrine of Christian Perfection* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009), when he says that after the 1760s Wesley "keeps the emphasis in Christian perfection on love and the positive desire for its fullness, rather than the more negative focus on sin and the desire to be cleansed" (p. 158).

<sup>20</sup>Sermon 117, "On the Discoveries of Faith" (1788), §16, in John Wesley, *Sermons*, ed. Albert C. Outler, Vols. 1-4 in *The Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984-87), 4:37. Hereafter *Sermons*.

tian perfection.<sup>21</sup> Around 1760, John Wesley became convinced that he had been articulating such a high standard for Christian perfection that people were being hindered from experiencing its freedom. He began encouraging people to seek (through God's grace) the immediate experience of Christian perfection while emphasizing the limits of the deliverance from sin that comes with such perfection. Two leaders of the London society, Thomas Maxfield and George Bell, took this to an extreme:

Maxfield and Bell proclaimed a perfection that was instantaneously attained by the simple affirmation "I believe," forfeiting any role for responsible growth prior to this event. And they portrayed this perfection as "angelic" or absolute, such that there was no need for growth after the event, or for the continuing atoning work of Christ.<sup>22</sup>

They also claimed gifts of prophecy and healing, and Bell attempted to cure blind people and raise the dead. John Wesley was slow to act, but finally repudiated both Maxfield and Bell when Bell predicted the end of the world on 28 February 1763. In reaction to these developments, Charles Wesley became progressively more critical of John's heightened emphasis on the possibility of present attainment and moved toward a more exacting expectation of Christian perfection, which he came to believe could be attained only at or very near to death. The "perfectionist controversy" lies behind the publication of *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, which incorporated in edited form several previously published documents.

In his *Thoughts on Christian Perfection* (1760), using the question-and-answer format typical of the *Minutes* of Conference, Wesley sought to respond to the growing confusion that was beginning to result from the ways in which some of the Methodist preachers and people were talk-

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<sup>21</sup>See Randy L. Maddox, "Be Ye Perfect?" *Christian History* 69 (2001), 32-34, online at <https://www.christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/be-ye-perfect/> (accessed 1 June 2015); Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, second edition (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013), 234-36; W. Stephen Gunter, *The Limits of 'Love Divine': John Wesley's Response to Antinomianism and Enthusiasm* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1989), 202-26; John R. Tyson, "A Brotherly Debate," in *Charles Wesley on Sanctification: A Biographical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids: Francis and Taylor, 1986), 227-301; Tyson, *Assist Me to Proclaim: The Life and Hymns of Charles Wesley* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 230-51; Kenneth J. Collins, *John Wesley: A Theological Journey* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 193-204.

<sup>22</sup>Maddox, "Be Ye Perfect?" 34.

ing about Christian perfection, and in particular to address questions about whether “perfect” Christians were freed from all human infirmities (which Wesley denied) and whether only fully sanctified Christians could be assured of final salvation (which Wesley also denied).<sup>23</sup> Two years later, Wesley found it necessary to publish *Cautions and Directions Given to the Greatest Professors in the Methodist Societies* (1762).<sup>24</sup> This tract was then incorporated in expanded form into a larger work, *Farther Thoughts Upon Christian Perfection* (1764).<sup>25</sup>

In 1764, prompted by the persistent misinterpretations of his teachings by extremists such as Bell and Maxfield and the subsequent tensions with his brother Charles, John Wesley undertook “a review of the whole subject” of Christian perfection, and “wrote down the sum of what I had observed in the following short propositions:”

(1) There is such a thing as *perfection*; for it is again and again mentioned in Scripture.

(2) It is not so early as justification; for justified persons are to “go on unto perfection” [Heb. 6:1].

(3) It is not so late as death; for St. Paul speaks of living men that were “perfect” [Phil. 3:15].

(4) It is not *absolute*. Absolute perfection belongs not to man, nor to angels, but to God alone.

(5) It does not make a man *infallible*—none is infallible, while he remains in the body.

(6) Is it *sinless*? It is not worthwhile to contend for a term. It is *salvation from sin*.

(7) It is *perfect love* [1 John 4:18]. This is the *essence* of it; its *properties*, or inseparable fruits, are “rejoicing ever more,” “praying without ceasing,” and “in everything giving thanks” [1 Thess. 5:16-18].

(8) It is *improvable*. It is so far from lying in an indivisible point, from being incapable of increase, that one perfected in love may grow in grace far swifter than he did before.

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<sup>23</sup>Wesley, *Thoughts on Christian Perfection* (1760), *Treatises II*, 57-82, with introductory comments, 54-56; see note about incorporation into the *Plain Account* in *Treatises II*, 167.

<sup>24</sup>Wesley, *Cautions and Directions Given to the Greatest Professors in the Methodist Societies* (1762), *Treatises II*, 83-91, with introductory comments, 81-82.

<sup>25</sup>Wesley, *Farther Thoughts Upon Christian Perfection* (1764), *Treatises II*, 95-131, with introductory comments 92-94; see note about incorporation into the *Plain Account* in *Treatises II*, 218.

(9) It is *amissible*, capable of being lost; of which we have numerous instances. But we were not thoroughly convinced of this, till five or six years ago.

(10) It is constantly both preceded and followed by a *gradual* work.<sup>26</sup>

One can see John Wesley struggling here to articulate his views clearly. What kind of “perfection” is this, if it is something that can grow or increase? some thing that can be lost or destroyed? something that happens “in a moment” but is both preceded and followed by a gradual work? something that is not absolute? something that does not produce infallibility or sinlessness? This seems to be a very *imperfect* sort of “perfection.” The paradox is that “perfection” as Wesley understood it could co-exist with “imperfections” or infirmities of various kinds, since its essence is an unbroken relationship of love of God and neighbor.<sup>27</sup>

All of these shorter works were incorporated in whole or in abridged form, in the *Plain Account* when it appeared in 1766. Another short piece that also eventually found its way into later editions of the *Plain Account* is worth special attention here, because it provides evidence of important elements of emerging nuance in Wesley’s conception of Christian perfection subsequent to the first publication of the *Plain Account*.

In 1767 John Wesley wrote a letter to his brother Charles outlining three main points relating to Christian perfection, seeking to “come to a good understanding” with Charles about them:

Some thoughts occurred to my mind this morning which I believe it may be useful to set down: the rather because it may be a means of our understanding each other clearly; that we may agree as far as we can, and then let all the world know it.

I was thinking on Christian perfection, with regard to the thing, the manner, and the time.

(1) By perfection I mean the humble, gentle, patient love of God and man ruling all the tempers, words, and actions, the whole heart by the whole life.

I do not include an impossibility of falling from it, either in part or in whole. Therefore I retract several expressions in our Hymns which partly express, partly imply, such an impossibility.

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<sup>26</sup>This text, apparently never published separately, was incorporated into the *Plain Account*; see *Treatises II*, 187. The text goes on to consider at some length an eleventh proposition about whether or not Christian perfection is “instantaneous”; that section of the text is omitted here, but the issue is taken up below.

<sup>27</sup>See T. A. Noble, *Holy Trinity: Holy People—The Theology of Christian Perfecting* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 73-96, esp. 90-94.

And I do not contend for the term *sinless*, though I do not object against it.

Do we agree or differ here? If we differ, wherein?

(2) As to the manner. I believe this perfection is always wrought in the soul by faith, by a simple act of faith, consequently in an instant. But I believe in a gradual work both preceding and following that instant.

Do we agree or differ here?

(3) As to the time. I believe this instant generally is the instant of death, the moment before the soul leaves the body. But I believe it may be ten, twenty, or forty years before.

Do we agree or differ here?

I believe it is usually many years after justification; but that it *may be* within five years or five months after it. I know no conclusive argument to the contrary. Do you? If it must be many years after justification, I would be glad to know how many. *Pretium quotus arroget annus?* And how many days or months or even years can you allow to be between perfection and death? How far from justification *must* it be? And how near to death?

If it be possible, let you and I come to a good understanding, both for our own sakes and for the sake of the people.<sup>28</sup>

The evidence of this letter shows John Wesley as being relatively clear in 1767 about what he understood the *nature* of Christian perfection to be: “the humble, gentle, patient love of God and man ruling all the tempers, words, and actions, the whole heart by the whole life.” He was also relatively clear about the *manner* of perfection: like justification and regeneration, entire sanctification or Christian perfection comes to one *sola fide*, by faith alone, consequently in an instant—but (paradoxically?) with a “gradual work” *both preceding and following* that instant. But he does here express some uncertainty about the *timing* of perfection. How many years must pass between justification and perfection? Since Chris-

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<sup>28</sup>Letter from John Wesley to Charles Wesley, 27 January 1767, in *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, ed. John Telford, 8 vols. (London: Epworth Press, 1931), 5:38-39. Hereafter *Letters*. This letter was published in slightly edited form “Brief Thoughts on Christian Perfection” in the *Arminian Magazine* 6 (1783): 156-57, and subsequently annexed to later editions of *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*. See *Treatises II*, 199, with introductory comments 197-98. The Latin quotation *Pretium quotus arroget annus?* is from Horace, *Epistles* II.i.35, translated in *Letters* as “What year must claim the reward?” and in *Treatises II*, following the Loeb Library edition, as “What is the year that gives fresh value?”

tian perfection comes through faith, it *could* come at any moment in a person's life, and Wesley wants to encourage people to be constantly seeking, hoping, longing, and praying for that moment to come. But generally, he says here, most people probably don't actually experience this until the moment just before death occurs—seeming to echo the position of his brother Charles on this issue.<sup>29</sup>

There is no surviving evidence that Charles Wesley ever replied to John's letter. In fact, the brothers never did come to a complete agreement about these issues. In February 1767 John wrote to Charles about their differing views on sanctification and perfection:

The voice of one who truly love God surely is—" 'Tis worse than death my God to love / And not my God alone." Such a one is certainly "as much athirst for *sanctification* as he once was for justification." You remember this used to be one of *your* constant questions. It is not now. Therefore *you* are altered in your sentiments. And unless we come to an explanation, we shall inevitably contradict each other. But this ought not to be in any wise, if it can possibly be avoided.<sup>30</sup>

Then June 1768 John again wrote to Charles about perfection:

I think it is high time that you and I at least should come to a point. Shall we go on in asserting perfection against all the world? Or shall we quietly let it drop? We really must do one or the other; and, I apprehend, the sooner the better. What shall we jointly and explicitly maintain (and recommend to all our preachers) concerning the nature, the time (now or by-and-by), and the manner of it (instantaneous or not)? I am weary of intestine war, of preachers quoting one of us against the other. At length let us *fix* something for good and all; either the same as formerly or different from it.<sup>31</sup>

Finally in March 1772 John wrote once again to Charles about the matter:

I find almost all our preachers in every circuit have done with Christian perfection. They say they believe it; but they never

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<sup>29</sup>For somewhat different but I believe compatible discussions of Wesley's changing views, see D. Marselle Moore, "Development in Wesley's Thought on Sanctification and Perfection," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 20/2 (1988): 29-53; McEwan, 138-41; and Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 176-90.

<sup>30</sup>Letter from John Wesley to Charles Wesley, 12 February 1767, *Letters*, 5:40-41.

<sup>31</sup>Letter from John Wesley to Charles Wesley, 14 June 1768, *Letters*, 5:93.

preach it, or not once a quarter. What is to be done? Shall we let it drop, or make a point of it?<sup>32</sup>

I have found no evidence of any reply from Charles Wesley to brother John's letters.<sup>33</sup> John Wesley was not willing to "let it drop" and continued to advocate the possibility of Christian perfection, but one lasting result of the controversy was his more careful distinction after the 1760s between "outward sin" and "inward sin" and his greater emphasis on the point that "sin may *remain* but does not *reign*" in believers.<sup>34</sup> A second result was greater emphasis on the themes of "having the mind that was in Christ" and "walking as Christ walked" as being the essence of Christian perfection, as in this letter from 1769 to an (unknown) "Irish Lady":

By Christian Perfection I mean (1) loving God with all our heart. Do you object to this? I mean (2) an heart and life all devoted to God. Do you desire less? I mean (3) regaining the whole image of God. What objection to this? I mean (4) having all the mind that was in Christ. Is this going too far? I mean (5) walking uniformly as Christ walked. And this surely no Christian will object to. If any one means anything more or anything else by perfection, I have no concern with it.<sup>35</sup>

And a third result of the "perfectionist controversy" was the virtual disappearance after about 1770 of the language of "sinless perfection" and its replacement by the language of love filling the soul and "expelling" sin.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup>Letter from John Wesley to Charles Wesley, 25 March 1772, *Letters*, 5:314.

<sup>33</sup>*The Letters of Charles Wesley: A Critical Edition, with Introduction and Notes: Volume 1 (1728–1756)*, edited by Kenneth G. C. Newport and Gareth Lloyd (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), obviously goes only to 1756, and the second volume, which will cover the dates noted above, is not yet published.

<sup>34</sup>In this regard see in particular his important sermons "On Sin in Believers" (1763), *Sermons*, 1:314–34, "The Scripture Way of Salvation" (1765), *Sermons*, 2:153–69, and "The Repentance of Believers" (1767), *Sermons*, 1:335–52.

<sup>35</sup>Letter from John Wesley to "an Irish Lady," 27 June 1769, *Letters*, 5:141.

<sup>36</sup>See, for example, the letter from John Wesley to Walter Churchey, 21 February 1771, *Letters*, 5:223: "Entire sanctification, or Christian perfection, is neither more nor less than pure love—love expelling sin and governing both the heart and the life of a child of God. The Refiner's fire purges out all that is contrary to love. . . ."

### Translating “Perfection”

John Wesley once famously characterized the doctrine of Christian perfection as “the grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodists.”<sup>37</sup> He first expressed the idea of Christian perfection through his preaching in the sermon “The Circumcision of the Heart,” which was originally written in 1733 though not published until 1748.<sup>38</sup> In 1741 he published his sermon entitled “Christian Perfection.”<sup>39</sup> In 1785 he published “On Perfection,” his last sermon focused on the doctrine.<sup>40</sup> The idea appears in numerous other sermons across more than 50 years. Across these five decades, two scriptural texts are dominant in Wesley’s preaching on this theme: Matthew 5:48 (eighteen times between 1740 and 1785) and Hebrews 6:1 (fifty times between 1739 and 1785).<sup>41</sup> Some consideration of the translation traditions of these two texts in several languages will help to demonstrate the difficulties caused for the Methodists of Wesley’s day, and also for modern Christians, by the use of the words “perfect” and “perfection” in Wesley’s preaching. The following chart shows the English translation of these key verses in the King James Version of the Bible (1611) compared to the Latin of the Vulgate and the Greek Textus Receptus.

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<sup>37</sup>John Wesley, letter to Robert Brackenbury, 15 Sept. 1790, *Letters*, 8:38.

<sup>38</sup>Sermon 17 “The Circumcision of the Heart” (1733/1748), *Sermons*, 1:398-414.

<sup>39</sup>Sermon 40, “Christian Perfection” (1741), *Sermons*, 2:97-124.

<sup>40</sup>Sermon 76, “On Perfection” (1784), *Sermons*, 3:70-87.

<sup>41</sup>These statistics come from Albert C. Outler’s introductory comments to Sermon 76, “On Perfection” *Sermons*, 3:70. See also “Register of John Wesley’s Preaching Texts,” compiled and annotated by Wanda Willard Smith, online at the Duke Center for Studies in the Wesleyan Tradition, <https://divinity.duke.edu/initiatives-centers/cswt/research-resources/register> (accessed 1 June 2015). The records in this register indicate the importance of Heb. 6:1 to the elderly Wesley: in the last three years of his life, he preached on this text a total of thirty-three times—eleven times in 1788, ten times in 1789, and twelve times in 1790. In all, the sermon register records 100 sermons on Heb. 6:1. In addition, he preached on Matt. 5:48 five times in 1788, and once in 1789. Curiously, while he had published his sermon “Christian Perfection” in 1741 on Phil. 3:12 (see *Sermons*, 2:97–124), the sermon register contains no record of Wesley ever preaching on Phil. 3:12 and only one record of his use of Phil. 3:15; see the note on p. 265 (1744) and the entry on p. 298 (1783).

*Matthew 5:48*

(KJV) Be ye therefore *perfect*, even as your Father which is in heaven is *perfect*.<sup>42</sup>

(Latin) estote ergo vos *perfecti* sicut et Pater vester caelestis *perfectus* est.

(Greek) esesthe oun humeis *teleioi*, hōsper ho patēr humōn ho en tois ouranois *teleios* estin.

*Hebrews 6:1*

(KJV) Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto *perfection*.

(Latin) quapropter intermittentes inchoationis Christi sermonem ad *perfectionem* feramur.

(Greek) Dio, aphentes ton tēs archēs tou Christou logon, epi tēn *teleiōtēta* pherōmetha.

In the Greek of the New Testament, the words translated into Latin as *perfectus* (and related forms) and into English as *perfect* and *perfection* are forms of *teleios* and *teleiōsis*. Both come from the Greek root *telos*, which has the basic meaning of end, goal, objective, destination, or purpose. Depending on the particular context of their use, both terms can also carry the sense of completion, fulfillment, consummation, accomplishment, wholeness, or maturity. Jeffrey S. Lamp provides this helpful analysis in his article on “Perfection” in *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*:

In the NT, *teleiōtēs* and its cognates convey several senses. Matthew 5:48 uniquely in the NT refers to God as perfect—and, then, identifies God’s perfection as the standard for Jesus’ followers. This exhortation is not to some abstraction of perfection, but is rather tied concretely to the exercise of love (Matt. 5:43-47). Similarly, Col. 3:14 identifies love as the bond of perfection, and 1 John collocates love and perfection in contexts of obedience (2:5), love between believers (4:12), eschatological

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<sup>42</sup>It is interesting to note that John Wesley’s own translation of Matt. 5:48 is “Therefore ye shall be perfect; as your Father who is in heaven is perfect.” This converts the imperative command of the KJV (“*be ye therefore perfect*”) into a “covered promise” (“*ye shall be perfect*”). See his *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, 3rd corrected edition (Bristol: Graham and Pine, 1760–62; reprinted Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981). Hereafter *NT Notes*. Cf. Sermon 25, “Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, 5” (1748), §II.3, *Sermons*, 1:554-55: “every command in Holy Writ is only a covered promise.”

confidence (4:17), and vanquished fear (4:18). Related to this is the statement in Jas. 3:2-12 that perfection is evidenced in those whose speech is without bitterness. Some theological traditions have summarized the biblical doctrine of perfection in the commands of Jesus to love God and neighbor completely (Mark 12:30-31).

Occasionally in the NT perfection language is used in a positional sense, indicating that believers, by virtue of their status as those redeemed by Christ, have reached a telic apex in human existence (1 Cor. 2:6; Phil. 3:15; Heb. 5:14). In other texts, maturity is identified as the goal toward which believers are to strive (e.g., Eph. 4:13; Col. 1:28; 4:12; Heb. 6:1; Jas. 1:4).<sup>43</sup>

The Latin *perfectus* comes from the verb *facere* = “to make” or “to do” plus the prefix *per* = “completely” or “thoroughly.” In the root sense, then, something is “perfect” when it is “thoroughly done” or “completely made”—when it is finished. From this root meaning we get the English words *factory* (= a place where things are made) and *manufacture* (= the process of making something, literally by hand—*manus* + *facere*). From the same root meaning we also get the English theological terms *justification* (= being made or declared righteous) and *sanctification* (= being made holy). The Latin *perfectio* is defined as “the highest or most complete condition of a thing or attribute” which “indicates both a transcendence of mutation and a fulfillment of all potential or potency (*potentia*).<sup>44</sup>

The Greek *teleiōsis* was translated into the Latin of the Vulgate as *perfectus*, and from there came into English as *perfection*. That is not a mistake: *perfectus* (Latin) or *perfection* (English) is an entirely good and appropriate translation of the Greek term *teleiōsis*, at least in certain contexts. However, in other contexts, the Greek terms *teleios* / *teleiōsis* can equally well be translated into English as *whole* / *wholeness*, *complete* / *completion*, or *mature* / *maturity*. Several recent versions of the Bible have

<sup>43</sup>Jeffrey S. Lamp, “Perfection,” in Katharine Doob Sackenfled (ed.), *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 5 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009), 4:443-44. See further the extensive discussion of *telos* and related terms in Gerhard Kittel & Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, translated and edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 10 volumes (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964-76), 8:49-87, on which Lamp’s article draws extensively.

<sup>44</sup>Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms, Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 221.

chosen to use some of these terms rather than *perfect* / *perfection* in translating Matt. 5:48 and/or Heb. 6:1.<sup>45</sup> At the risk of creating an artificially sharp dichotomy between them, the differences of meaning and implication of the Latin *perfectus* and the Greek *teleiōsis* can be summarized as follows.

*perfectus*

- static state
- finished action
- passive/receptive
- past/present
- flawless, unchangeable
- fixed, unmovable

*teleiōsis*

- dynamic process
- ongoing development
- active/operative
- present/future
- improvable, amissible
- can change, increase or decrease

It seems clear that Wesley himself understood “perfection” in the sense of the Greek *teleiōsis*—as “*perfecting* perfection,” as an ongoing process of growth and development in grace. Albert Outler called attention to this point as early as 1964, pointing to the lasting influence on Wesley, dating from his Oxford days, of writers such as Clement of Alexandria, Macarius, Gregory of Nyssa, and Ephraem Syrus:

What fascinated him in these men was their description of “perfection” (*teleiōsis*) as the goal (*skopos*) of the Christian in this life. Their conception of perfection as a process rather than a state gave Wesley a spiritual vision quite different from the static per-fectionism envisaged in Roman spiritual theology of the period and the equally status quietism of those Protestants and Catholics whom he deplored as “the mystic writers.”<sup>46</sup>

Outler subsequently stressed the point, contrasting the implications of the key Latin and Greek terms:

The crucial term for Wesley was not *perfectus* but *teleiōsis*—a dynamic understanding of “perfecting” that had come to him from early and Eastern spirituality, such as Clement, Gregory of Nyssa, Macarius, Ephraem Syrus, et al. In this view, “perfection”

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<sup>45</sup>See the Appendix (below) for comparative translations of Matt. 5:48 and Heb. 6:1.

<sup>46</sup>Albert C. Outler, ed., *John Wesley*, Library of Protestant Theology (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), Introduction, 9-10. Outler’s parenthetical use of the Greek *skopos* for “goal” (or “purpose”) here is unusual since that word occurs only once in the New Testament (Phil. 3:14, translated as “mark” in the KJV).

may be “realized” in a given moment (always as a gift from God, received by trusting faith), yet never as a finished state.<sup>47</sup>

Edgardo A. Colón-Emeric, in his valuable study of *Wesley, Aquinas and Christian Perfection*, questions “the categorical validity of opposing an Eastern *teleiōsis* to a Western *perfectus*” that he sees going on in Outler’s argument.<sup>48</sup> But as Outler elsewhere noted, Wesley himself somehow never quite managed to grasp the point that most people in his time, influenced as they were by the traditions of Latin Christianity, naturally understood the English term “perfection” in the sense of the Latin *perfectus*—as “perfected perfection,” as a final, finished, static, unchanging condition of completed growth:

Protestants, convinced of the *simul justus et peccator*—and used to translating *perfectio* as some sort of perfected perfection—were bound to see in the Wesleyan doctrine, despite all its formal disclaimers, a bald advertisement of spiritual pride and, implicitly, works-righteousness. Even the Methodists, working from their own unexamined Latin traditions of forensic righteousness, tended to interpret “perfection” in terms of a spiritual elitism—and so misunderstood Wesley and the early Eastern traditions of *teleiōtēs* as a never ending aspiration for all of love’s fullness (perfecting perfection). Thus, “Christian Perfection” came to be the most distinctive and also the most widely misunderstood of all Wesley’s doctrines.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>Albert C. Outler, “John Wesley: Folk Theologian” [1977], in Thomas C. Oden and Leicester R. Longden, eds., *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage: Essays of Albert C. Outler*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 121-22.

<sup>48</sup>Edgardo A. Colón-Emeric, *Wesley, Aquinas and Christian Perfection: An Ecumenical Dialogue* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), 2-3.

<sup>49</sup>Albert C. Outler, Introduction to Wesley’s Sermon 40, “Christian Perfection” (1741), *Sermons*, 2:97. Cf. Outler, *Evangelism and Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit*, 121-22. See also Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 187-89; Victoria L. Campbell, “Understanding Christian Perfection and its Struggle with Antinomianism,” *Asbury Theological Journal* 68/2 (2013): 58-77; and the introduction to *A Perfect Love: Understanding John Wesley’s “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection”* by Steven W. Manskar [modern-language version and notes] with Diana L. Hynson [study guide] and Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki [theological reflections] (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2004), 9-10.

### “Perfection” Reconsidered

These reflections and observations prompt an important question: Do we face a situation today in which, to quote the 1980s hit song of Gloria Estefan, “the words get in the way”? Has the term “perfection,” even when qualified by the adjective “Christian,” become such a “turn off” that it has become essentially dysfunctional in the life of the church today? We have evidence that John Wesley himself recognized that the word presented difficulties even in his own time, but that he resisted “laying aside” the expression. His sermon “Christian Perfection” (1740) is based on Phil. 3:12, which he translates with the KJV as “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect [*teteleiōmai*].” In the introduction, Wesley says this:

There is scarce any expression in Holy Writ which has given more offence than this. The word “perfect” is what many cannot bear. The very sound of it is an abomination to them. And whosoever “preaches perfection” (as the phrase is), i.e. asserts that it is attainable in this life, runs great hazard of being accounted by them worse than a heathen man or a publican.

And hence some have advised, wholly to lay aside the use of those expressions, “because they have given so great offence.” But are they not found in the oracles of God? If so, by what authority can any messenger of God lay them aside, even though all men should be offended? We have not so learned Christ; neither may we thus give place to the devil. Whatsoever God hath spoken, that will we speak, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear: knowing that then alone can any minister of Christ be “pure from the blood of all men,” when he hath “not shunned to declare unto them all the counsel of God.”

We may not therefore lay these expressions aside, seeing they are the words of God, and not of man. But we may and ought to explain the meaning of them, that those who are sincere of heart may not err to the right hand or to the left from the mark of the prize of their high calling. And this is the more needful to be done because in the verse already repeated the Apostle speaks of himself as not perfect: “Not,” saith he, “as though I were already perfect.” And yet immediately after, in the fifteenth verse, he speaks of himself, yea and many others, as perfect. “Let us,” saith he, “as many as be perfect, be thus minded.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Sermon 40, “Christian Perfection” (1741), *Sermons*, 2:97.

The problem is that the Greek words underlying the English “perfect” in both Phil. 3:12 [*teteleiōmai*] and Phil. 3:15 [*teleioi*], are forms of *teleios*. In his own *Notes Upon the New Testament* Wesley tries to deal with the problem posed by these Greek terms by commenting on Phil. 3:12 that “There is a difference between one that is perfect, and one that is *perfected*. The one is fitted for the race, ver. 15; the other, ready to receive the prize.”<sup>51</sup> Phil. 3:15 in the KJV reads: “Let us therefore, as many as be perfect [*teleioi*], be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.” Wesley’s not entirely helpful notes on Phil. 3:15 characterize those who are “perfect” as being “strong in faith” while those who are “not perfect” are “weak in faith”:

*Let us, as many as are perfect*—Fit for the race, strong in faith; so it means here. *Be thus minded*—Apply wholly to this one thing. *And if in anything ye*—Who are not perfect, who are weak in faith. *Be otherwise minded*—Pursuing other things. God, if ye desire it, *shall reveal even this unto you*—Will convince you of it.<sup>52</sup>

As is the case with Heb. 6:1, modern translations of these verses have largely moved away from rendering the Greek with versions of “perfect,” preferring instead to use the language of “completion” or “wholeness” or “maturity.”<sup>53</sup> Consider the Common English Bible’s rendering of the whole passage Phil. 3:12-16, which is couched in developmental language about reaching a goal:

It’s not that I have already reached this goal or have already been perfected, but I pursue it, so that I may grab hold of it because Christ grabbed hold of me for just this purpose. Brothers and sisters, I myself don’t think I’ve reached it, but I do this one thing: I forget about the things behind me and reach out for the things ahead of me. The goal I pursue is the prize of God’s upward call in Christ Jesus. So all of us who are spiritually mature should think this way, and if anyone thinks differently, God will reveal it to him or her. Only let’s live in a way that is consistent with whatever level we have reached.

<sup>51</sup>*NT Notes*, Phil. 3:12.

<sup>52</sup>*NT Notes*, Phil. 3:15.

<sup>53</sup>See the Appendix (below) for evidence of this movement in the translation of both Matt 5:48 and Heb. 6:1, especially the latter.

In his valuable study of *Wholeness in Christ: Toward a Biblical Theology of Holiness*, which thoroughly surveys the biblical basis of the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification, William M. Greathouse comments that “the most difficult term with which we must deal is the Greek term *teleios*, ‘perfect’”:

In the broadest sense, *teleios* denotes something that has arrived at its *telos*, which has actualized its *raison d'être*. Biologically, *teleios* may thus be rendered “full-grown,” “mature,” or “adult.” Employing this metaphor, Paul admonished the Corinthians who were making a toy of glossolalia: “Do not be children in your thinking; rather, be infants in evil, but in thinking be adults [*teleioi*]” (I Cor. 14:20).<sup>54</sup>

Could we today not better express what John Wesley really meant by speaking about “Christian perfection” if we speak instead about “Christian wholeness” or “Christian maturity” or “Christian adulthood”? Randy Maddox has suggested something like this move in his discussion of Christian perfection in Wesley’s thought: “One of Wesley’s most characteristic descriptions of those who have attained Christian perfection was that they are now adult—or *mature*—Christians.”<sup>55</sup> Scott Jones agrees that the best way to interpret Wesley’s thinking about Christian perfection is “to use the image of maturity.”<sup>56</sup> And Stephen Rankin explores this trajectory in his recent book *Aiming at Maturity: The Goal of the Christian Life*, in which he provides what I find to be a profoundly sensible and pastoral reinterpretation of Wesley’s vision of Christian perfection without dwelling on the term:

. . . grown-up Christians keep growing. Spiritual maturity is never a static state. It is always a *maturing maturity*. We have the blessed privilege of going from strength to strength as long as we live. As long as we live we can eagerly look forward to new levels of growth.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>William M. Greathouse, *Wholeness in Christ: Toward a Biblical Theology of Holiness* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1998), 206. Greathouse has a note at the end of this paragraph saying that “John Wesley understood the ‘perfect’ to be the ‘adult’ children of God (Heb. 5:11-6:1) or ‘fathers’ in the faith (I John 2:12-14).”

<sup>55</sup>Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 187.

<sup>56</sup>Jones, *United Methodist Doctrine*, 213.

<sup>57</sup>Stephen W. Rankin, *Aiming at Maturity: The Goal of the Christian Life* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 8.

Wesley himself regularly employs the analogy of physical birth with spiritual re-birth or “new birth” (regeneration). Just as the birth of a child is the beginning of natural life, just so the “new birth” of a Christian is the beginning of spiritual life. What follows in either case is a process of growth and development that moves toward maturity:

As in the natural birth a man is born at once, and then grows larger and stronger by degrees, so in the spiritual birth a man is born at once, then gradually increases in spiritual stature and strength. The new birth, therefore, is the first point of sanctification, which may increase more and more unto the perfect day.<sup>58</sup>

Wesley makes frequent use throughout his life of the language of 1 Cor. 3 and 1 John 2 about “babes in Christ” or “little children,” “young men,” and “fathers.”<sup>59</sup> In his sermon “Christian Perfection” (1740) Wesley says that “there are several stages in Christian life as well as in natural: some of the children of God being but new-born babes, others having attained to more maturity,” then observes that “accordingly St. John, in his first Epistle, applies himself severally to those he terms little children, those he styles young men, and those whom he entitles fathers.”<sup>60</sup> In his sermon “The Wilderness State” (1760) Wesley admonishes his preachers: “Convince them [the Methodist people] that the whole work of sanctification is not (as they imagined) wrought at once; that when they first believe they are but as new-born babes, who are gradually to grow up, and may expect many storms before they come to the full stature of Christ.”<sup>61</sup> In his sermon “On Patience” (1783), he comments that “there is as great a difference in the spiritual as in the natural sense between fathers, young men, and babes.”<sup>62</sup> And in one of his very late sermons,

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<sup>58</sup>Sermon 107, “On God’s Vineyard” (1787), §I.6-7, *Sermons*, 3:506-507. See also Sermon 19, “The Great Privilege of Those that are Born of God” (1748), §I.1-10, *Sermons*, 1:432-35; and Sermon 45, “The New Birth” (1760), §II.4-5, *Sermons*, 2:192-94.

<sup>59</sup>A particularly important example is found in the journal entry for 6 June 1738: see John Wesley, *Journal and Diaries*, ed. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, Vols. 18–24 in *The Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988–2006), 1:254. Hereafter *Journal and Diaries*. The incident recounted here marks the beginning point of Wesley’s development of the notion of “degrees of faith” and thus “degrees of salvation.”

<sup>60</sup>Sermon 40, “Christian Perfection” (1740), §II.1 *Sermons*, 2:105.

<sup>61</sup>Sermon 46, “The Wilderness State” (1760), §III.14, *Sermons*, 2:220.

<sup>62</sup>Sermon 83, “On Patience” (1783), §10, *Sermons*, 3:175.

“What is Man?” (1788), he speaks of the spiritual riches of the Psalms, which have “richly supplied the wants, not only of ‘babes in Christ’—of those who were just setting out in the ways of God—but of those also who had made good progress therein, yea, of such as were swiftly advancing toward ‘the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.’”<sup>63</sup>

Wesley also refers frequently to the distinction between *milk* as (spiritual) “baby food” and *meat* as food for fully grown adults that is found in 1 Cor. 3, Heb. 5, and 1 Pet. 2, for example. In commenting on Heb. 5:12-14, Wesley distinguishes the “babes in Christ,” those “who desire and can digest nothing but the doctrine of justification and imputed righteousness,” from those of “full age,” who embrace the “sublimar truths relating to ‘perfection’” and who exhibit “spiritual understanding, arising from maturity of spiritual age.”<sup>64</sup> He characterizes the “milk of the word” in 1 Peter 2:2 as “that word of God which nourishes the soul as milk does the body” and which enables one to grow “unto the full stature of Christ.”<sup>65</sup> In the sermon “Salvation by Faith” (1738) he combines the two sets of images involving the growth and development of Christians:

He who is thus justified or saved by faith is indeed “born again.” He is “born again of the Spirit” unto a new “life which is hid with Christ in God.” And as a “newborn babe he gladly receives the *adolon*, the sincere milk of the word, and grows thereby” [1 Pet. 2:2]; “going on in the might of the Lord his God,” “from faith to faith,” “from grace to grace,” “until at length he comes unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” [Eph. 4:13].<sup>66</sup>

The process of a Christian’s growth and development in grace, or spiritual maturation, is what Wesley calls sanctification. The goal toward

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<sup>63</sup>Sermon 103, “What is Man?” (1788), *Sermons*, 3:455. See also Sermon 8, “The First-fruits of the Spirit” (1746), §II.5, *Sermons*, 1:239; Sermon 13, “On Sin in Believers” (1763), §II.1-III.7, IV.2-3 *Sermons*, 1:319-25; Sermon 24, “Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, IV” (1748, §I.4, *Sermons*, 1:534-35; Sermon 35 “The Law Established through Faith, I” (1750), §I.2, *Sermons*, 2:22; Sermon 55, “On the Trinity” (1775), §17, *Sermons*, 2:385-85; Sermon 61, “The Mystery of Iniquity” (1783), §12, *Sermons*, 2:456; Sermon 78, “Spiritual Idolatry” (1781), §1, *Sermons*, 3:103; Sermon 107, “On God’s Vineyard” (1787), §I.7, *Sermons*, 3:507; Sermon 117, “On the Discoveries of Faith” (1788), §§15-17, *Sermons*, 4:37-38.

<sup>64</sup>*NT Notes*, Heb. 5:12-14.

<sup>65</sup>*NT Notes*, 1 Peter 2:1-2.

<sup>66</sup>Sermon 1, “Salvation by Faith” (1738), §II.7, *Sermons*, 1:124-25.

which that process moves he calls *entire* sanctification, which is a synonym for Christian perfection. He put it this way in a letter to Joseph Benson:

A babe in Christ (of whom I know thousands) has the witness sometimes. A young man (in St. John's sense) has it continually. I believe one that is perfected in love, or filled with the Holy Ghost, may be properly termed a father. This we must press both babes and young men to aspire after—yea, to expect. And why not now? I wish you would give another reading to the *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*.<sup>67</sup>

He said much the same thing in a letter to John Fletcher:

It is certain every babe in Christ has received the Holy Ghost, and the Spirit witnesses with his spirit that he is a child of God. But he has not obtained Christian perfection. Perhaps you have not considered St. John's threefold distinction of Christian believers: little children, young men, and fathers. All of these had received the Holy Ghost; but only the fathers were perfected in love.<sup>68</sup>

When Wesley speaks about Christian perfection, then, he is really painting a picture of what he thinks a fully grown-up, adult, mature Christian would look like. As Randy Maddox has succinctly put it, "For Wesley, then, Christian perfection was that dynamic level of maturity within the process of sanctification characteristic of 'adult' Christian life."<sup>69</sup> In his sermon "On Patience" Wesley is quite clear about the developmental nature of the process of sanctification:

Love is the sum of sanctification; it is the one *kind* of holiness which is found, only in various *degrees*, in the believers who are distinguished by St. John into "little children, young men, and fathers." The difference between one and the other properly lies in the degree of love. . . . The faith of a babe in Christ is weak, generally mingled with doubts or fears. . . . In the same proportion as he grows in faith, he grows in holiness: he increases in love, lowliness, meekness, in every part of the image of God; till it pleases God, after he is thoroughly convinced of inbred sin, of the total corruption of his nature, to take it all away, to purify his heart and cleanse him from all unrighteousness. . . .<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>Letter to Joseph Benson (Mar. 16, 1771), *Letters*, 5:229.

<sup>68</sup>Letter to John Fletcher (Mar. 22, 1775), *Letters*, 6:146.

<sup>69</sup>Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 187.

<sup>70</sup>Sermon 83, "On Patience" (1783), *Sermons*, 3:175.

Christian perfection for Wesley thus involves what might be considered to be a kind of developing sainthood. The point is helpfully articulated in Gordon T. Smith's valuable volume, *Called to be Saints: An Invitation to Christian Maturity*:

The animating and empowering call to transformation in Christ is a call to mature in faith, hope and love—to be “perfect” in Christ. And yet many recoil from such talk largely because they have seen the downside of perfectionism. The fear of perfectionism has even led some New Testament translators to avoid the use of the word *perfect* to translate *telos* (see, for example, the New International Version and New Revised Standard Version translations of Colossians 1:28).

This avoidance is perhaps an overreaction, but we still need to be clear about what we do and do not mean by use of the word *perfect*. Perfectionism is deadly, whereas the call to full maturity in Christ is animating (that it, it enlivens us).<sup>71</sup>

Recent scholarship has suggested similarities between Wesley's notion of Christian perfection and the concept of *theosis* of the Eastern Orthodox Church, with its implications of a constantly on-going process.<sup>72</sup> Understood literally, *theosis* means divinization, deification, or making divine. It is the process through which a believer puts into practice the spiritual teachings of Jesus Christ and His gospel and is gradually transformed thereby, as the believer comes to participate more and more fully in the life of God.<sup>73</sup> In particular, *theosis* refers to the attainment of

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<sup>71</sup>Gordon T. Smith, *Called to be Saints: An Invitation to Christian Maturity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014). While Smith is not a Wesleyan—he is an ordained ministry with the Christian and Missionary Alliance, and currently serves as President and Professor of Systematic and Spiritual Theology at Ambrose University in Calgary, Alberta—there seem to me to be important points of contact between his thought and the Wesleyan theological tradition. See the appendix (below) for examples of the translation of key NT texts that use various forms of *telos* with terms other than *perfect*.

<sup>72</sup>Let me be clear that am *not* here making an argument for the “genetic dependence” of Wesley's notion of Christian perfection upon the Orthodox concept of *theosis*, but only noting certain similarities between them. The “genetic dependence” argument, which is often attributed to Albert Outler, has aptly been challenged in the work of (among others) Ken Collins and Edgardo Colón-Emeric.

<sup>73</sup>It is worth recalling the importance to Wesley in his Oxford days of the classic little devotional book by the Scottish divine Henry Scougal titled *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, which expresses the essence of this image in a powerful and persuasive way.

likeness to God, or union with God; that is the final stage of this process of transformation and is as such the goal of the spiritual life. However, the “union” with God envisioned by *theosis* is never human participation in the divine *substance*, in the very being of God—that would be *apotheosis*, or actually becoming God, and such a claim would certainly be heretical! Instead, *theosis* involves participation in the divine *energies* of God, which are present to the believer in and through the Church and its sacraments and mysteries. The process is necessarily incomplete in this earthly life; it can only be fully consummated through the resurrection of the believer, when the power of sin and death, having been fully overcome by the atonement of Jesus, will lose hold over the believer forever.<sup>74</sup>

Wesley’s position is similar: the Christian in this earthly life really never *is* perfected, but is always *being* perfected. D. Stephen Long succinctly expresses the point: “Our sins are the lack of what God possesses in full. . . . our perfection does not depend on us securing our own perfection by our own resources, but on our participating in God’s perfections.”<sup>75</sup> In Wesley’s view, the “perfect” Christian never completely attains the fully restored image of God while living in this human life; such a *perfected* perfection is an eschatological reality that Wesley reserves for heaven, after the advent of the “new creation.”

Matthew Schlimm points out that in Wesley’s view even those who have obtained Christian perfection continue to grow in grace because “perfection is a dynamic state that builds upon past progress and results in becoming increasingly like God.”<sup>76</sup> Ken Collins agrees, writing that

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<sup>74</sup>On all of this see Randy L. Maddox, “John Wesley and Eastern Orthodoxy: Influences, Convergences, and Differences,” *Asbury Theological Journal* 45.2 (1990): 29–53; K. Steve McCormick, “*Theosis* in Chrysostom and Wesley: An Eastern Paradigm of Faith and Love,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 26 (1991): 38–103; Michael J. Christensen, “*Theosis* and Sanctification: John Wesley’s Reformulation of a Patristic Doctrine,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 31.2 (Fall 1996): 71–94; the collection of papers from the first Consultation on Wesleyan and Orthodox Spirituality edited by S. T. Kimbrough, *Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality* (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002); and Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung, eds., *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), particularly Christensen’s essay “John Wesley: Christian Perfection as Faith Filled with the Energy of Love,” 219–30.

<sup>75</sup>D. Stephen Long, with Andrew Kinsey, *Keeping Faith: An Ecumenical Commentary on the Articles of Religion and Confession of Faith in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 99.

<sup>76</sup>Matthew R. Schlimm, “The Puzzle of Perfection: Growth in John Wesley’s Doctrine of Perfection,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 38/2 (2003): 124; cf. 124–42, esp. 139.

Wesley rejected the idea of a static perfection that would not admit of a continual increase and advance as one improves the rich grace of God. Thus, there is no place in Wesley's theology for the notion that "one has arrived," spiritually speaking. . . . Christian perfection, so understood, is not static but dynamic, and it bespeaks the richest measures of holy love.<sup>77</sup>

In this life, in this world, Wesley's "perfect" Christians in fact become increasingly aware of their physical, moral, psychological, emotional, intellectual and spiritual weaknesses and imperfections, and thus increasingly conscious of their total dependence upon God's grace and mercy. As T. A. Noble has helpfully put it,

Wesley constantly struggles, particularly in his later years, to clarify what he meant by this "imperfect perfection" and explains it in terms of two linked areas of imperfection. First there is our physical constitution as fallen creatures, and second there is our consequent liability to involuntary or unintentional transgressions and to faults of character so long as we live in the body. The consequence of this continuing fallen condition and continuing involuntary transgressions is that we are always dependent on forgiveness through the atonement of Christ.<sup>78</sup>

It is important to note that for all the stress placed upon it in his preaching and writings, John Wesley himself never claimed to have personally experienced what he described as Christian perfection, habitually using Phil. 3:12 as a kind of disclaimer: "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect [KJV]."<sup>79</sup> Of more modern translations, the NABRE seems to best capture the sense of Wesley's characteristic use of this passage: "It is not that I have already taken hold of it or have already attained perfect maturity [*teteleiōmai*], but I continue my pursuit in hope that I may possess it, since I have indeed been taken possession of by Christ [Jesus]."

For Wesley, in the end, Christian perfection (or real Christian maturity) "is nothing higher and nothing lower than this: the pure love of God and man—the loving God with all our heart and soul and our neighbor as ourselves. It is love governing the heart and life, running through all our

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<sup>77</sup>Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 300.

<sup>78</sup>Noble, *Holy Trinity: Holy People*, 91.

<sup>79</sup>See the evidence cited by Kenneth J. Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation: The Heart of John Wesley's Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 224, n. 114.

tempers, words, and actions.”<sup>80</sup> In Wesley’s view, “Pure love reigning alone in the heart and life . . . is the whole of scriptural perfection.”<sup>81</sup> As John Tyson has said,

John Wesley persistently defined Christian perfection in terms of loving God with all one’s heart, mind, and strength, and loving one’s neighbor as oneself (Matt. 22:37-39). This purity of intention is a consistent Christian maturity (“perfection,” or “wholeness”), which fulfills Gods law through love and does not willfully violate a known law of God. Intentional sin ceases to dominate and determine our lives as we are being filled and transformed by God’s love.<sup>82</sup>

Ted Runyon beautifully captures the point of this powerful Wesleyan language:

The best starting point for reinterpreting and reappropriating Wesley’s doctrine of Christian perfection . . . is the *perfection of God’s love* as we receive it from Christ through the Holy Spirit. But in rethinking this doctrine it is important to focus first of all not on our own perfection but on the perfection of *that which we receive*. God’s love is perfect. . . . We receive and participate in perfect love.<sup>83</sup>

Although his reading of Wesley’s soteriology differs in some important respects from that of Runyon, Ken Collins agrees that in the final analysis “Christian perfection . . . is another term for holy love.”<sup>84</sup> Edgardo Colón-Emeric puts it this way:

To be perfect here below [i.e., in this life] is to be made perfect in love. The identification of Christian perfection with perfect love is a persistent and consistent theme in Wesley’s theology. Perfection in love is a fitting end [i.e., *telos*, goal] for humans in the condition of grace, for such perfection entails participation in the very nature of the God who is love.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>80</sup>A *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, in *Works* (Jackson) 11:397.

<sup>81</sup>A *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, in *Works* (Jackson) 11:401.

<sup>82</sup>Tyson, *The Way of the Wesleys*, 103.

<sup>83</sup>Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley’s Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 225.

<sup>84</sup>Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 302.

<sup>85</sup>Colón-Emeric, *Wesley, Aquinas and Christian Perfection*, 30.

Perhaps if Christians focus less on their own efforts to *become* “perfect” and seek to open themselves more fully to *being filled by* God’s presence and grace, with God’s perfect (whole, complete) love, they can grow toward greater maturity as Christians. Steve Manskar ably summarizes this conviction: “Christian perfection is the work of divine grace that, through faith in Jesus Christ, restores the human soul, damaged by sin, to wholeness and helps babes in Christ grow up to maturity in faith and love.”<sup>86</sup> Perhaps if we reframe John Wesley’s teaching about Christian perfection in terms of growth in grace toward real Christian “adulthood,” or maturity, we can reclaim his notion of “holiness of heart and life” in a way that is more useful for our people and our churches and our world today. As Runyon put it,

We are called not just to receive but to *reflect* this perfect love into the world, to share it with our fellow creatures—and to share it *perfectly*, that is, to share it in such a way that it can be received and appropriate by others as a love whose source is God. . . . Our sanctifying is linked to and directed toward the sanctifying of the world, and as such is an ever-beckoning, never-finished project, even though the love we redirect is complete as it comes from the divine source.<sup>87</sup>

In commenting on the questions noted at the beginning of this article, the questions that are put to all ordination candidates in The United Methodist Church, Scott Jones (now himself one of the bishops who asks those questions) comments that the last question could be phrased in contemporary language as “Are you earnestly trying to grow up?” and observes that in the Wesleyan understanding, “the goal of human life is to allow God’s grace to shape us into the kind of mature human beings God intended us to be.”<sup>88</sup> Steve Manskar agrees: “Christian perfection is nothing more, or less, than growing up in love and becoming a whole, complete human being made in the image of God as revealed in Jesus Christ.”<sup>89</sup>

### Teaching and Translation

Relatively few people in the second decade of the twenty-first century, even if they are well-educated native English speakers, can easily

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<sup>86</sup>Manskar (with Hynson and Suchocki), *A Perfect Love*, 10.

<sup>87</sup>Runyon, *The New Creation*, 225.

<sup>88</sup>Jones, *United Methodist Doctrine*, 214-15.

<sup>89</sup>Manskar (with Hynson and Suchocki), *A Perfect Love*, 6.

read and understand these opening lines of the original text of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, a late 14th-century Middle English chivalric romance:

SIPEN þe sege and þe assaut watz sesed at Troye,  
 Þe borȝ brittened and brent to brondez and askez,  
 Þe tulk þat þe trammes of tresoun þer wroȝt  
 Watz tried for his tricherie, þe trewest on erthe:  
 Hit watz Ennias þe athel, and his highe kynde,  
 Þat siþen depreced prouinces, and patrounes bicome  
 Welneȝe of al þe wele in þe west iles.<sup>90</sup>

The English language has changed through time, and the original Middle English text now obviously needs to be translated for the modern reader:

After the siege and the assault of Troy,  
 when that burg was destroyed and burnt to ashes,  
 and the traitor tried for his treason,  
 the noble Æneas and his kin  
 sailed forth to become princes and patrons  
 of well-nigh all the Western Isles.<sup>91</sup>

Even more obvious is the need of translation for the modern reader of texts from the past not originally written in English—such as the Bible. The scholarly literature concerning Bible translations and translation theory is enormous and can here only be acknowledged in passing.<sup>92</sup> But as my friend and colleague Steven J. Kraftchick has observed:

Translation is always interpretation, and so is preaching. In their sermons, preachers “translate” biblical texts for contemporary congregations, but they (or their sources) have already

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<sup>90</sup>*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, edited by J.R.R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon; text by the Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse, University of Michigan, online at <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/cme/Gawain/1:1?rgn=div1;view=fulltext> (accessed 7 June 2015).

<sup>91</sup>*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, translated by Jessie Weston, text by The Camelot Project, online at (accessed 7 June 2015).

<sup>92</sup>One good, brief, accessible survey is provided by Philip Sumpter in “English Bible Translations: An Overview of Current Versions” (2012), available online at [https://www.academia.edu/5016594/English\\_Bible\\_Translations\\_An\\_Overview\\_of\\_Current\\_Versions](https://www.academia.edu/5016594/English_Bible_Translations_An_Overview_of_Current_Versions) (accessed 1 June 2015). See also the classic article by Edward L. Greenstein, “Theories of Modern Bible Translation,” *Prooftexts* 3/1, Special Issue on Translation (January 1983): 9–39.

translated the sermon text from a biblical language into a contemporary idiom. Each of these steps is inevitably fraught with ambiguity—of which the good preacher must always be aware.<sup>93</sup>

The familiar Italian aphorism “Traduttore, traditore,” usually translated into English as “Translator, traitor,” or alternatively as “to translate is to betray,” makes the point that all translation involves distortion—or “betrayal”—of the original. (The phrase also provides a good example of exactly what it describes: even though the meaning comes through in English, the pun based on the close similarity between the Italian words is lost.) Translations from a source language may reveal meaning to a reader of the target language, but at the same time will also inevitably conceal meaning. But translations of the Middle English texts like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*—or of the Bible—are necessary if modern readers are to understand anything of their meaning.

Do the writings of John Wesley also need translation for modern readers? Has the language of Wesley's eighteenth-century English receded far enough from twenty-first century readers to render his meaning unclear or indistinct? Some would answer these questions affirmatively. In 2002–2003, Abingdon Press published a three-volume set of John Wesley's “Standard Sermons in Modern English” by Kenneth C. Kinghorn, who at the time was Professor of Church History and Historical Theology and Vice President-at-Large at Asbury Theological Seminary.<sup>94</sup> This is the publisher's description of the project in first volume:

How many times have you heard people say “everyone should read Wesley” or maybe you've thought about reading the Standard Sermons but couldn't get past the original language? This volume contains the first twenty sermons, in which Wesley deals with theology, in modern English, making this volume appropriate for individual and small group study.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup>Steven J. Kraftchick, “Mr. Johnston's Axiom: Thoughts on the Tasks of Translation and Preaching,” *World and World* 31/3 (September 2011), 324. Cf. Hans H. Penner, “Interpretation,” in Willi Braun & Russell T. McCutcheon, eds., *Guide to the Study of Religion* (London and New York: Cassell, 2000), 51–71.

<sup>94</sup>Kenneth C. Kinghorn, *John Wesley on Christian Beliefs: The Standard Sermons in Modern English, Volume 1, 1–20* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002); *John Wesley on The Sermon on the Mount: The Standard Sermons in Modern English, Volume 2, 21–33* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002); *John Wesley on Christian Practice: The Standard Sermons in Modern English, Volume 3, 34–53* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003).

<sup>95</sup>Publisher's description posted on Abingdon Press website (accessed 27 May 2015): <http://www.abingdonpress.com/product/9780687052967#.VWZsoZNVhBc>.

A review of the first volume of this series posted on the publisher's website praises Kinghorn's efforts in these terms:

The sermons . . . are faithful to the originals while avoiding the awkwardness of Wesley's 18th century English. Where Wesley used the King James version of the Bible most quotations from Scripture are now taken from the NRSV. Hebrew, Greek and Latin quotations are translated into modern English. Words that have fallen out of use over the past 250 years or whose meanings have changed with time are updated. Kinghorn also corrects much of Wesley's sometimes awkward sentence structure thus making for a very readable transcription of the Standard Sermons. This volume goes a long way toward making Wesley's sermons accessible to modern readers.<sup>96</sup>

More recently a British scholar, James Hargreaves, has undertaken a similar project: *Wesley's Forty-Four Sermons In Today's English*. Based on the conviction that "the English language has changed and evolved to the point that his [Wesley's] works can no longer be as easily read and understood in their original dialect," translation into contemporary English is necessary "to preserve Wesley's message, and to make it come to life for a new generation." This includes the use of gender-inclusive language to escape Wesley's "archaic" use of the word "he" to indicate "everyone." The word "humanity" is preferred over "mankind," as the latter "now carries with it gender implications which were not present in Wesley's time."<sup>97</sup>

These publishing projects indicate the clear perception by the authors and publishers involved of a need for "updating" and "modernizing" the original language of Wesley's sermons. Whatever one may think of such translation projects—and as a historical theologian, I must confess my serious reservations about them—they betray a concern by those involved about communicating the essential theological content of Wesley's message to modern readers. I share that concern, and every time I teach a class on Wesleyan theology, I am also engaged in the activity of translation. Teachers are translators, unavoidably so, every bit as much as preachers.

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<sup>96</sup>Review by David C. Hockett posted on Abingdon Press website: <http://www.abingdonpress.com/product/9780687052967#.VWZsoZNVhBc> (accessed 1 June 2015).

<sup>97</sup>Quotations taken from the description on Amazon.com: [http://www.amazon.com/Salvation-Faith-Wesleys-Forty-Four-Sermons/dp/1479180939/ref=la\\_B008TVEVO8\\_1\\_11?s=books&ie=UTF8&qpd=432774226&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Salvation-Faith-Wesleys-Forty-Four-Sermons/dp/1479180939/ref=la_B008TVEVO8_1_11?s=books&ie=UTF8&qpd=432774226&sr=1-1) (accessed 1 June 2015). Cf. the author's own publishing firm website: <http://www.hargreavespublishing.com>.

Sometimes the translation activity involved in my teaching is relatively simple and uncomplicated. An example would be pointing out to my students that when they see the word “want” in John Wesley’s writings, or Charles Wesley’s hymns, they should generally read that word as meaning “lack” or “need” rather than “desire.” When Wesley instructed his preachers to “go always, not only to those that want you, but to those that want you most,” he was not telling them to go to those who liked them most and who most desired their presence, but to those who most needed their ministry and their message.<sup>98</sup>

Sometimes the translation activity involved in my teaching is more subtle and complicated. This article is an example. When I try to help students to understand the meaning of Wesley’s language about Christian perfection, I am inevitably engaged in a sort of translation project. And if it is true that “Traduttore, traditore,” then it is my responsibility as a teacher to be as conscious and perceptive as possible about the consequences and implications of my translation activity.

### Retranslating “Christian Perfection”

I am suggesting here that we today might better express what John Wesley really meant by speaking about “Christian perfection” if we reinterpret—or retranslate—the concept, by speaking instead about “Christian maturity” or “Christian adulthood.”<sup>99</sup> The latter expressions certainly seem to resonate with my students far more naturally and easily than does Wesley’s original language about “Christian perfection,” however qualified or glossed. But if such a conceptual retranslation inevitably both reveals meaning and conceals meaning, what dimensions of Wesley’s concept of “Christian perfection” are concealed or obscured by its translation as “Christian maturity”?

The image of “Christian maturity” is inevitably tied to the paradigm of human growth and development, from infancy to childhood to adolescence to full adulthood. But that paradigm has several problems when transposed into a theological key. One problem is that human growth and

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<sup>98</sup>John Wesley, “The Rules of a Helper,” Q. 37 of the ‘Large’ *Minutes* (1753), in Henry D. Rack, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 10: *The Methodist Societies: The Minutes of Conference* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 854. This “rule” was basically unchanged in subsequent editions of the ‘Large’ *Minutes* through 1789.

<sup>99</sup>Let me be clear that I am not proposing alteration of the text of Wesley’s writings along the lines of the projects by Kinghorn and Hargreaves mentioned above. My suggestion involves conceptual retranslation, not textual revision.

development is something that happens naturally, indeed inevitably, unless the process is interrupted by malnutrition or disease or premature death. The spiritual maturation of any individual, at least in Wesleyan thought, requires active and conscious and intentional human response to and cooperation with divine grace, and is not something that just “happens naturally.”

A second problem is that the paradigm of human growth and development does not stop with full adulthood; it continues in an arc from full adulthood through stages of decline during old age to the inevitable point of death. The parallel between natural, physical life and spiritual life again breaks down when pressed to its limits in this way; Wesley, at least, is convinced that spiritual life does not enter a downward spiral from the point of “Christian maturity” but instead proceeds “from glory to glory.” Recall Wesley’s words from his “Brief Thoughts on Christian Perfection”: “I believe this perfection is always wrought in the soul by faith, by a simple act of faith; consequently in an instant. But I believe in a gradual work, both preceding and following that instant.”<sup>100</sup>

That quotation also indicates a third problem with retranslating Wesley’s conception of “Christian perfection” as “Christian maturity”—namely, obscuring the relationship in his thought between the gradual process of sanctification (which for him entailed growth and development in grace) and the transforming moment of *entire* sanctification (which for him was a precise synonym for Christian perfection). Ken Collins has been particularly eloquent about the importance of maintaining both the distinction and the relationship between the process and the moment—between the progressive development and the instantaneous transformation—which he quite correctly maintains is an important conjunction in Wesley’s own thought:

. . . if perfection itself is subsumed under a progressive paradigm, if it is ever a flying goal, as Outler put it, always moving, then it is never actualized or realized in the warp and woof of life. . . . those who emphasize the processive nature of the order of salvation to the virtual exclusion of the instantaneous aspect will fail to see that entire sanctification is a whole work, an entire work, as the name suggests, a whole-ness and entirety that can only be lost in a nearly exclusive emphasis on process and Christian nurture along the way. The genius of Wesley as a practical theologian, then, is that he held both these elements

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<sup>100</sup>Wesley, “Brief Thoughts on Christian Perfection,” *Treatises II*, 199.

together, process and realization, a gradual element and an instantaneous one, in a subtle and well-crafted tension. Yes, there will be continual growth in grace, even after the grace of Christian perfection has been realized. But it will be a *pure* heart that continues to grow in the favor of God. The completeness of this work, therefore, need not be denied in the name of nurture.<sup>101</sup>

Giving full credit to the force and the importance of the argument that Collins states here, it leaves us with the difficulty of understanding how Christian perfection (or entire sanctification) can be instantiated in a moment, how it can be realized at a certain point in time, and yet remain so “imperfect” as to both allow and require, in Wesley’s words, “a gradual work both preceding *and following* that instant.” Here we again see the problem of how Wesley’s vision of a *perfecting* perfection (based on the Greek *teleiōsis*) collides with the notion of a *perfected* perfection (based on the Latin *perfectus*).

In Wesley’s view, as Collins is I think saying, the moment (or event) of Christian perfection (or entire sanctification) *punctuates* but does not *terminate* the process of growth in grace and development in love of God and neighbor that both leads up to that moment and flows from it. In a similar way, one could speak of the way in which the moment (or event) of full maturity or adulthood *punctuates* but does not *terminate* the process of human growth and development within which it occurs. But this way of thinking has problems, as Jason Vickers has noted:

. . . as to the logic-chopping insistence that there must nevertheless be a moment at which a person is entirely sanctified, we might note that this is like saying that there is some moment at which a person ceases to be an adolescent and becomes a grown man or woman. There are rites of passage and other indicators, to be sure, but where is the line exactly that marks off adolescence from adulthood? Better yet, it is like saying that there is some moment at which two persons love one another maximally. To the degree that sanctification has to do with love, logic breaks down entirely the moment we notice that love is not the sort of thing that has a ceiling or some other limit. It is not like, say, a sauce pan that can hold so much and no more. Thus people often say that they know the moment at which

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<sup>101</sup>Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 295; cf. 279-312. See also Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, 177-80.

they fell in love. Yet, when probed, they will sometimes say that there were subsequent moments at which they fell in love with one another in ways they did not previously know existed. Suffice it so say that, if there are often unsounded depths in the love that exists between individuals, then surely this is infinitely multiplied when we are dealing with the love that exists between human individuals and God.<sup>102</sup>

As Vickers suggests here, it is difficult if not impossible to identify with clarity and precision the exact moment comes in which any person comes to full maturity as a human being. We know that no two human beings mature in exactly the same way, or on the same schedule, or to the same degree; that girls usually come to maturity at an earlier age than boys; and that the physical, intellectual, emotional, and sexual maturity of any individual typically do not occur simultaneously or coincide with that of other individuals. Part of what this demonstrates is the fact that the analogy between the physical process of human growth and development leading to the *telos* of full human maturity, and the spiritual process of sanctification leading to the *telos* of Christian perfection (or *entire* sanctification), breaks down at a certain point. So will any other analogy or metaphor if pressed far enough or hard enough. Still, with its limits, this particular analogy is useful in facilitating an understanding of Wesley's struggle to express the fundamental point of the New Testament emphasis on *teleiōsis* within the limitations and implications of the English language about "perfection" deriving from the Latin *perfectus*.

Affirmation of the possibility of a moment of entire sanctification (or instantaneous Christian perfection) may have been the most *distinctive* element of Wesley's theology, but the conception of sanctification (taken as a whole) as "a progressive journey in responsive cooperation with God's empowering grace" was the most *characteristic* dimension of Wesley's theology.<sup>103</sup> It is just for that reason that my students seem to find it helpful to retranslate Wesley's language about Christian perfection into the language of "Christian maturity" or "Christian wholeness."

The language of "perfection" has, in most modern ears, an overtone of finality, a suggestion of flawlessness, and an implication of being finished and done and through, that is not present in the same way in the language of "maturity" or "adulthood." The *Oxford English Dictionary*

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<sup>102</sup>Jason E. Vickers, *Wesley: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark International, 2009), 103.

<sup>103</sup>Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 190.

(OED) indicates that the “usual sense” of the word “perfection” is “the condition, state, or quality of being free from defect; flawlessness, faultlessness; purity; also in weakened sense: supreme or comparative excellence.”<sup>104</sup> *Webster's New World College Dictionary* defines “perfection” as “the quality or state of being perfect or complete, so that nothing requisite is wanting; entire development; consummate culture, skill, or moral excellence; the highest attainable state or degree of excellence; maturity; as, perfection in an art, in a science, or in a system; perfection in form or degree; fruits in perfection.”<sup>105</sup> *The American Heritage Dictionary* gives the following among its definitions of “perfect” and “perfection”:<sup>106</sup>

*Perfect* (adj.) (1) Lacking nothing essential to the whole; complete of its nature or kind. (2) Being without defect or blemish: *a perfect specimen*. (3) Thoroughly skilled or talented in a certain field or area; proficient. (4) Completely suited for a particular purpose or situation.

*Perfection* (n.) (1) The quality or condition of being perfect. (2) The act or process of perfecting: *Perfection of the invention took years*. (3) A person or thing considered to be perfect. (4) An instance of excellence.

The sense of “perfect” or “perfection” as having anything to do with spirituality or the religious life, though it continues to be present in the dictionaries, has largely disappeared from ordinary, everyday English usage. When “perfection” is used with reference to religious life, the implication is all too often negative, as in this recent Internet “blog” post on “The Perils of Worshiping a Perfectionist God”:

As a child, I felt guilt constantly. I felt constantly bombarded with my failures and short-comings, despite the fact that I acted like the new intellectual savior. I was and always have been a perfectionist. With each flaw and error in my life and choices, I saw these as direct representations of my immortal soul, and I

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<sup>104</sup>*The Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000; continually updated), online at <http://www.oed.com> (accessed 24 June 2015).

<sup>105</sup>*Webster's New World College Dictionary*, 5th edition (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014), online at <http://www.yourdictionary.com/perfection#websters> (accessed 24 June 2015).

<sup>106</sup>*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 5th edition (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), online at <http://www.yourdictionary.com/perfect#americanheritage> (accessed 24 June 2015).

thought that I as a person was inherently flawed and would do nothing but fail.

Unfortunately, the Bible backed me up. . . .

“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect,” as Jesus said in Matthew 5:48. The Sermon on the Mount felt like basic tenets, but right there he demanded perfection. I wanted to make Jesus happy, so my standard for “good enough” became “Godly perfection.” Once I read those words, my guilt spiraled out of control. I felt guilt for things I had done, but also things I hadn’t done. I just wanted to make Jesus proud and I was making myself miserable. . . .

Of course, the Bible has messages about inherent self-worth, but those aren’t the messages that I heard. Those weren’t the messages that rang in my ears when I couldn’t sleep. I’d lie awake thinking, “Why would God waste his time on me? I’m completely evil and everything I do inadvertently dishonors him.”<sup>107</sup>

Such an understanding of “perfection,” with its implications, is altogether too prevalent in today’s world, and has nothing to do with what John Wesley meant when he spoke of “Christian perfection.” For this reason, it seems worthwhile to attempt retranslation of the Wesleyan concept into the language of adulthood, or wholeness, or completion, or perhaps best, maturity. Christians may be regarded as mature by the degree to which they exhibit what Wesley described as “the humble, gentle, patient love of God and man ruling all the tempers, words, and actions, the whole heart by the whole life.”<sup>108</sup> By that measure, even fully mature Christians, those who could be described as “saints,” aren’t really “perfect” in the ordinary sense of the term, but continue to grow in grace as they are more completely filled with and transformed by the energy of divine love. Wesley himself put it this way in one of the most beautifully and powerfully poetic images in all of his writings: “What is the most perfect creature in heaven or earth in thy presence but a void, capable of being filled with thee and by thee?”<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup>Holly Baer, “The Perils of Worshiping a Perfectionist God” (2 June 2015), <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/godlessindixie/2015/06/02the-perils-of-worshipping-a-perfectionist-god> (accessed 3 June 2015).

<sup>108</sup>Wesley, “Brief Thoughts on Christian Perfection,” *Treatises II*, 199.

<sup>109</sup>*A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, in *Works* (Jackson) 11:440.

### Appendix: Comparative Translations of Matthew 5:48 and Hebrews 6:1

The comparative translations provided here show the decisions made by various translators as to how best to render the Greek terms *teleioi* / *teleios* of Matthew 5:48 and *teleiotēta* of Hebrews 6:1 into the Latin of the Vulgate and into five modern languages: English, French, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese. English is technically classified as a Germanic language, but the influence of Latin on English is so pervasive, particularly in the technical vocabulary of philosophy and theology, that it bears strong kinship with the major modern Romance languages that developed directly from Latin. The weight of opinion in the five modern languages represented here has been to use a form of “perfect” in the various languages in translating Matthew 5:48, but since about 1970 to use a form of “wholeness,” “completion,” or “maturity” in translating Hebrews 6:1. The first English version to prefer “maturity” in Hebrews 6:1 appears to have been the Revised Standard Version (1952), followed by the New American Standard Version (1963). All of the more contemporary English translations surveyed use “maturity” or “completion” in translating Hebrews 6:1. Both the Bible in Basic English (2011) and the Common English Bible (2011) also use “complete” in translating Matthew 5:48.

#### Matthew 5:48

**Greek**, Textus Receptus: esesthe oun humeis *teleioi*, hōsper ho patēr humōn ho en tois ouranois *teleios* estin.

**Latin**, Vulgate: estote ergo vos *perfecti* sicut et Pater vester caelestis *perfectus* est.

#### “Classic” English Translations:

King James Version (1611): Be ye therefore *perfect*, even as your Father which is in heaven is *perfect*. The Revised Standard Version (1952) is very similar: You, therefore, must be *perfect*, as your heavenly Father is *perfect*. The New Revised Standard Version (1989) continues the tradition: Be *perfect*, therefore, as your heavenly Father is *perfect*.

American Standard Version (1901): Ye therefore shall be *perfect*, as your heavenly Father is *perfect*. The New American Standard Version (1963) is similar: Therefore you are to be *perfect*, as your heavenly Father is *perfect*.

**“Classic” Romance Language Translations:**

**French**, Ostervald (1744): Soyez donc *parfaits*, comme votre Père qui est dans les cieux est *parfait*. Louis Segond (1927) and La Nouvelle Edition de Genève (1979) are very similar, also using *parfaits* and *parfait*.

**Italian**, Giovanni Diodati Bible (1649): Voi adunque siate *perfetti*, come è *perfetto* il Padre vostro, che è ne’ cieli. Nuova Riveduta Bible (1927) is very similar, also using *perfetti* and *perfetto*.

**Spanish**, Reina-Valera Antigua (1602): Sed, pues, vosotros *perfectos*, como vuestro Padre que está en los cielos es *perfecto*. Reina-Valera Revisado (1960) is identical.

**Portuguese**, João Ferreira de Almeida Atualizada (1681): Sede vós, pois, *perfeitos*, como é *perfeito* o vosso Pai celestial. Almeida Revista e Atualizada (1959) is very similar, also using *perfeitos* / *perfeito*.

**Contemporary English Translations:**

New American Bible (1970): So be *perfect*, just as your heavenly Father is *perfect*. The New American Bible, Revised Edition (NT 1986) is identical.

New International Version (1973): Be *perfect*, therefore, as your heavenly Father is *perfect*.

New Jerusalem Bible (1985): You must therefore be *perfect*, just as your heavenly Father is *perfect*.

Contemporary English Version (1995): But you must always act like your Father in heaven. [The actual terms disappear here, but the meaning is the much the same as if “perfect” were used.]

New English Translation (2005): So then, be *perfect*, as your heavenly Father is *perfect*.

Bible in Basic English (2011): Be then *complete* in righteousness, even as your Father in heaven is *complete*.

Common English Bible (2011): Therefore, just as your heavenly Father is *complete* in showing love to everyone, so also you must be *complete*.

**Contemporary Romance Language Translations:**

**French**, Nouvelle Edition de Genève (1979): Soyez donc *parfaits*, comme votre Père céleste est *parfait*. La Bible en français courant (1987): Soyez donc *parfaits*, tout comme votre Père qui est au ciel est *parfait*.

**Italian**, Nuova Riveduta (2006): Voi dunque siate *perfetti*, come è *perfetto* il Padre vostro celeste.

**Spanish**, La Biblia de las Américas (1997): Por tanto, sed vosotros *perfectos* como vuestro Padre celestial es *perfecto*.

**Portuguese**, Nova Versão Internacional (1999): Portanto, sejam *perfeitos* como *perfeito* é o Pai celestial de vocês.

### Hebrews 6:1

**Greek**, Textus Receptus: Dio, aphantēs ton tēs archēs tou Christou logon, epi tēn *teleiōtēta* pherōmetha.

**Latin**, Vulgate: quapropter intermittentes inchoationis Christi sermonem ad *perfectionem* feramur.

### “Classic” English Translations:

King James Version (1611): Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto *perfection*. The Revised Standard Version (1952) seems to have been the first English translation to use “maturity” rather than “perfection” in this verse: Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to *maturity*. The New Revised Standard Version (1989) reverts to a translation very similar to that of the KJV: Therefore let us go on toward *perfection*, leaving behind the basic teaching about Christ.

American Standard Version (1901): Wherefore leaving the doctrine of the first principles of Christ, let us press on unto *perfection*. The New American Standard Version (1963) follows the RSV in using *maturity* rather than *perfection*: Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to *maturity*.

### “Classic” Romance Language Translations:

**French**, Ostervald (1744): C'est pourquoi, laissant les premiers principes de la doctrine de Christ, tendons à la *perfection*. Louis Segond (1927) is very similar, also using *perfection*. La Nouvelle Edition de Genève (1979) uses a different construction: C'est pourquoi, laissant les éléments de la parole de Christ, tendons à *ce qui est parfait*.

**Italian**, Giovanni Diodati Bible (1649): Perciò, lasciata la parola del principio di Cristo, tendiamo alla *perfezione*. Nuova Riveduta Bible (1927)

uses a different construction: Perciò, lasciando l'insegnamento elementare intorno a Cristo, tendiamo *a quello perfetto*.

**Spanish**, Reina-Valera Antigua (1602): Por tanto, dejando la palabra del comienzo en la doctrina de Cristo, vamos adelante á la *perfección*. Reina-Valera Revisado (1960) is identical.

**Portuguese**, João Ferreira de Almeida Atualizada (1681): Pelo que deixando os rudimentos da doutrina de Cristo, prossigamos até a *perfeição*. Almeida Revista e Atualizada (1959) is very similar, also using *perfeição*.

### Contemporary English Translations:

New American Bible (1970): Therefore, let us leave behind the basic teaching about Christ and advance to *maturity*. The New American Bible, Revised Edition (NT 1986) is almost identical, also using *maturity*.

New International Version (1973): Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to *maturity*.

New Jerusalem Bible (1985): Let us leave behind us then all the elementary teaching about Christ and go on to its *completion*.

Contemporary English Version (1995): We must try to become *mature* and start thinking about more than just the basic things we were taught about Christ.

New English Translation (2005): Therefore we must progress beyond the elementary instructions about Christ and move on to *maturity*.

Bible in Basic English (2011): For this reason let us go on from the first things about Christ to *full growth*.

Common English Bible (2011): So let's press on to *maturity*, by moving on from the basics about Christ's word.

### Contemporary Romance Language Translations:

**French**, Nouvelle Edition de Genève (1979): C'est pourquoi, laissant les éléments de la parole de Christ, tendons à *ce qui est parfait*. La Bible en français courant (1987): Ainsi, tournons-nous vers *un enseignement d'adulte*, en laissant derrière nous les premiers éléments du message chrétien.

**Italian**, Nuova Riveduta (2006): Perciò, lasciando l'insegnamento elementare intorno a Cristo, tendiamo *a quello superior*.

**Spanish**, La Biblia de las Américas (1997): Por tanto, dejando las enseñanzas elementales acerca de Cristo, avancemos hacia la *madurez*.

**Portuguese**, Nova Versão Internacional (1999): Portanto, deixemos os ensinamentos elementares a respeito de Cristo e avancemos para a *maturidade*.

# JEFFREY THE JACOBITE POLTERGEIST: THE POLITICS OF THE GHOST THAT HAUNTED THE EPWORTH RECTORY IN 1716-17

by

Kelly Diehl Yates

The Wesley family believed they experienced the haunting of a poltergeist<sup>1</sup> whom daughter Emilia affectionately named “Old Jeffrey” in December 1716 and early 1717, not long after the first Jacobite Rising.<sup>2</sup> Samuel Wesley (1662-1735) declared “the goblin routed loudly over our heads constantly when we came to prayers for King George and the Prince.”<sup>3</sup> The tale of Old Jeffrey has been called the second most documented ghost story of all time, so it is important to sift through the historiography to find the family’s actual account. Almost all biographies of the Wesleys mention the Epworth rectory ghost, but few have commented on the apparition’s political leanings.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For studies on eighteenth-century ghost beliefs: see Sasha Handley, *Visions of an Unseen World: Ghost Belief and Ghost Stories in Eighteenth-century England in Religion Cultures in the Early Modern World 2* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2007); Shane McCorristine, *Spectres of the Self: Thinking about Ghosts and Ghost-Seeing in England, 1750-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Old Jeffrey’s story is found in Gillian Bennett, *The 100 Best British Ghost Stories: True Stories from the Oral Tradition* (Stroud: Amberly Publishing Limited, 2013), 52-55.

<sup>2</sup>Southey, *Life of Wesley*, 19; according to Southey, Old Jeffrey is the name of one who died in the house, however primary evidence examined did not reveal this.

<sup>3</sup>John Wesley, “An Account of the Disturbances in My Father’s House,” *Arminian Magazine* 7 (1784), 548-550, 606, 656.

<sup>4</sup>See Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast, John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, 3rd edn (London: Epworth Press, 2002), 59; Adam Clarke, *Memoirs of the Wesley Family*, 2nd edn (New York: Lane & Trippett, 1848) reprint 1976, 206-235; Roy Hattersby, *A Brand Plucked from the Burning, the Life of John Wesley* (London: Little & Brown, 2002), 35-37; Anthony J. Headly, *Family Crucible: The Influence of Family Dynamics in the Life and Ministry of John Wesley* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 53; Rebecca Lamar Harmon, *Susanna, Mother of the Wesleys* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1968), 66-73; Vivian H.H. Green, *The*

Samuel, the rector of St. Andrew's Church, Epworth, was born two years after the restoration of Charles II.<sup>5</sup> He lived through the reigns of Charles, James II, William and Mary, Anne, George I and during the first eight years of George II. Samuel and his wife, the former Susanna Annesley (1669-1742), had produced nineteen children since their 1688 marriage, yet only ten lived to adulthood.<sup>6</sup> During the alleged haunting, their son, Samuel, Jr., "Sammy" (1690-1739) aged twenty-six was at Westminster School, London, teaching; son John (1703-1791), thirteen, was at Charterhouse School; and son, Charles (1707-1788), nine, was enduring his first year at Westminster. Their seven daughters all still lived at home: Emilia (1692-1771), Susanna "Sukey" (1695-1764), Mary "Molly" (1696-1734), Anne "Nancy" (1701-unknown), Martha "Patty" (1706-1791), Kezia "Kezzy" (1709-1741), and Mehetebel "Hetty" (1709-1741).<sup>7</sup> John and Charles would later become famous as Church of England priests and leaders of the religious movement that eventually led to the Methodist Church.<sup>8</sup> However, at the time of this tale, they were not renowned

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*Young Mr. Wesley: A Study of John Wesley and Oxford* (London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1961), 55-59; and Robert Southey, *The Life of John Wesley* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1903), 17-22. Southey is one of the few biographies that revealed the alleged ghost's Jacobite association.

<sup>5</sup>For writings of Samuel Wesley, see *Dissertationes in Librum Jobi* (London: Guleimi Bowyer, 1736), this was his *magnum opus*, a commentary on the book of Job in Latin, which his son, John Wesley worked to get published after Samuel died. Samuel also wrote *The History of the Old Testament in Verse: with Three Hundred and Thirty Scriptures in Two Volumes; Dedicated to her Most Sacred Majesty* (London: C. Harper, 1704); *The Holy Communicant Rightly Prepar'd, or a Discourse Concerning the Blessed Sacrament: Wherein the Nature of it is Describ'd*, 2nd edn (London: G. Davis, 1716), *The Battle of the Sexes: A Poem* (London: J. Roberts, 1723), further writings may be found in *Some Account of the Life and Character of the Rev. Samuel Wesley, M.A., with the Addition of a Few Short Poems Never Before Printed which Complete the Quarto Edition Published by Himself in 1736* (London: S. Birt, 1743).

<sup>6</sup>Susanna Wesley was also a prolific writer, see *The Complete Writings of Susanna Wesley*, ed. Charles Wallace (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>7</sup>Luke Tyerman, *The Life and Times of The Rev. Samuel Wesley, M.A., Rector of Epworth, and Father of the Revs. John and Charles Wesley, The Founders of the Methodists* (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1866), 365.

<sup>8</sup>See Frank Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England* 3rd edn (London: Epworth Press, 2012); Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995); for studies on Charles Wesley see S.T. Kimbrough ed., *Charles Wesley: Poet and Theologian* (Nashville: Kingswood, 1992); and Kenneth G. C. Newport and Ted A. Campbell eds, *Charles Wesley, Life, Literature & Legacy* (London: Epworth Press, 2007).

preachers, but children, fascinated by the goings-on at home; and most likely insanely jealous of their seven sisters' first-hand experience of the goblin.

Susanna detected the poltergeist's first knock. Her young adult son, Samuel, Jr., "Sammy," had recently arrived home from his teaching responsibilities at Westminster School, London, and had argued with his sister, Sukey. Susanna heard a clattering in the doors and windows of her bedroom: several distinct knocks, three by three. She did not consider this important until later disturbances, and remembered this first incident.<sup>9</sup> Then, other members of the family noticed unusual household episodes. Robert Brown, their manservant said the wheat grinder would move, and that he wished the ghost would grind when the grinder was full.<sup>10</sup> Nanny Marshall, kitchen servant, heard some "groans of the dying" in the dining room in early December. The next night Susanna and Anne heard something rush to the door and rap three times, but there was no one at the door. Emilia heard a noise like a coal thrown down yet the dog did not bark. Hetty was sitting on the bottom stair and she saw "something like a man in a loose nightgown trailing after him, which made her fly to Emilia upstairs in their room."<sup>11</sup> Brown, sleeping in the garret heard something going up and down the stairs clucking like a turkey. He became so distressed over the course of the next few weeks with Jeffrey's haunts that he often sprinted down the back stairs half naked, afraid to dress in his attic bedchamber.

Until late December, Samuel in his cynicism doubted the stories of his wife, children, and servants. However, Samuel himself finally heard nine thumps, the next night he heard six knocks; two days later he heard seven thwacks. Emilia heard thumps under her bed and rapped on the floor and it answered her. The next night Samuel and Susanna were awakened by a loud noise and searched the house but found nothing. This time their dog, a mastiff, seemed to be more distressed by the noises than the children, causing even more unease.<sup>12</sup> At first, the mastiff jumped, barking before anyone else heard the ruckus. Nevertheless after a few days the canine crept into hiding often, signalling to the family the Old Jeffrey was poised and ready for his next dance.

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<sup>9</sup>Tyerman, *Samuel Wesley*, 350-51.

<sup>10</sup>Hattersby, *A Brand Plucked*, 35. In some accounts this man is called Robin.

<sup>11</sup>Tyerman, *Samuel Wesley*, 351.

<sup>12</sup>Clarke, *Memoirs of the Wesley Family*, 163.

The goblin apparently took a holiday just before Christmas, ceasing its racket, but resumed its clamorous knocking on Boxing Day.<sup>13</sup> Samuel banged with his stick against the kitchen wall and it answered back every single time. The next night the racket was worse, and the overstressed Samuel pulled out a pistol and would fain have shot the ghost, but his visitor Mr. Hoole warned, "Sir, if this is something supernatural you cannot hurt it by firing your pistol, but you may give it power to hurt you."<sup>14</sup> Instead of discharging the gun, Samuel fired his *voice*, "Thou deaf and dumb devil, why dost thou frighten children that cannot answer thee? Come to me in my study that am a man!"<sup>15</sup> Then the ghost tapped Samuel's own special knock, the one he *always* used and was silent. Obediently, Old Jeffrey hid in the Samuel's study the next evening. At just the right moment the goblin threw open the door, hitting Samuel, and tossing the rector to the floor. Before he could stand, the thought occurred to him that perhaps the ghost was the spirit of someone he loved, "If you are the spirit of my son Samuel knock."<sup>16</sup> Nothing.

Nearly a month passed and with no ghost's mischief, they had only just begun to relax when at their evening family prayers, "The family heard the usual knocks at the prayer for King George; and at night the knocks were more distinct, both in the prayer for the king and for the prince, and were accompanied with a thundering thump at the amen."<sup>17</sup> This same evening they saw a rabbit-like creature run out of a tiny hole in the wall that Brown chased, but it vanished. The next day Samuel left out the prayers for the king and there was no knocking, and thus discovered when he used the name of King George it seemed to communicate to the poltergeist to commence its mischief. This influenced Samuel to claim the goblin must be a Jacobite. When it knocked the next time Samuel prayed for the King, it made him so irate he determined to utter three prayers for the royal family, instead of his usual two.<sup>18</sup>

Jacobites were supporters of James VII of Scotland and II of England, and the House of Stuart. After James had been removed from the throne in 1688 because of his Roman Catholic association and replaced with his daughter Mary II and her husband William of Orange in the Glorious Revolution, many British still believed James had rights to the

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<sup>13</sup>A British holiday that is celebrated on December 26.

<sup>14</sup>Tyerman, *Samuel Wesley*, 353.

<sup>15</sup>Tyerman, *Samuel Wesley*, 353.

<sup>16</sup>Tyerman, *Samuel Wesley*, 353.

<sup>17</sup>Tyerman, *Samuel Wesley*, 353.

<sup>18</sup>Tyerman, *Samuel Wesley*, 354.

throne. The Act of Settlement in 1701 “settled” the question of succession to the English and Irish crowns, giving the rights to Electress Sophia of Hanover although she was the most junior of the Stuarts, because neither William and Mary nor Anne had produced a Protestant heir.<sup>19</sup> In the first Jacobite Rising in 1715, James II’s son, James Francis Edward Stuart, “the Old Pretender,” attempted unsuccessfully to claim the throne. For the entire eighteenth-century, association with Roman Catholicism was labelled as Jacobitism in fear, and many were caught up in the political instability due to the paranoia of the country over the Jacobite plots.<sup>20</sup>

Soon the family became so used to the Jacobite poltergeist’s knocking they were almost comforted by it. When the tapping began at night, the sisters would say to each other, “Jeffrey is coming; it’s time to sleep.” In the daytime seven-year-old Kezzy would pursue it from room to room, more amused by the ghost than she was by any toy. Several of his fellow clergymen urged Samuel to move out of the house, but Samuel replied that he would rather the devil flee from him than the opposite. About middle of February 1717 the noises ceased for a time.<sup>21</sup>

Samuel, Sr. wrote to Sammy in February, “As for the noises &c., in our family, I thank God, we are all quiet. There were some surprising circumstances in that affair. Your mother has not written you a third part of it. When I see you here, you shall see the whole account which I have written down.”<sup>22</sup> It was forty-seven pages. Susanna wrote to Sammy later on in March, baffled at his inquisitiveness about the poltergeist declaring, “I cannot imagine how you should be so curious about our unwelcome guest. For my part, I am quite tired with hearting of speaking of it: but if you come among us, you will find enough to satisfy all your scruples, or perhaps may

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<sup>19</sup>William III, “An Act for the Further Security of His Majesties and the Succession of the Crown in the Protestant Line and for extinguishing the Hopes of the Pretended Prince of Wales and all other Pretenders and their Open and Secret Abettors [Chapter VI Rot. Parl. 13 & 14 Gul. III. N. 6],” *Statutes of the Realm* vol. 7, 1695-1701, ed. John Raithby (1820), 747-50, <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=47004>>.

<sup>20</sup>For the Glorious Revolution, see John Miller, *The Glorious Revolution* (London: Longman, 1997); for the first Jacobite Rising, see Daniel Szechi, *1715: The Great Jacobite Rebellion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006). Szecki labelled the prevalent emotion in Britain as “hysteria” in the years immediately preceding and following the 1715 Rebellion on page 65.

<sup>21</sup>Tyerman, *Samuel Wesley*, 356.

<sup>22</sup>Samuel Wesley, Sr. to Samuel Wesley, Jr., 11 February 1717, reprinted in Tyerman, *Samuel Wesley*, 357.

hear or see it yourself.”<sup>23</sup> Mayhap this was a clever mother’s way of getting her son home for a visit. Just three days after Susanna transcribed this letter to her eldest son, when they were getting used to the quiet again, it opened a door, slammed it shut, and commenced to knocking. This seems to have been the last time the old haunt prowled; at least for the Wesley family.

### **Explanations for the Disturbance**

Biographers of the Wesleys have speculated on reasons for the knocking and apparitions since it was first recorded. There are hundreds of theories on what caused the noises: Susanna thought it was a spirit of one of her sons or her father, but they all proved alive; next she blamed rioting rats. Many thought it was servants playing tricks, but it is argued that the servants were present for much of the knocking. The rectory had been burned to the ground twice in five years: 1702 and 1709; it was attributed to the family’s enemies in the village.<sup>24</sup> Some have suggested these same adversaries tormented the family with the pounding. One imaginative biographer said that perhaps a piece of hidden machinery, which was never detected, was put in the garret by one of the servants or an angry villager. John Wesley had the wildest of all the reasons for the ghost’s haunting. He firmly believed it was a punishment straight from Satan to his father for an incident that had happened fourteen years previous, and he wrote about it decades after his parents had both perished.<sup>25</sup> This, too, was a conflict over a political incident: the rights of William III to the throne.<sup>26</sup>

Susanna and Samuel had been married fourteen years, and had six living children when a prayer of Samuel’s in late 1701 for King William III caused friction between them. Susanna did not say “amen” to his prayer. When he confronted her and asked her to say it, she refused. Her fuming husband informed her, “You and I must part, for if we have two kings we must have two beds.”<sup>27</sup> He left her in poverty with the six children and went to London.

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<sup>23</sup>Susanna Wesley to Samuel Wesley, Jr., 27 March 1717, reprinted in Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 89.

<sup>24</sup>Tyerman, *Samuel Wesley*, 332-33.

<sup>25</sup>John Wesley, “An Account of the Disturbances in my Father’s House,” 548-550.

<sup>26</sup>For religious implications of the ascension of William III and Mary II in 1689, see Warren Johnston, “Revelation and the Revolution of 1688-1689,” *Historical Journal* 48/2 (2005), 351-389.

<sup>27</sup>Susanna Wesley to Lady Yarbrough, 7 March 1702, reprinted in “John Wesley’s Parents: Quarrel and Reconciliation,” *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 29/3 (1953-54), 52-53; and Wallace, 9.

Susanna had been raised a Nonjuror but had chosen to communicate with the Church of England. This conflict with her husband suggests she was in part still loyal to the Nonjurors, Anglicans who refused to take the oath of Allegiance to William and Mary 1689-90, as it violated previous oaths to James II and the Stuarts.<sup>28</sup> Her father, Dr Samuel Annesley (c. 1620-1696), colleague of Richard Baxter (1615-1691)<sup>29</sup> and Daniel Defoe (1660-1731),<sup>30</sup> a Presbyterian, served as a chaplain in the Parliamentary Navy before he became rector of Cliffe in Kent.<sup>31</sup> He soon lost his parish because he opposed the execution of Charles I, and did not get along with Oliver Cromwell. He moved to London where Oliver's son, Richard, gave him the parish at St Giles, Cripplegate. At the Restoration, he refused to subscribe to the *Book of Common Prayer* according to the *Act of Uniformity* and was ejected in 1662.<sup>32</sup> He organized a parish of Nonconformists in Spitalfields. It was while he was leading this congregation his youngest daughter and twenty-fifth child, Susanna, was born.<sup>33</sup>

Susanna met Samuel at her sister Elizabeth's wedding in 1682. Samuel was a son and grandson of Nonconformists, however he also converted to the Church of England as a young person, and attended Exeter College, Oxford. They were married four years later in the parish church at Marylebone. He was appointed to Epworth parish in 1695, moving there in 1697.<sup>34</sup> Geordan Hammond asserted that it was the death of

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<sup>28</sup>For the Nonjuror influence on the Wesleys, see Geordan Hammond, *John Wesley in America, Restoring Primitive Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 14-29; on the Nonjurors, see Peter Nockles, "Church Parties in the Pre-Tractarian Church of England 1750-1833: The Orthodox"—Some Problems of Definition and Identity," in John Walsh, Colin Haydon, and Stephen Taylor, eds, *The Church of England c. 1689-c. 1833: From Toleration to Tractarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 335-36.

<sup>29</sup>For the ejection of Richard Baxter see Jacqueline Rose, *Godly Kingship in Restoration England: The Politics of Royal Supremacy 1660-1688* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>30</sup>Daniel Defoe's *Political History of the Devil* ran eighteen editions from 1726-1843, Bennett, *100 Best Ghost Stories*, 33.

<sup>31</sup>For an example of the writings of Samuel Annesley, see, *How We May be Universally and Exactly Conscientious. An Extract from a Sermon preached at Cripplegate, by Dr. Samuel Annesley* (London: n.p., 1767).

<sup>32</sup>Newton E. Key, "Annesley, Samuel (bap. 1620, d. 1696)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/566>>.

<sup>33</sup>Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 5.

<sup>34</sup>Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 7.

James II in exile on 6 September 1701 that led to this difference of opinion rather than the death of Queen Mary. “. . . Susanna’s belief in divine hereditary monarchy led her to oppose the removal of a rule monarch and sympathize with the Nonjuring clergy who were dismissed from their cures.”<sup>35</sup> She struggled with her decision because her husband had left, but clung to the right to make her own choices.

She wrote to her friend Lady Yarbrough for advice, and asked her to refer her to a Nonjuror pastor, Rev George Hickes (1642-1715), confessing, “I’m almost ashamed to own what extreme disturbance this accident has given me, yet I value not the world.”<sup>36</sup> Hickes, an Oxford educated churchman, was “deprived in 1690 for refusing to take the oaths of allegiance to William and Mary.”<sup>37</sup> No wonder she wrote him.<sup>38</sup> Hickes had published a 233-page *Apologetical Vindication of the Church of England in Answer to her Adversaries* in 1706. She penned a letter to this pastor, explaining the situation and beseeching for spiritual guidance. Hickes wrote back, and told her to fulfil the rights of her own conscience, but shortly after he wrote, King William died (8 March 1702), and both Samuel and Susanna agreed on Anne’s rights to the throne.<sup>39</sup> Samuel

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<sup>35</sup>Hammond, *John Wesley in America*, 16-17.

<sup>36</sup>Susanna Wesley to Lady Yarbrough, 15 March 1702, reprinted in Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 36.

<sup>37</sup>Jeremy Gregory and John Stevenson, *The Routledge Companion to the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Routledge Publishing, 2007), 343. A sampling of George Hickes’s writings include: *A Case of Infant Baptism in Five Questions* (London: Thomas Basset, 1683), *Anglo-Saxon Grammar* (Oxford: The Theatre, 1690), *Apology for the New Separation: in a Letter to John Sharpe, Archbishop of York, Occasioned by His Farewell Sermon* (London: n.p., 1691), and a translation of Thomas à Kempis, *Imitatio de Christi* (London: John Nicholson, 1707).

<sup>38</sup>See George Hickes, *An Apologetical Vindication of the Church of England: in Answer to her Adversaries who Reproach her with the English Heresies and Schisms with an Appendix of Papers Relating to the Schisms of the Church of Rome*, 2nd edn (London: Walter Kettibly, 1686); *A Declaration of Faith Made by the Right Reverend Dr. George Hickes, Concerning the Faith in which He Lived and Died and Intended to Die: and Referred to in His Will* (London: n.p., 1743); *A Discourse to Prove that the Strongest Temptations are Conquerable by Christians: or, A Sober Defence of Nature and Grace Against the Cavils and Excuses of Loose Inconsiderate Men in a Sermon Preached before the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor of London, Court of Aldermen, 14 January, 1676/7*, 3rd edn (London: John Churchill, 1713). In this sermon Hickes emphasizes that conscience is bound by the choice to enter into a covenant with God.

<sup>39</sup>Susanna Wesley to Rev George Hickes, 31 July 1702, reprinted in Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 39.

returned home and their joyful reunion brought about a son whom they named John.<sup>40</sup>

So, almost seventy years after the alleged hauntings, John Wesley concluded that they were due to the fact that Samuel Wesley had left his wife over her refusing to say “amen” to the prayer for William III. John Wesley published this article in his own *Arminian Magazine* in 1784 calling Old Jeffrey a “messenger of Satan sent to buffet his father.”<sup>41</sup> Luke Tyerman, a Wesley biographer in the nineteenth century called this assumption of Wesley’s, “simply silly and absurd.”<sup>42</sup> Earlier, in 1768, John Wesley had asserted his beliefs in the supernatural by articulating that people of learning had given up belief in apparitions,

They well know (whether Christians know it or not) that the giving up of witchcraft is the giving up of the Bible. And they know, on the other hand, that if by one account of the intercourse of men with separate spirits be admitted, their whole castle in the air (deism, atheism, materialism) falls to the ground. I know no reason therefore why we should suffer even this weapon to be wrestled out of our hands. Indeed, there are numerous arguments, besides which abundantly confute their vain imaginations.<sup>43</sup>

The story of Jeffrey was a *fact* according to John, one of the many proofs he collected and documented in order to prove the existence of the supernatural.

The Epworth haunting is not the only ghost story of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century England. Henry More (1614-1687), a Cambridge Platonist philosopher, theologian, and fellow of Christ College, Cambridge, told the story of Anne Walker’s ghost. She had been killed, and appeared to a miller and told who had murdered her in 1631. More used this story as proof of the supernatural, not so much unlike the way John Wesley used stories for proof of the same. Several other Anglican and Nonjuror authors wrote about the importance of the belief in

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<sup>40</sup>Hammond, *John Wesley in America*, 17.

<sup>41</sup>Tyerman, *Samuel Wesley*, 357.

<sup>42</sup>Tyerman, *Samuel Wesley*, 357.

<sup>43</sup>John Wesley, 25 May 1768, *Journal, The Works of John Wesley, Bicentennial Edition*, general eds Frank Baker and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976-83 and Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984-), 22:135 (hereafter: *Works*).

ghosts in the same time period.<sup>44</sup> So, Samuel had the support of not only contemporary Anglicans who believed in the existence of ghosts, but also Nonjurors like Anthony Horneck, whose writings he recommended by name in his essay, *Advice to a Young Clergyman*. Horneck argued vehemently that ghosts were proof of the supernatural.<sup>45</sup>

### **The Jacobite Curse**

Old Jeffrey remained a part of the family lore for most of their lives and not just for John. Charles Wesley wrote of the ghost seventeen years after Jeffrey's last documented haunt in a letter to his brother Samuel in 1734 that it was not in the power of "even Jeffrey himself" to keep us from travelling to see him. Charles had been a boy of nine when Jeffrey transfigured, but had missed out on all the fun because he was enduring his first year at Westminster School in London. "I dare say Jeffrey can't fright my sister from her hours of retirement. I would be worth his while to station half his legions with you, to carry that point. But the prayer of faith can vindicate that sacred time, as it did in my mother's case, from his disturbances."<sup>46</sup> Thirty-four years later Emilia would describe any affliction as a visit from Old Jeffrey.<sup>47</sup>

These may have been entertaining ways to remember a household story, but this was not the only way the "Jacobite curse" affected the family. Their enemies aimed many Jacobite accusations at the Wesley family over the next fifty years. These events turned out to be much more frightening than a mischievous but nearly benign poltergeist. Samuel Wesley, Jr. was associated with Bishop of Rochester Francis Atterbury (1662-

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<sup>44</sup>See Henry More, *Divine Dialogues Containing Dispositions Concerning the Attributes and Providence of God* 3 vols, 2nd edn (London: Joseph Downing, 1713), 248; *A Collection of Several Philosophical Writings of Henry More*, 4th edn (London: Joseph Downing, 1712); See also Joseph Glanvil, Henry More, and George Rust, *Two Choice and Useful Treatises the One, Lux Orientalis; or, An Enquiry into the Opinion of the Eastern Sages Concerning the Pre-existence of Souls* (London: J. Collins, 1662).

<sup>45</sup>S. Wesley, *Advice to a Young Clergyman*, 523; Joseph Glanvil, Henry More and Anthony Horneck, *Saducismus triumphatus; or, Full and Plain Evidence Concerning Witches and Apparitions*, 1st edn (1689), 4th edn (London: A. Betterworth & J. Batley, 1726), 2.

<sup>46</sup>Charles Wesley to Samuel Wesley, Jr., 29 Jan 1734, Charles Wesley, *The Letters of Charles Wesley Critical Edition*, eds S.T. Kimbrough and Gareth Lloyd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 38-39.

<sup>47</sup>Tyerman, *Samuel Wesley*, 356.

1732)<sup>48</sup> who was convicted of a Jacobite plot against King George I, imprisoned in the Tower, and exiled where he worked for the Pretender until his death in 1732.<sup>49</sup> Refusing to renounce loyalty to his friend, Samuel, Jr., wrote an ode to him on his death.<sup>50</sup> This seemed to kill Samuel's career.

[Samuel] Wesley [Jr.] became friendly with Tory politicians and poets such as Robert Harley, earl of Oxford, Alexander Pope, and Jonathan Swift, but the Atterbury connection ensured that he would receive no ecclesiastical preferment. In 1722 Atterbury was arrested for complicity in Jacobite plots and, in 1723, exiled to France. Wesley never wavered in his loyalty to Atterbury and wrote squibs against Sir Robert Walpole. This association branded him a Jacobite though there is no evidence that this went beyond literary opposition.<sup>51</sup>

During the second Jacobite Rising in 1745, John Wesley was accused twice of "bringing in the Young Pretender" (Charles Edward Stuart), and when all the Roman Catholics were asked to vacate London for fear they would join the Jacobites if they reached the city, he had planned to leave but did not so as not to be held in suspicion.<sup>52</sup> Charles Wesley was shown a warrant for his arrest twice during the second Jacobite Rising: once he had to go before the magistrates and spend all day defending himself, until finally they believed he was a Church of England priest and a loyal subject of the King and let him go.<sup>53</sup> As late as 1784 John Wesley defended his then deceased brother, Samuel, articulating that he was a Tory, not a Jacobite, and this was almost forty years after the last Jacobite Rising.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>48</sup>Hayton, D.W., 'Atterbury, Francis (1663-1732)', *ODNB*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/871>>.

<sup>49</sup>Tyerman, *Samuel Wesley*, 367.

<sup>50</sup>Samuel Wesley [Jr.], "An Ode of the Death of Bishop Atterbury," ed. Charles Wells Moulton *Library of Literary Criticism of English and American Authors* (New York: Henry Malkan, 1901-05), 3:65.

<sup>51</sup>Henry D. Rack, "Wesley, Samuel (baptized 1662, died 1735)," *ODNB*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29071>>.

<sup>52</sup>*Works*, 20:25; for the Second Jacobite Rising 1745-46, see Gregory Fremont-Barnes, *The Jacobite Rebellion 1745-46* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2011); and Frank McLynn, *Bonnie Prince Charlie: Charles Edward Stuart* (New York: Random House, 2011).

<sup>53</sup>*Works*, 20:15; *Gentleman's Magazine* 14 (1744), 107.

<sup>54</sup>Charles Wesley, 10 March 1744, *The Manuscript Journal of the Rev. Charles Wesley, M.A.*, eds S.T. Kimbrough, Jr. and Kenneth G.C. Kimbrough, 2

## Conclusion

That an early eighteenth-century rural Anglican family believed a ghost haunted their rectory is no surprise. Samuel's earlier writings and documents written by his colleagues suggested that Church of England priests were concerned that the denial of the supernatural led to atheism: therefore the belief in ghosts went along with their devoted practice of Christianity during the early eighteenth-century. Samuel and Susanna's Nonjuror background also influenced their tendency to accept a disturbance as a poltergeist's presence. John Wesley's use of household lore to enforce his own assertions is not unexpected. The remarkable epiphany in this story is that a ghost mirrored its family's apprehension over a political change, which they had no power to influence.

The Epworth ghost allegedly haunted shortly after the first Jacobite Rising in 1715. The story of Old Jeffrey suggests there were lasting results on this family due to the Hanover ascension: events that affected their home life, their everyday anxieties, and even criminal charges. That Samuel labelled the ghost a Jacobite suggests the ghost was a symptom of the family's anxiety over the Hanover ascension, and perhaps a symbol of the entire country's angst over the political instability of the times.<sup>55</sup>

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vols (Nashville: Kingswood, 2007), 2:397. The autograph of Charles Wesley's manuscript journal is in the Methodist Archives Research Centre, The John Rylands Library, Manchester, DDCW 10/2; see also Frank Baker, "Methodism and the '45 Rebellion," *London Quarterly and Holborn Review* (October 1947), 326-7; and Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 274.

<sup>55</sup>The Epworth Old Rectory is now a Grade 1 Historic Site. The Rectory welcomes visitors in March, April, October, and May to September. Visit <epwortholdrectory.org.uk> for more information.

# REVISITING WESLEY'S ETHICS AND HIS MINISTRY TO THE POOR: SOCIAL, ECONOMICAL, AND MEDICAL SOLUTIONS

by

Joshua Bloor

From the outset of the Evangelical Revival it was more than apparent that John Wesley “saw himself as having a particular mission to the poor people.”<sup>1</sup> Wesley dedicated almost seventy years towards helping the poor. His ethics sought to impact and transform the underprivileged and deprived parts of society, and thus, “one would be hard put to find many examples of people who gave away more of their adult resources of time and money than Wesley did.”<sup>2</sup> While his ethics cover a broad array of themes—including his views on slavery, war, education, and community—it can be argued that Wesley’s ministry to the poor received a significant amount of attention.

Although the poor faced numerous disadvantages during the eighteenth century, there remained three prevalent disadvantages that Wesley specifically addressed. This article will suggest that these three were *social*, *economical*, and *medical*. With the *social* part, it will be important to explore contextual issues and Wesley’s own personal imitation of the poor. With *economical*, Wesley’s financial ethics will be examined, as well as how he attempted to assist the poor financially through various means. Finally, with health, the problem of disease within this era will be looked at too, as well as how Wesley’s *Primitive Physic* and his overall holistic soteriology attempted to restore health to the poor. Consequently, the following article will argue that John Wesley’s ethics helped to improve the lives of the poor on a substantial level.

According to Richard Heitzenrater, the question of “who were the poor in eighteenth-century England?” has been a question which Wesleyan scholarship has failed to answer, or alternatively, “avoided ask-

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<sup>1</sup>John Walsh, “John Wesley and the Urban Poor,” *Review Francaise de Civilisation Britannique* 6 (1985); 18-30, 18.

<sup>2</sup>Luke L. Keefer, “Presidential Address: John Wesley, the Methodists and Social Reform in England,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 25 (1990); 7-20.

ing.”<sup>3</sup> Poverty within an eighteenth-century context, therefore, needs to be addressed if Wesley's ethics are to be understood. After all, “the concept of poverty and the nature of the problem in eighteenth-century England—is largely unknown to most Methodists today.”<sup>4</sup>

### A Tale of Two Cities

The opening lines of Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* give an accurate description of how an eighteenth century context can be understood. “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.”<sup>5</sup> Although he was describing France at the time, Dickens' description remains valid, and reveals a society that had an array of diverse personal experiences. For example, while the eighteenth-century witnessed mass industrial, economical and technological growth, it also experienced degrees of widespread poverty.<sup>6</sup> Technological and industrial growth meant that employment became available for the poor in urban areas. This led to mass urban migration, yet urban accommodation was often highly unsanitary, which inevitably culminated in various forms of disease.

Poverty only seemed to increase and the majority of the labouring people in England, “were poor and many of them unable to survive on their earnings.”<sup>7</sup> The poor were “wretchedly poor” and it is estimated that between 1760 and 1802 in one of the poorest counties, Staffordshire, 10 per cent of households could not afford to buy bread, even if they used their yearly wage.<sup>8</sup> The poor, therefore, were those whose social and economic status was below the subsistence level. From this, the poor can be considered to be those who were lacking in the necessities of life. Limited food, inadequate clothing, and awful sanitary accommodation remain an accurate description of who the poor were during this era.

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<sup>3</sup>Richard P. Heitzenrater, ed., “The Poor and the People Called Methodists”, in *The Poor and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2002), 16. Title will be abbreviated to *PPCM* henceforth.

<sup>4</sup>Richard P. Heitzenrater, *PPCM*, 15.

<sup>5</sup>Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (London: Penguin, 2012), 3. Although he was describing France at the time, Dickens' description remains valid.

<sup>6</sup>Kirstin Olsen, *Daily Life in 18<sup>th</sup>-Century England* (Westport, Conn; London: Greenwood Press, 1999), xi-xii.

<sup>7</sup>John Rule, “The Labouring Poor,” in *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Ed. H. T. Dickinson; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 183.

<sup>8</sup>Rule, “Labouring Poor,” 183.

## A Social Stigma

It is apparent that throughout the eighteenth century the “problem” of poverty was not always considered a problem. In fact, “poverty” was *defined* by the elite, the wealthy, the officials, and the laws.<sup>9</sup> The term “poor” was initially applied by the wealthy elite in order to explain a social situation. Interestingly, the poor never considered themselves to be a problem in the first place.<sup>10</sup> Poverty therefore was viewed as something which was normal, and as something which never needed to change, for example, as Marquardt points out:

A chief impediment to long-range social improvement lay in the view of poverty as a self-incurred fate or a stigma of divine punishment . . . neither the property holders, who wished to preserve the existing order, nor the poor, whose apathy confirmed their wretchedness, considered the necessity or possibility of fundamentally altering the existing social structures.<sup>11</sup>

This therefore reveals a society which not only suffered from polar economics and severe poverty, but one who also accepted poverty as “normal” and as part of God’s divine plan. Thus, attempts to try and reduce poverty were considered by some to be unnecessary, or as, “flying in the face of God’s manifest will.”<sup>12</sup>

## The Poor Laws

Yet it is worth noting that the government did not entirely neglect poverty. It was something which many had hoped to reform, even distinguished writers such as Daniel Defoe wrote on the need for change.<sup>13</sup> Although unorganised and irregular, national policies were introduced in England as early as the sixteenth-century in the form of the Poor Laws. The Poor Laws offered workhouses for the poor and aimed for full employment. However, dire conditions and poor wages meant that the

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<sup>9</sup>Heitzenrater, *PPCM*, 23.

<sup>10</sup>Thomas Riis, *Aspects of Poverty*, in *PPCM*, 18, n.12.

<sup>11</sup>Manfred Marquardt, *John Wesley’s Social Ethics: Praxis and Principles* (Trans. John E. Steely and W. Stephen Gunter; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 30.

<sup>12</sup>Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., *Good News to the Poor: John Wesley’s Evangelical Economics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 30.

<sup>13</sup>Daniel Defoe, *Giving alms no charity, and employing the poor a grievance to the nation* (London: Printed and sold by the booksellers of London and Westminster, 1704).

poor, "preferred self-help to the stigma of the dole."<sup>14</sup> Ultimately the Poor Laws were "incapable of making a significant dent in the misery of poverty and even inflicted new suffering of its own devising."<sup>15</sup> This "new suffering" was of course the workhouses.

The writings from Poor Law critics, such as Joseph Townsend, reveal the increased popular frustration towards the "persistent poor." Townsend states that there, "never was more money collected for their relief," and that the Poor Laws should make England, "the happiest nation upon earth." Yet the poor remain in, "drunkenness and idleness clothed in rags," and if only, "idleness and vice could not exist" then, "poverty would be unknown."<sup>16</sup> In this atmosphere of blame and accusation towards the poor, Wesley would emerge as a defender of the poor, something Rack sees as, "certainly unusual in his day."<sup>17</sup>

What is important to mention here, is that during the implementation of The Poor Laws, there emerged various groups such as The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK, 1698) and The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG, 1701). The SPCK for example would meet weekly and set up schools in order to educate the poor. They taught people how to read and understand the Bible, as well as organising missions abroad. Both these groups are essential to mention, as they no doubt had a significant influence on John Wesley's ethics.

### Wesley's Social Ethics

One of the most remarkable aspects of John Wesley's Social Ethics was his approach to the *problem* of poverty. For Wesley, although the government strived to provide financial support for the poor, they unfortunately created an "us-and-them mindset" which consisted of, "those who paid the poor tax and those who benefited from it."<sup>18</sup> Consequently, the poor were considered a "national economic and social problem to be solved by national legislation that would force increased productivity and thereby enhance national wealth."<sup>19</sup> Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*

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<sup>14</sup>Heitzenrater, *PPCM*, 23.

<sup>15</sup>Steven King and Alannah Tomkins eds., *The Poor in England 1700-1850: An Economy of Makeshifts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 2.

<sup>16</sup>Joseph Townsend, *A Dissertation on the Poor Laws: By a Well-Wisher to Mankind* (London: Printed for Ridgeways, 1817, 1786), 7.

<sup>17</sup>Henry E. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 1989), 362.

<sup>18</sup>Heitzenrater, *PPCM*, 23.

<sup>19</sup>Heitzenrater, *PPCM*, 23.

(1776) only increased this mentality, and thus, it appeared that the poor were becoming an unwanted burden, and a hindrance to economic bliss. All of this therefore resulted in negative stereotypes towards the poor, who were often considered lazy and indolent.

“They are poor, only because they are idle” was something Wesley labelled as, “devilishly false.”<sup>20</sup> Wesley continued to defend the poor: “Has poverty nothing worse in it than this, that it ‘makes men liable to be laughed at’? . . . Is it not worse for one after an hard day’s labour to come back to a poor, cold, dirty, uncomfortable lodging, and to find there not even the food which is needful to repair his wasted strength?”<sup>21</sup> To Wesley, the poor were not lazy or lethargic, but a consequence of inadequate governmental policy. Wesley though sought to reform how the poor were depicted, and from this representation, Wesley sought to awaken a, “sense of responsibility to one’s contemporaries in distress.”<sup>22</sup>

One of John Wesley’s main critiques of governmental attempts at relieving poverty was that it remained distant. Money was being invested yet the reality of poverty remained. Wesley however wanted to, “see with his own eyes what they needed.”<sup>23</sup> Therefore, “apostolic poverty,” or “Gospel poverty,” would become a significant trait to Wesley’s ministry. Wesley found much of Thomas à Kempis’s *The Imitation of Christ* (1418) useful in this, who asserted that Christians should be, “a servant of others” and, “to appear poor in this world.”<sup>24</sup> William Law also proved influential in this area of Wesley’s Social Ethics, with links often being made to mendicants, such as Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Dominic.<sup>25</sup> What is essential here though, is that Wesley’s Social Ethics sought to improve the lives of the poor *directly*, or as Wesley states, “How much better is it, when it can be done, to *carry* relief to the poor than *send* it.”<sup>26</sup> Thus, Wesley’s ministry to the poor was not, “*service of the poor, but more importantly life with the poor.*”<sup>27</sup>

<sup>20</sup>Wesley, *Journal*, in Kenneth J. Collins, “The Soteriological Orientation of John Wesley’s Ministry to the Poor,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 36 (2001); 7-36; 19, n. 42.

<sup>21</sup>“Heaviness Through Manifold Temptations,” *Works* [BE], 2:227-228.

<sup>22</sup>Marquardt, *Praxis and Principles*, 33.

<sup>23</sup>Marquardt, *Praxis and Principles*, 30.

<sup>24</sup>Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (Trans. Leo Sherley-Price; London: Penguin Classics, 2005), 34.

<sup>25</sup>Ted A. Campbell, “The Image of Christ in the Poor: On the Medieval Roots of the Wesley’s Ministry with the Poor,” in *PPCM*, 47.

<sup>26</sup>*JW J*, IV, 422, in Rack, *RE*, 362.

<sup>27</sup>Douglas M. Meeks, ed. *The Portion of the Poor: Good News to the Poor in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1995), 10.

John Wesley's participation and awareness for helping the poor developed from the outset of Oxford Methodism, a young group of students who sought holy living and aimed to, "to flee from the wrath to come."<sup>28</sup> It was here that Wesley and the "Holy Club" were, "first confronted with the challenge for social work and recognised it to be an essential, inseparable part of the Christian life."<sup>29</sup> Their social work in the city involved visiting impoverished families, assisting in schools and helping in workplaces. Furthermore, Charles and John Wesley visited prisons on a number of occasions, preaching and setting up pastoral care groups, as well as helping with the rehabilitation of prisoners, often caring for them financially as well.

Constant dedication towards the visiting of disadvantaged families, combined with their ability to supply medicine and clothing, displayed a willingness from Methodists to help the underprivileged parts of society. Setting up schools for deprived children was an example of John Wesley's willingness to educate children. By paying teachers, children were able to receive an education, which without Wesley and the Methodists, would have previously been deprived from.<sup>30</sup> In order to help others financially the Holy Club prevented one another from purchasing unneeded clothing, as well as fasting on regular occasions. Oxford Methodism displayed a zealous charitable stamina and a serious intent on making a permanent change to the deprived and marginalised.

Oxford Methodism and Wesley's later ministry to the poor did however change, not necessarily in its commitment, but regarding John Wesley's motives. Following John's Aldersgate experience, he no longer acted out of a motive of "fearing the wrath to come," but out of an assurance of faith and the forgiveness of sins.<sup>31</sup> "Before Aldersgate, Wesley's approach was essentially catholic. After Aldersgate the relationship was perceived in an evangelical sense."<sup>32</sup> Although controversial in Wesleyan scholarship, it is fair to assert that Aldersgate remains a significant part of Wesley's ministry, as it appears to have altered Wesley's motives for helping the poor.

Wesley's direct involvement in the lives of the poor led to key societies, such as the London Methodist Society, the Poor Fund account book of West Street Chapel, as well as the Stranger's Friend Society in 1785. It

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<sup>28</sup>"Of Laying the Foundations of the New Chapel," *Works* [BE], 3:580.

<sup>29</sup>Marquardt, *Praxis and Principles*, 23.

<sup>30</sup>Marquardt, *Praxis and Principles*, 24.

<sup>31</sup>For Wesley's account see, *Journal* (24 May 1738), *Works*, [BE], 18:249-50.

<sup>32</sup>Leon O. Hynson, *To Reform the Nation: Theological Foundations of Wesley's Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Francis Asbury Press, 1984), 34.

also seemed to inspire wealthy philanthropists to participate, such as William Marriott and Ebenezer Blackwell.<sup>33</sup> Wesley also often brought nourishing food to those who were hungry, provided decent clothing, and furnished houses for widows and orphans. In order to boost employment, Wesley would send weavers yarn for their looms. For children, schools were built to train young girls and boys, as well as setting up publishing programmes for uneducated adults.<sup>34</sup>

Wesley's involvement in the lives of the poor was clearly having an impact, so much so, that Halévy argues that it prevented England from a French-style revolution.<sup>35</sup> Although Halévy's claim has attracted much attention, according to Rack, the work remains, "seriously flawed."<sup>36</sup> While the debate surrounding Halévy's claim cannot be discussed in full at present, it is worth mentioning briefly, as the claim alone is a witness towards the significant impact John Wesley had in his eighteenth-century context.

Central to Wesley's Social Ethics was to love his neighbour. Throughout all that Wesley and the Methodists did, "Wesley's social ethics was never separated from his theology of Christian perfection and sanctification."<sup>37</sup> Wesley built his Ethics on the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:35-40) believing that Christians should love all people, including the poor, as they, "are created in God's image and, therefore, of the same dignity as the rich and the noble; all are souls for whom Christ died."<sup>38</sup> Thus, Wesley's Social Ethics are formed primarily from his biblical and soteriological perspectives.

Wesley's personal dedication towards the poor is undeniable, whether he wished it upon himself is debateable; however, what is true is that he remained dedicated, "even to the point of contracting diseases from their beds."<sup>39</sup> Wesley "could not more imagine a week without visiting the hovels of the poor than he could imagine a week without partici-

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<sup>33</sup>Gareth Lloyd, "Eighteenth-Century Methodism and the London Poor," in *PPCM*, 122-124.

<sup>34</sup>Heitzenrater, *PPCM*, 34.

<sup>35</sup>E. Halévy, *The Birth of Methodism in England* (Trans & Ed. Bernard Semmel; London: University of Chicago Press, 1971).

<sup>36</sup>Rack, *RE*, 171.

<sup>37</sup>Hynson, *Reform the Nation*, 34.

<sup>38</sup>Manfred Marquardt, "Social Ethics in the Methodist Tradition," *T&T Clark Companion to Methodism* (Ed. Charles Yrigoyen, Jr. London: T. & T. Clark, 2010), 292-293.

<sup>39</sup>Meeks, *Portion of the Poor*, 10.

pation in the Eucharist.”<sup>40</sup> In a Letter to Miss Furly, Wesley writes, “I love the poor; in many of them I find pure, genuine grace, unmixed with paint, folly and affectation.”<sup>41</sup> Wesley’s ministry to the poor therefore was not separate to his ministry, but entangled within, with every part of Methodism concerned with the lives of the poor, and thus, “Solidarity with the poor therefore was not to be a side issue, but the test of every dimension of activity.”<sup>42</sup>

### Wesley's Economical Ethics

John Wesley’s Economical Ethics were birthed primarily out of a concern for the poor. Instead of budgeting financially based on one’s own concerns, Wesley radically flipped the aim of economics, placing the *purpose* of money around helping those less fortunate. Backed up with scripture, Wesley sought to create a society which did not necessarily oppose money, but saw it as an opportunity to do the will of God. Christians were, “not to serve money, for that idolatry prevented one from serving God. But one was to deal calculatingly with money.”<sup>43</sup> Wesley’s Economical Ethics therefore sought to improve the lives of the poor in every way possible.

When addressing Wesleyan economics it is important, as Kenneth Collins stresses, to view them from a biblical hermeneutic, and as spiritually and soteriologically based, rather than simply from a political or economic slant.<sup>44</sup> Many scholars for instance have attempted to find ulterior motives behind Wesley’s economics, with some viewing them as having a political slant,<sup>45</sup> or specifically Tory.<sup>46</sup> Others however have viewed them as linked to the rise of capitalism,<sup>47</sup> with some also regarding them as a

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<sup>40</sup>Jennings, “Wesley and the Poor: An Agenda for Wesleyans,” in *The Portion of the Poor*, 21.

<sup>41</sup>Letter to Dorothy Furly (25 September 1757), *Letters* (Telford), 3:229, quoted in Ted A. Campbell, “The Image of Christ in the Poor,” in *PPCM*, 52.

<sup>42</sup>Meeks, *The Portion of the Poor*, 22.

<sup>43</sup>Ronald H. Stone, *John Wesley's Life and Ethics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 164.

<sup>44</sup>Collins, “The Soteriological Orientation,” 7-9.

<sup>45</sup>See Robert C. Haywood, “Was John Wesley a Political Economist?” *Church History* 33 (September 1964); 314-321.

<sup>46</sup>Rack, *RE*, 363-4.

<sup>47</sup>See Robert Kingdon, “Laissez-Faire or Government Control: A Problem for Wesley,” *Church History* 26 (1957); 342-54, and, Bernard Semmel, *The Methodist Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1972), 75-80.

kind of Christian socialism,<sup>48</sup> with the latter being something which, “has been swallowed more readily by sociologists than historians.”<sup>49</sup> Yet, Wesley’s Economical Ethics, “grew out of a consideration of the needs of the poor;”<sup>50</sup> and therefore, his Ethics should be viewed from his spiritual and biblical motives.

With all that Wesley wrote regarding money, it can be argued that he saw money as having the ability to either hinder Christianity, or to spread the holy love of God, through giving to the poor. For example, Wesley saw money as having a potentially dangerous influence on Christians, arguing that it often leads to a, “forgetfulness of God,”<sup>51</sup> which results in a wasteful lifestyle. Wesley often refers to the Acts five narrative, of Ananias and Sapphira lying to the Holy Spirit for the sake of personal gain, something Wesley labels as, “the first plague which infected the Christian Church.”<sup>52</sup> With this Wesley argues that riches have often been the downfall of the church, writing in harsh terms against Constantine:

Persecution never did, never could, give any lasting wound to genuine Christianity. But the greatest it ever received, the grand blow . . . was struck in the fourth century by Constantine the Great, when he called himself a Christian, and poured in a flood of riches, honours, and power, upon the Christians.<sup>53</sup>

To Wesley, with great wealth comes great responsibility. Riches do and have caused damage to the Church, as mentioned above; nevertheless, Wesley also reveals how money can be used for good, and how it can be used specifically to improve the lives of the poor. A popular sermon by Wesley, which has been unfortunately twisted and manipulated by some, is his “The Use of Money.”<sup>54</sup> From this, the renowned dictums of “gain all you can,” “save all you can,” and “give all you can” are often interpreted as the foundations of Wesley’s Economical Ethics. In this sermon Wesley challenges the Christian to use the money which God has given to meet the needs of those less fortunate.

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<sup>48</sup>Robert Hughes, “Wesleyan Roots of Christian Socialism,” *The Ecumenist* 13 (1975); 49-53.

<sup>49</sup>Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 365.

<sup>50</sup>Collins, “The Soteriological Orientation,” 15.

<sup>51</sup>“On Riches,” *Works* [BE], 3:523. See also “The Danger of Increasing Riches,” *Works* [BE], 4:186-188.

<sup>52</sup>“The Mystery of Iniquity,” *Works* [BE], 2:260.

<sup>53</sup>“The Mystery of Iniquity,” *Works* [BE], 2:462-3.

<sup>54</sup>“The Use of Money,” *Works* [BE], 2:263-80.

While Marquardt, Meeks, Heitzenrater and Collins make good use of this sermon, it appears that it has received an array of criticism. Jennings for example refuses to grant Wesley the first two of his three economic rules, “gain all you can,” and “save all you can.” He argues that “gain all you can” produces a, “catastrophic misunderstanding,” and that to “gain all you can” produces wealth and riches, which Jennings sees as contradicting the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7). Jennings states that, “Earning what is needed is not the same as gaining all you can . . . Earning what you need does not produce riches. Gaining what you can does.” Thus, according to Jennings, Wesley promotes dangerous rhetoric, with this sermon being an, “uncharacteristic deviation,” from Wesley's Economical Ethics.<sup>55</sup>

One person in particular who defends this sermon, and who criticises Jennings, is Kenneth Collins. Collins argues that Jennings fails to appreciate a truth, “readily acknowledged by Wesley, namely, that vital religion *necessarily* produces both industry (gain all you can) and thrift (save all you can).”<sup>56</sup> Gaining all you can and saving all you can are therefore, “not necessarily evidence of rebellion against a holy God. On the contrary, they can be, and often are, the very ingredients of stewardship, the prerequisites of ministry.”<sup>57</sup> Collins corrects Jennings on a number of occasions, pointing out that in this same sermon, Wesley criticizes Methodists of neglecting to “give all they can.” Therefore, Wesley's “give all you can” remains the sole purpose behind the first two rules. Thus, as Maddox rightly states, Wesley's, “encouragement of his Methodists to earn and save money is suggestive of—but hardly an endorsement of—laissez-faire capitalism.”<sup>58</sup>

### Giving All They Can

Wesley's Economical Ethics therefore sought to improve the lives of the poor in a practical and generous manner. The earliest form of Methodism's aid to the poor came weekly via the “class meeting.” The class meeting aimed at collecting charitable contributions, and then distributing them to the poor in various forms such as clothing, food, medicine, fuel, and money.<sup>59</sup> Methodists would also maintain a constant figure to

<sup>55</sup>Jennings, *Good News to the Poor*, 167.

<sup>56</sup>Collins, “The Soteriological Orientation,” 15.

<sup>57</sup>Collins, “The Soteriological Orientation,” 15.

<sup>58</sup>Randy L. Maddox, “Visit the Poor’: John Wesley, the Poor, and the Sanctification of Believers,” in *PPCM*, 62.

<sup>59</sup>Marquardt, *Praxis and Principles*, 28.

fund the poor, reaching 80 pounds a week in 1734, which helped to relieve the poor in their city. As a fellow at Lincoln, Wesley lived on as little as 28 pounds a year, giving away whatever was left as his income rose. Also, before his death, Wesley gave away all of his accounts, and it is estimated that Wesley disposed of around 30,000 pounds in his lifetime.<sup>60</sup>

Despite his brother Charles labelling it as self-righteous, John Wesley often gave to mendicants, as he saw, “the awesome image of the suffering Christ.”<sup>61</sup> Wesley also collected resources from everyone who could help, appealing for money from the rich, and on one occasion Wesley collected 200 pounds from the streets of London in the space of one week.<sup>62</sup> A loan system and an employment system were also set up in order to help the poor, with the loan fund increasing to 120 pounds by 1767. Wesley also collected from within, charging a penny a week for Methodist class members, with the Society Stewards given responsibility to watch over finances within the society.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, Wesley’s earnings for the poor were huge, with Ward and Heitzenrater arguing that for over forty years, “all the class-money in London, amounting to several hundred pounds a year, was distributed to the poor by the stewards.”<sup>64</sup>

William Law again was an influence on John Wesley’s *Economical Ethics*. Like Law, Wesley viewed charity as a lifestyle, which came with living a Christian life, not simply a sporadic one off donation.<sup>65</sup> It is also worth noting that Methodism did not necessarily have to “search out the poor.” After all, most of the Methodist societies consisted largely of the poor, for example, the majority of Methodists were below the poverty line, with 65 to 75 percent falling under the 30 pounds annual income, earning only 20 pounds. The rest of the Methodists earned just above the 30 pound a year rate, which meant that effectively, Methodism was an impoverished movement. Therefore, Wesley had every right to hang signs outside of Methodist preaching houses which read, “The Poor R Us.”<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>Rack, *RE*, 361.

<sup>61</sup>John Walsh, “John Wesley and the Community of Goods,” in *Protestant Evangelicalism: Britain, Ireland, Germany and America: Essays in Honour of W.R. Ward* (Ed. Keith Robbins; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 36.

<sup>62</sup>Heitzenrater, *PPCM*, 31.

<sup>63</sup>Heitzenrater, *PPCM*, 31.

<sup>64</sup>Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal*, [BE], 20:176, n. 45, cited in Collins, “The Soteriological Orientation . . .”

<sup>65</sup>Walsh, “Community of Goods,” 35.

<sup>66</sup>Heitzenrater, *PPCM*, 27-28, and Maddox, 76.

Yet, Wesley did not view poverty in the traditional sense of earning less than 30 pounds a year; he viewed it in relative terms. He saw poverty as lacking the necessities of life, with these necessities being food, clothing, and shelter. To Wesley, having more than these necessities meant that you were rich: "whoever has sufficient food to eat and raiment to put on, with a place where to lay his head, and something over, is *rich*."<sup>67</sup> Thus, for Wesley, helping the poor did not stop at the poor. Wesley insisted that everyone had somebody who was in an inferior position to them, so therefore, even the poor should give to people who are poorer than themselves, and thus, "no one is exempt from the law of love for neighbour."<sup>68</sup> Therefore, the poor are not to be only, "*recipients* of grace but also as *responsible participants* in sharing that grace."<sup>69</sup>

### Wesley and Medicine

Disease within the eighteenth century was a considerable problem. As Porter states, "People of every age-group, occupation and social rank in early modern England knew they trod the pilgrim's progress of life in the shadow of sickness, disability and death."<sup>70</sup> Illness and death, "loomed large in people's mind,"<sup>71</sup> yet, for poor people living in England, it appears as if it loomed for considerably less time, before it became an inevitable reality. The causes of sickness were often linked to God's divine judgment, however, the belief in *maleficium*—or sickness caused by witchcraft—remained a common belief as well.<sup>72</sup>

Although the bubonic plague had long been eradicated, it soon became evident that growing diseases, such as "smallpox," posed a dominating threat. Poor hygiene and poor sanitary conditions were prevalent within many homes during this time, with dire nutrition being a severe problem too. Most importantly, those affected the most had little knowledge of what a sufficient diet consisted of, or how to medically care for themselves. What is most significant though is that, "the costs of illness to a poor family were considerable, well beyond their means."<sup>73</sup> Yet, with all

<sup>67</sup>"The Danger of Riches," *Works* [BE], 3:230.

<sup>68</sup>Heitzenrater, *PPCM*, 31.

<sup>69</sup>Maddox, "Visit the Poor," 76.

<sup>70</sup>Roy Porter, *Disease, medicine and society in England, 1550-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 17.

<sup>71</sup>Porter, *Disease*, 17.

<sup>72</sup>Porter, *Disease*, 21.

<sup>73</sup>Joan Lane, *A Social History of Medicine: Health, healing and disease in England, 1750-1950* (London: Routledge, 2001), 134-135.

this said, Wesley's Social Ethics sought to improve the lives of the poor, and to ultimately heal them, not just spirituality, but physically too.

### Holistic Soteriology

While disease and illness plagued eighteenth-century society, Wesley attempted to address it practically. While Wesley is rightly depicted as being a successful revivalist, it appears that his indulgence in medicine can often go unnoticed. As Maddox states, "Few laity in Wesleyan traditions today are aware that John Wesley published a collection of advice for preserving health and treating diseases, even though that collection, his *Primitive Physic*, went through twenty-three editions in Wesley's life time."<sup>74</sup>

Yet, to Wesley, salvation should be viewed in *holistic* terms. God's salvation did not just include the forgiveness of sins, but it extended further, even towards the restoration of the physical body:

By salvation I mean, not barely (according to the vulgar notion) deliverance from hell, or going to heaven, but a present deliverance from sin, a restoration of the soul to its primitive health . . . the renewal of our souls after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness, in justice, mercy, and truth.<sup>75</sup>

To Wesley, "God is the physician of not only the soul but also the physical body, demonstrating that God longs to aid us, as well, in recovering and maintaining physical well being in this life."<sup>76</sup> Thus both *outward* and *inward* health were equally as important in regards to salvation.

### Wesley as Physician

Initially Wesley attempted at helping to help the poor medically himself without charge. It is believed that while John was at Oxford he attended medical lectures in case there was a lack of physicians in the colony of Georgia. These lectures essentially taught John the basics of performing simple medical procedures, with the most serious often left to the more qualified. Nevertheless, Wesley was successful and influential in this area, aiding hundreds of people within the space of a few short months.<sup>77</sup> Also, to help the London poor, Wesley instituted the "lending-

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<sup>74</sup>Randy L. Maddox, "John Wesley on Holistic Health and Healing," *Methodist History* 46 (2007); 4-33, 4.

<sup>75</sup>*Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, Pt. 1, *Works* [BE], 11:106, in Maddox, "Wesley on Holistic Health," *MH*, 7

<sup>76</sup>Randy L. Maddox, "Visit the Poor," 68.

<sup>77</sup>Marquardt, *Praxis and Principles*, 28-29.

stock" at the Foundry, where pills, remedies, nostrums, elixirs, and medical advice were given free of charge.<sup>78</sup> The success from this led to the setting up of the Bristol dispensary in the same year, which freely supplied the needs of 200 patients.

### Primitive Physic

In 1747, Wesley published his *Primitive Physic*,<sup>79</sup> a book which gave advice and remedies on healing yourself from minor to major illnesses.<sup>80</sup> It was also, "one of most popular volumes published in England during the eighteenth-century."<sup>81</sup> This was a significant work in an age of costly cures and swindling physicians. Wesley writes in the Preface, "When man came first out of the hands of the great Creator . . . there was no place for physic, or the art of healing. As he knew no sin, so he knew no pain, no sickness, weakness, or bodily disorder."<sup>82</sup> Therefore, Wesley aimed to bring the focus back to the *imago Dei* (God image), seeing God as merciful and as providing, "the antidotes to nature's poisons, wrought by humanity's disobedience and subsequent Fall."<sup>83</sup> Thus, Wesley's restorative theology laid the foundations for his Ethics.

Through Wesley's lifetime, *PP* went through twenty-three editions, with the last edition being the thirty-seventh, published in 1859. It was republished throughout Europe and the United States, but within the first twenty-three editions, Wesley updated his research and continued to edit and add remedies. Within *PP* Wesley recommends for example drinking lots of water, and dedicating yourself to exercise as a means of keeping yourself healthy. Going to bed early and waking up early was also key, with oversleeping discouraged by Wesley, as this often led to illness.<sup>84</sup>

Wesley's purpose for *PP* was to supply, "cheap, safe, and easy medicines [for] . . . unlettered men."<sup>85</sup> Wesley effectively wanted to remove the

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<sup>78</sup>Samuel J. Rogal, "Pills for the Poor: John Wesley's Primitive Physic," *The Yale Journal of Biology and Medicine* (1978); 81-9, 82.

<sup>79</sup>*Primitive Physic* will be abbreviated to *PP* henceforth.

<sup>80</sup>Wesley also wrote other works in maintaining and restoring health: See Maddox, "John Wesley on Holistic Health and Healing," 6.

<sup>81</sup>Samuel J. Rogal, "Pills for the Poor," 82.

<sup>82</sup>John Wesley, *Primitive Physic: or an Easy and Natural Method of Curing Most Diseases*, (9th Edition; London: Printed by W. Strahan and sold by the booksellers of London and Westminster, 1761), iii.

<sup>83</sup>Deborah Madden, "Wesley as Advisor on Health and Healing," *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley* (Eds. Randy L. Maddox and Jason E. Vickers; Cambridge: Cambridge, 2009), 182.

<sup>84</sup>Madden, "Wesley as Advisor on Health and Healing," CC, 186.

<sup>85</sup>Wesley, *Primitive Physic*, Postscript, *Works* (Jackson), 14:316.

jargon out of medicine and return to a primitive and ancient form of empiricism. Like his preaching, Wesley wanted to, “design plain truth for plain people.”<sup>86</sup> Wesley wanted to empower the poor, and to give the poor the ability to heal themselves. While the likes of J. H. Plumb criticise Wesley and his *PP* as anti-enlightenment and regressive in thinking,<sup>87</sup> it is worth noting that within *PP*, Wesley used prominent theorists and physicians, such as Huxham, Sydenham, Cheyne, Mead, and Boerhaave,<sup>88</sup> meaning that his research on many levels remained as scholarly as his contemporaries.

### Conclusion

Throughout the eighteenth century, John Wesley’s ethics impacted the lives of the poor considerably. While the poor were socially rejected, financially inadequate and medically deprived, it appears that Wesley addressed these three issues extensively. The Poor Laws were an example of governmental attempts to deal with poverty, however this developed into a corrupt system, with ulterior motives aimed ultimately at developing an all round *Wealth of Nations* styled economy. While governmental attempts remained distant from the poor, Wesley’s Social Ethics aimed at entering into the problem of poverty and imitating Christ. To Wesley, dealing with the problem of poverty meant that people had to, “imitate the life of Christ not improve the national economy.”<sup>89</sup> Therefore, Wesley ignored the stigma attached to the poor, and continued to supply and visit them in a society which often regarded the poor as lazy and lethargic.

Also, while the eighteenth century is notorious for industrialisation, a developing middle-class, and the exploitation of the poor, it was Wesley’s financial motives that went against the current economical climate. For example, the Methodists were encouraged to *gain* all they could and to *save* all they could, however, it was all for one prime purpose; that they could *give* all they could to those who needed it the most. Thus, Wesley and the Methodist Societies contributed extensively to helping the poor across England. Methodism therefore in its very nature remained insistent in its provision for the poor.

Finally, while the eighteenth century was plagued with illness, disease and high mortality rates, Wesley attempted to improve the current

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<sup>86</sup>“Preface to the Sermons,” *Works* [BE], 1:30-31.

<sup>87</sup>J. H. Plumb, *England in the Eighteenth-Century* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974).

<sup>88</sup>Rogal, “Pills for the Poor,” 81.

<sup>89</sup>Heitzenrater, *PPCM*, 36.

situation for the poor. With his holistic approach to salvation, Wesley believed that outward health was equally as important as inward health. With this, Wesley provided a simple and effective manual, *Primitive Physic*, which ultimately empowered the poor to heal themselves. With no health care, and with costly procedures, it is fair to argue that Wesley helped to save an array of lives with his *Primitive Physic*, his own personal practice as a physician, as well his free dispensaries.

Thus, Wesley's ethics sought to improve the lives of the poor in various ways. Socially, economically, and medically, Wesley made a major impact on many of the poor, so much so, that the likes of Halévy argue that it prevented a revolution in England. Though this may seem far-fetched for some, this claim alone seems to attest to the overall impact with which Wesley's ethics had on the lives of the poor.

## TULIP VS. ACURA: REFRAMING DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CALVIN AND WESLEY

by

**Don Thorsen**

Are you familiar with the acrostic: TULIP? If you have a theological background, or if you received a broad-based Christian education in church, then you may be familiar with this five-point summary of Calvinistic teaching. For those unfamiliar with TULIP, the acrostic stands for the following terms, which have to do—broadly speaking—with a Christian understanding of the salvation of people (also known as the “doctrines of grace”):

- T – Total depravity
- U – Unconditional election
- L – Limited atonement
- I – Irresistible grace
- P – Perseverance of the saints

The acrostic TULIP has been used to summarize beliefs and values of John Calvin, though the acrostic was formulated after his death, and debate among Calvinists still occurs regarding its appropriateness. All the same, Calvin was among the best known founders of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. He formulated theology systematically in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which continues to represent for many the best presentation of Reformed Protestant theology, at least, the Calvinistic branch of Reformed theology. Those who claim to follow the Reformed tradition of Calvinism often appeal to TULIP as representative of their theology.

However, not all Protestants come from a Reformed background. After the Reformation, many Protestant traditions developed, and continue to develop today. Yet, Calvin’s theology does not represent their respective beliefs and values. Indeed, it can be argued historically that Calvin represents few of the later Protestant developments, which is why they originated. How is it, then, that when Protestants are asked about which theology comes closest to describing their Christianity, they end up mentioning Calvin and the Reformed tradition of theology?

No doubt there are many reasons for why this is the case, and I will discuss some of them, for example, how Western civilization has long been enamored with theologies that are systematically formulated. But on a popular level, one possible reason for why Protestants default to Calvin and Calvinism is because they cannot think of a ready alternative to the easily remembered acrostic TULIP. They may know the names of other key Protestants—Luther, Zwingli, Cranmer, Wesley, and others—but they cannot articulate point-by-point how to differentiate between them. In my experience, Protestants often appeal to the five-points of Calvinism—of TULIP—not necessarily because they agree (much less understand) the acrostic, but because it is mnemonically easy to remember, and projects a sense of logical coherence and intellectual respectability.

As an adherent to the Wesleyan tradition of theology, I propose an alternative to the acrostic TULIP, which I think will help Protestants, who are not Calvinistic, to contrast their beliefs and values with TULIP. They may not even be Wesleyan, since Calvin and Wesley represent only two views among many within Protestant Christianity. But Calvin and Wesley are important leaders, historically as well as today, as Protestants try to understand and communicate their beliefs and values to others, especially with regard to people's salvation. Thus, I use the acrostic ACURA, which represents the following:

- A – All are sinful
- C – Conditional election
- U – Unlimited atonement
- R – Resistible grace
- A – Assurance of salvation

The acrostic ACURA helps to reframe differences between Calvin and Wesley. It is not a forced comparison, but one that gives clarity into theological issues that have long separated the followers of Calvin and Wesley. Moreover, I argue that the overwhelming majority of Protestants, regardless of who they claim as their theological leader, live in *practice* far more like a Wesleyan understanding of the so-called five-points than they live like Calvin's *theory* of it. I even argue that this is surprisingly true, in practice, of those who call themselves Calvinists!

### **Thesis**

Although TULIP represents a long and esteemed theological summary of the Christian understanding of people's salvation, the Wesleyan acrostic ACURA more realistically describes biblical teaching and, also

importantly, describes more accurately the way people convert and live Christian lives. In arguing for this thesis, I will begin with a discussion of the history of TULIP, and my alternative formulation of ACURA. Then, I will argue for how ACURA serves far better as a practical, ministerial guide to the Christian life as well as being a better theoretical, theological formulation of biblical teaching on the subject matter. It is my hope that ACURA will become a more recognized and acknowledged alternative to TULIP, which for too long has monopolized Protestants' understanding of Christian salvation.

My research for this paper draws upon my book entitled *Calvin vs. Wesley: Bringing Belief in Line with Practice*.<sup>1</sup> I did not use TULIP and ACURA as a way to compare the two leaders because, as I mentioned, the acrostic TULIP did not occur until after Calvin's death. And not everyone is in agreement that TULIP precisely represents his theology, much less all of Reformed theology. Likewise, Wesley did not develop the acronym ACURA; I did. So, in *Calvin vs. Wesley*, I relegated my discussion of TULIP and ACURA to the Appendix.<sup>2</sup> But that is not because I consider the contrast unimportant. On the contrary, I consider it very important theologically, personally, and ministerially. For these reasons, I write now about TULIP and ACURA in order to promote the two acrostics as a useful way to begin comparing Calvin, Wesley, and their followers. I also want people to promote how much better ACURA represents the Bible, salvation, and real-life Christian living, than does TULIP.

### History of TULIP

Historically, the five-points of Calvinism date back to the early seventeenth century Netherlands, less than fifty years after Calvin's death. Debate increasingly occurred among Reformed Christians about the nature of salvation, and how strongly Calvin's predestinarianism and related beliefs should be interpreted. Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609) became the focal point of debate, but he died before any theological resolution could be achieved. Arminius' followers wrote a Remonstrance, or response, to the dominant interpretation of Calvin. The Remonstrance—also known as the Arminian Articles (1610)—made the following five challenges to Dutch Reformed theology. I summarize them as follows,

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<sup>1</sup>Don Thorsen, *Calvin vs. Wesley: Bringing Belief in Line with Practice* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2013).

<sup>2</sup>Thorsen, *Calvin vs. Wesley*, 128-142 (Appendix: More ACURA Than TULIP).

and I add terms in brackets that identify doctrines associated with the differences between Calvinists and Arminians:

“Article 1”: “That God . . . determined to save . . . those who through the grace of the Holy Spirit shall believe” [or conditional predestination]

“Article 2”: “That . . . Jesus Christ the Savior of the world, died for all” [or universal, unlimited atonement]

“Article 3”: “That the human has not saving grace of himself . . . in his state of apostasy and sin” [sinfulness of people, and rejection of works-righteousness]

“Article 4”: “That this grace of God is the beginning, the progress, and the end of all good (or prevenient). . . . But with this respect to the mode of operation, grace is not irresistible” [or resistible grace]

“Article 5”: “That those grafted into Christ by a true faith . . . are abundantly endowed with power to strive against Satan. . . . But the question of whether they are able . . . to neglect grace—this must be the subject of more exact inquiry” [uncertainty of perseverance]<sup>3</sup>

The debate over these issues unsettled leaders in the Dutch Reformed Church. Thus, they convened a Synod in the city of Dort (1618-1619), inviting representatives from Reformed churches in surrounding countries.

The Remonstrants were invited, believing they would receive a hearing for their views. Instead, the Remonstrants’ beliefs were condemned, and the Synod summarized their beliefs in contrast to the five Arminian Articles. The following is a summary of the five-points of the “Canons of Dort,” as they were called:

“The First Main Point of Doctrine Concerning Divine Predestination”: “Article 6: God’s Eternal Decision” [or unconditional election]

“The Second Main Point of Doctrine: Christ’s Death and Human Redemption through It”: “Article 8: The Saving Effectiveness of Christ’s Death” [or limited atonement]

“The Third and Fourth Main Points of Doctrine: Human Corruption, Conversion to God, and the Way They Occur”

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<sup>3</sup>“The Remonstrance,” 1610, in *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, vol. II, part 4, *Creeds and Confessions of the Reformation Era*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 549-550.

“Article 1: The Effect of the Fall on Human Nature” &  
 “Article 2: The Spread of Corruption” [or total depravity]  
 “Article 3: Total Inability” [or irresistible grace]  
 “The Fifth Main Point of Doctrine: The Perseverance of  
 the Saints” [or perseverance of the saints]<sup>4</sup>

These beliefs, in the English language, were later popularized by the acrostic TULIP, though they do not follow the precise wording or order of the Canons of Dort. In the Netherlands, the pronouncements by the Synod largely settled future debate regarding the concerns of the Remonstrants. The latter were not permitted to espouse Arminianism, as it came to be known, in the Dutch state church. Failure to comply with the Synod’s pronouncements resulted in heresy, loss of ecclesiastical vocation, and in some instances, loss of life. Many emigrated from the Netherlands as a result, for example, traveling to Britain and also the American Colonies.

### Calvin and Wesley

Wesley lived two centuries after the time of Calvin, and one century after the Synod of Dort. In his theological development, however, Wesley was more influenced by the Catholic, Orthodox, and Anglican traditions of theology, especially that of Anglicanism. This Anglo-Catholic tradition did not experience the particular predestinarianism of Calvin as much as had the Continental Protestants. Reflective of the *via media* (Latin for “middle way”) approach of Anglicanism, the Church of England avoided many of the over-emphases that arose in the Continental Reformation in reaction against Roman Catholicism.

Wesley’s Methodism flourished in eighteenth century England and elsewhere. As the movement grew, however, Wesley became increasingly embroiled in theological conflict with Reformed Christians, particularly those within Anglicanism. For example, he had noteworthy debates with George Whitefield, Howell Harris, Countess of Huntingdon, James Herve, and Augustus Montague Toplady. Wesley did not identify with Arminianism in his early ministry, though the Anglican tradition he received had been influenced by Arminian beliefs and values, along with other theological sources. In time, though, Wesley felt that the Methodist

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<sup>4</sup>“The Canons of the Synod of Dort,” 1618-1619, in *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, vol. II, part 4, *Creeds and Confessions of the Reformation Era*, ed. Jaroslav Pellikan and Valerie Hotchkiss (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 580, 583-584, 591, 592.

Movement was increasingly attacked by Calvinist publications, such as *The Spiritual Magazine* and *The Gospel Magazine*. In response, Wesley published the *Arminian Magazine: Consisting of Extracts and Original Treatises on Universal Redemption*. He thought that Methodism stood for “universal redemption,” vis-à-vis, the limited, double predestinarianism of Calvinism, which meticulously decreed who was saved and who was damned, without the opportunity for people to decide for themselves by God’s prevenient grace.

In summary of Wesley’s opposition to Calvinistic teachings, consider the following quote from his treatise on “Predestination Calmly Considered,” about the nature of salvation. In it, Wesley presents some of his reasons as well as passion against the beliefs of “Mr. Calvin,”<sup>5</sup> which he considered contrary to the justice and love of God, as well as to the teachings of Scripture. Wesley said:

Our blessed Lord does indisputably command and invite “all men every where to repent.” He calleth all. He sends his ambassadors, in his name, to “preach the gospel to every creature.” He himself “preached deliverance to the captives,” without any hint of restriction or limitation. But now, in what manner do you [Calvinists] represent him, while he is employed in this work? You suppose him to be standing at the prison-doors, having the keys thereof in his hands, and to be continually inviting the prisoners to come forth, commanding them to accept of that invitation, urging every motive which can possibly induce them to comply with that command; adding the most precious promises, if they obey, the most dreadful threatenings, if they obey not; and all this time you suppose him to be unalterably determined in himself never to open the doors for them! Even while he is crying, “Come ye, come ye from that evil place: For why will ye die, O house of Israel!” “Why!” might one of them reply, “because we cannot help it. We cannot help ourselves; and thou wilt not help us. . . . Alas! My brethren, what kind of sincerity is this, which you ascribe to God our Saviour?”<sup>6</sup>

Wesley did not contrast point-by-point his disagreement with Calvinism, in the same way that Calvin’s followers summarized the Canons

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<sup>5</sup>Wesley, “Predestination Calmly Considered,” §42, in *The Works of John Wesley*, 14 vols., edited by Thomas Jackson (London, 1872; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), 10.227.

<sup>6</sup>Wesley, “Predestination Calmly Considered,” §41, *Works* (Jackson), 10.226-227.

of Dort with the acrostic TULIP. But we can reframe Wesley's beliefs and values today in a way that can easily show the key differences about people's salvation between Calvin and Wesley, and between Calvinism and Wesleyanism.

### **Wesley, Arminianism, and Semi-Augustinianism**

Wesley did not entirely agree with all the remonstrances of the Arminians, but they share enough in common to be identified with one another theologically. But that does not mean that Wesley is best described as being Arminian. As already mentioned, he identified with a theological tradition much richer and ancient than Arminianism. In talking about theological differences between Calvin and Wesley, and between Calvinism and Wesleyanism, I prefer to talk about categories that extend back to the time of Pelagius and Augustine, who first popularized debates about salvation in relationship to divine predestination and human freedom.

At the turn of the fifth century, Augustine excoriated the beliefs and values of Pelagius for advocating a kind of works-righteousness, which Augustine considered contrary to Scripture and thus heretical. He also denounced Semi-Pelagianism, which placed more emphasis upon the role of God in people's salvation, but placed too much emphasis upon the initiation of people for salvation, rather than upon the grace of God. In Augustine's emphasis upon the sovereignty of God, coupled with his belief in the thoroughgoing sinfulness of people, salvation required God's autonomous work, irrespective of people's role in the process of being redeemed.

Probably no one in church history, after the authors of Scripture, influenced the theological development of Christianity more than Augustine. Yet, the ancient church conspicuously disagreed with the so-called Augustinianism that emphasized the sovereignty of divine predestination to the extent of de-emphasizing the responsible task people played in their salvation. As an alternative, the ancient church embraced views held by Christians such as Caesarius of Arles. Caesarius lived in the century following Augustine, and he gave leadership in the formulation of ecumenical pronouncements (for example, Council of Orange, 529) that affirmed both the sovereignty of God, along with the prevenient, grace-aided decisions that people must make in choosing to receive God's gift of eternal life. Thus, Caesarius' views were not Augustinian, on the one hand; nor were they Pelagian or Semi-Pelagian. I prefer to call them Semi-Augustinian, even though this is not a common designation found

in description of Caesarius' theology.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, I argue that Semi-Augustinianism best describes the view of divine predestination and human freedom affirmed by both the Roman Catholic Church in Western Christendom, and Orthodox Churches in Eastern Christendom. In this regard, Semi-Augustinianism represents a more pervasive and influential view of divine predestination and human freedom than that of Augustinianism—both today and throughout church history.

At the time of the Reformation, Protestants such as Luther and Calvin drew heavily upon the theology of Augustine as well as Scripture. It is naïve to think that either Luther or Calvin drew only upon Scripture for their theological development, regardless of the Reformation slogan of *sola Scriptura* (Latin for “Scripture alone”). They were both heavily invested in re-establishing the sovereign predestinarianism of Augustine, and Calvin systematically emphasized its logic more than either Augustine or Luther. For example, Calvin's all-encompassing treatment of God's sovereignty and effectual gracious work in the lives of people for their salvation, as well as for the rest of their lives, was later described by his followers as ‘double predestination.’ In other words, Calvin's predestinarianism was so strong that the reprobation (and damnation) of some people as well as the election (and salvation) of others were believed to be decreed by God, since God meticulously ordains all that occurs.

The British Reformation generally tried to steer a middle way between Roman Catholicism and Continental Protestantism, but sided with the former with regard to views about divine predestination and human freedom. By prevenient grace, people were thought to have sufficient freedom of choice so that they—rather than God—were responsible for accepting or rejecting God's gracious gift of eternal life. God's grace may initiate, sustain, and complete people's salvation, but that did not preclude God from voluntarily self-limiting divine sovereignty so that people have the power to choose, genuinely and with eternal consequences.

Wesley grew up within the Anglo-Catholic tradition, was educated in it, and embraced it in the Methodist Movement. This does not mean that Wesley did not also draw broadly from other Christian traditions, for he did. But he did not draw only from the Continental Protestants. Notably, Wesley also drew from Eastern Christendom, which influenced his views of sanctification as well as those pertaining to divine predestina-

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<sup>7</sup>Don Thorsen, *An Exploration of Christian Theology* (2008 rpt.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 254-258.

tion and human freedom. As such, Wesley's theology is best understood as reflecting those Semi-Augustinian views that stretch back much earlier than the development of Arminianism, back to the majority views of the ancient church.

### Calvin-ism and Wesley-anism

In comparing the views of Calvin and Wesley, and of Calvinism and Wesleyanism, we must acknowledge similarities between the latter and Arminianism. But it would be inaccurate to see Wesley as determined by them. As such, in comparing Calvinism and Wesleyanism, I focus squarely upon Wesley, and not upon Arminius and his followers. So my comparison is truly more about Calvin-ism and Wesley-anism, reflective of Wesley's Semi-Augustinian, Anglo-Catholic views.

When I first started comparing Calvinism and Wesleyanism, particularly in terms of the five-points of disagreement between the two, I formulated a chart that contrasted their views. The chart was first published in my introductory textbook entitled *An Exploration of Christian Theology*.<sup>8</sup> In the chart, I contrasted TULIP with five categories: Universality of Sin, Conditional Election, Unlimited Atonement, Resistible Grace, and Assurance of Salvation. And I described the theological differences between the two views with regard to the five-points of doctrine.

Of all the areas of comparison, Calvinism and Wesleyanism are probably closest in the first point of comparison, regarding sin. Both Calvin and Wesley believed that people could not earn salvation through their own merit or good works. In this regard, they agreed with the apostle Paul's rejection of works-righteousness. Wesley wrote about *The Doctrine of Original Sin*, and believed that people's salvation comes only by God effectually providing for it through the atonement of Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup> So, Wesley did believe that, at times, God works irresistibly in the lives of people, due to their finite and sinful state of existence, which resulted in their being out of right relationship with God. However, after providing for the atonement of all people, God now works through the person and work of the Holy Spirit in calling individuals to convert through faith and repentance.

Wesley disagreed with Calvinism most poignantly with regard to his belief in the conditionality of election, unlimitedness of the atonement,

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<sup>8</sup>Thorsen, *An Exploration of Christian Theology*, 256.

<sup>9</sup>John Wesley, *The Doctrine of Original Sin, according to Scripture, Reason, and Experience*, in *Works* (Jackson), 9.191-518.

and resistibility of grace. With regard to the conditionality of election, Wesley believed that God foreknows those who will believe, by prevenient grace. Reflective of the order of salvation found in Romans 8:29-30, Wesley believed, “For those whom he [God] foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified” (NRSV). Of course, foreknowledge has to do with people’s finite view of time, consisting of past, present, and future. But for God, all such knowledge is present, and known, though seemingly a foreknowing, from a human perspective. Contrary to Calvinism, which makes no temporal distinction between foreknowledge and foreordination (decrees of God), Wesley thought that foreknowledge is not causative knowledge, and people’s salvation is conditioned upon their faith and repentance.

With regard to the unlimitedness of the atonement, Wesley considered it immoral as well as unbiblical to think that God only died for the elect. As such, the atonement must not be thought of as limited in any way. To be fair to Calvin, there exists debate among his followers as to whether explicit wording in the *Institutes* confirm the doctrine of limited atonement. In fact, some forcibly argue against its presence.<sup>10</sup> Be that as it may, most Calvinists believe that the logic—if not the explicit words of Calvin—demands the doctrine of limited atonement (and particular redemption). And Wesley would have nothing of it.

With regard to the resistibility of grace, Wesley thought that Calvinists misunderstood the nature of prevenient grace, which was believed by Roman Catholics and Anglicans as well as Arminians. Prevenient grace has to do with the grace that God gives to people beforehand, that is, given in advance to them in order to enable or make possible people’s freedom and responsibility. Such grace and freedom do not thwart the sovereignty of God, even when people chose to reject God and salvation. God’s sovereignty is not thwarted because God voluntarily self-limits divine power in order that people might have sufficient power to choose, to be responsible for their decisions, and to love—the goal of a right relationship with God, oneself, and one’s neighbors.

The final point of comparison between Wesley and the five-points of Calvinism has to do with the perseverance of the saints, or whether a per-

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<sup>10</sup>For example, see R.T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649*, in Roger E. Olson, *Against Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 136-154 (Chapter 6: Yes to Atonement; No to Limited Atonement/Particular Redemption), esp. 145-147.

son who genuinely converts to Christianity may intentionally (and successfully) reject that salvation. Because Calvinism bases salvation, ultimately speaking, upon the divine predestination of God before the foundation of the world, then all decisions about election (and reprobation) occurred before the world was created. Thus, what decisions or circumstances in this life can affect one's eternal status? If one has faith, then one would not have it if one was not elect—or so the logic goes. Over time, Calvinists increasingly sought evidences to support their sense of election, appealing to obedience, a changed life, or other evidences that supported their presumed “eternal security.” Interestingly, the followers of Arminius did not assert that people may reject their salvation; they merely advocated further study of the subject. However, Wesley clearly believed that, since God gives people grace to choose freely their salvation as well as their subsequent Christian life (and sanctification), people may choose freely to reject their salvation. Of course, no one “lost” their salvation, *per se*, and no could separate believers from salvation. But, since salvation has to do with a right relationship with God, that relationship could weaken and be dissolved. God would not forcibly (or irresistibly) make people do that to which they freely and lovingly rejected. Finally, Wesley's theology did not leave people anxious or without hope about their salvation. On the contrary, Wesley strongly advocated on behalf of the assurance of salvation. The testimony of the Holy Spirit, coupled with the promises of Scripture, provided certain assurance of being the children of God.

### **TULIP and ACURA**

For years I taught about the differences between Calvinism and Arminianism (and also Wesley), using the chart I published in *An Exploration of Christian Theology*. However, students still had difficulty identifying Arminianism; they understood TULIP, but did not know how to reckon its alternative. They could summarize the five-points of Calvinism by using the acrostic, but then they could not easily identify an alternative.

In 2010, I published a book with my friend and colleague Steve Wilkens entitled *Everything You Know about Evangelicalism Is Wrong (Well, Almost Everything): An Insiders Look at Myths and Realities*. One chapter that I wrote was entitled “Evangelicals Are Not All Calvinists.” In the chapter, I talked about how few self-described evangelical Christians are functioning Calvinists. Because of the historic hegemony of Calvinist theology among Protestants—especially among those who write, publish, and purchase books—it is mistakenly thought that Calvinism speaks for

the majority. But that is not the case, based upon a survey of doctrinal statements found among denominational members of the National Association of Evangelicals, and among academic members of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities.<sup>11</sup>

While writing my chapter on how “Evangelicals Are Not All Calvinists,” I was struck with the idea of coming up with an alternative acrostic for offsetting the prominence of TULIP. Because my alternative was a thought that arrived late in the writing of *Everything You Know about Evangelicals Is Wrong*, I was hesitant to reframe a new paradigm for contrasting views from the five-points of Calvinism. But looking at my in-hand chart, I realized that I only needed to change one subject heading under Arminianism (and also Wesleyanism)—the first subject heading: Universality of Sin. By changing the subject heading to “All Have Sinned” (a la Romans 3:23), I could spell the acrostic ACURA. But I was still unsure of the wisdom of using this acrostic, because I did not know the etymology of the name Acura, used by the Honda automaker. What if, perchance, it had to do with some kind of evil or demonic meaning? Consequently, in a footnote I said, somewhat jokingly: “I am tempted to designate this category of Arminianism as ‘All have sinned’... Then the acronym for Arminianism would spell ACURA, which also stands for a brand of cars.”<sup>12</sup>

In writing *Calvin vs. Wesley*, I developed further my TULIP/ACURA chart. During 2012, I had the good fortune of doing research on my book at the Wesleyan Studies Summer Seminar at Asbury Theological Seminary. The director Ken Collins and other participants at the Seminar helped me to think through my comparative chart. It was the consensus of the Seminar that the phrase “All Have Sinned” was not strong enough to convey Wesley’s beliefs about the thoroughgoing nature and extent of human sinfulness. Nor did the phrase adequately convey people’s inability to do anything toward the atonement or salvation of their sins. Thus, the Seminar participants encouraged me to use the phrase “All Are Sinful” which was what I finally decided upon to complete my acrostic ACURA. The subject heading does a better job of capturing the magnitude of the problem of sin in Wesley’s theology.

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<sup>11</sup>Steve Wilkens and Don Thorsen, *Everything You Know about Evangelicals Is Wrong (Well, Almost Everything): An Insider’s Look at Myths and Realities* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 122-144.

<sup>12</sup>Wilkens and Thorsen, *Everything You Know about Evangelicals Is Wrong*, 212, n. 12.

I published a “new and improved” chart in my book *Calvin vs. Wesley*, and I list it below. Although the chart was originally developed as a comparison between Calvinism and Arminianism, it more accurately contrasts Calvin and Wesley, as well as Calvinists and Wesleyans.

<b>Calvinism and Wesleyanism</b>	
<b>Calvinism—TULIP</b>	<b>Wesleyanism—ACURA</b>
<b>1. <u>T</u>otal depravity</b>	<b>1. <u>A</u>ll are sinful</b>
<b>2. <u>U</u>nconditional election</b>	<b>2. <u>C</u>onditional election</b>
<b>3. <u>L</u>imited atonement</b>	<b>3. <u>U</u>nlimited atonement</b>
<b>4. <u>I</u>rresistible grace</b>	<b>4. <u>R</u>esistible grace</b>
<b>5. <u>P</u>erseverance of the saints</b>	<b>5. <u>A</u>ssurance of salvation</b>

No doubt there are self-described Wesleyans who would disagree with my charting of the five-points of disagreement between themselves and TULIP. I welcome the dialogue; I want to improve upon the accuracy as well as usefulness of the chart in contrasting Calvinism and Wesleyanism. I also want this acrostic to encourage increased theological discussion and debate, just as lively and productive as TULIP. In many ways, the chart represents a popular comparison, rather than a critical theological instrument. But for the most part, it is a useful starting point for contrasting the two, even though ACURA is presently less known and influential persuasive as an alternative. It is my hope that times will change, and ACURA will become better recognized and persuasive than TULIP in helping Christians conceptualize theologically key points in their beliefs, values, and practices with regard to salvation.

How important are mnemonic summarizations? Let me mention just a couple. First, many people are aware of the acrostic *ichthus* (Greek for “fish”). The acrostic consists of the first Greek letters for the following English words: *iota* (Jesus), *chi* (Christ), *theta* (God), *upsilon* (son), and *sigma* (Savior). Christians to this day may identify themselves with the line drawing of a fish (using two intersecting arcs that portray the profile of a fish), which is thought to extend back to believers in the ancient church, who clandestinely identified themselves to one another in order to maintain concealment from persecution. Second, many people are also aware of the acronym (not acrostic) of WWJD, which stands for the question: “What would Jesus do?” The question is asked by a character in the nineteenth century novel by Charles Sheldon, entitled *In His Steps*. The

acronym continues to be a popular mnemonic device for challenging people in general and Christians in particular with regard to how Jesus may want them to think, speak, and act. In sum, these examples help us to grasp how acronyms as well as acrostics powerfully benefit us personally, theologically, and ministerially.

### Alternative Summarizations

Similar summarizations of Calvinism and Wesleyanism exist. Let me begin with Dennis Bratcher, who contrasts the five-points of Calvinism and Wesleyanism with the following subject headings, describing Wesleyan perspectives as follows: (1) Deprivation; (2) Conditional Election; (3) Unlimited Atonement; (4) Resistible Grace; and (5) Assurance and Security.<sup>13</sup> Bratcher's comparison has, basically speaking, the same content as my comparison, which is the same comparison used by Wesleyans, Arminians, and others for years (decades? centuries?). In fact, four of the five subject headings match those of my acrostic ACURA—the final four section headings spell CURA—though with minor differences in wording. Similarly, my early attempts to contrast Calvinism and, originally, Arminianism, in *An Exploration of Christian Theology*, consisted of the letters CURA in the final four section headings.

However, Bratcher's comparison (and my earlier comparison) suffers from problems that lead to the neglect and marginalization of the genius of Wesley's theology, vis-à-vis, that of Calvin. First, Bratcher's comparison is couched entirely in terms of TULIP, both in the title and chart he uses. While Bratcher wants to uplift Wesleyanism over Calvinism, the paradigm for comparison is still dominated by TULIP; it is the only theological viewpoint identified by name (and acrostic). Second, if Wesleyans want to promote their views of God, grace, and salvation, then ACURA will better aid them in presenting an equally useable theological paradigm to contrast with TULIP. Third, the acrostic has the added benefit of being easily remembered, and the mnemonic advantages of an acrostic should not be minimized. In my experience, Wesleyans have often sold

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<sup>13</sup>Dennis Bratcher, "‘TULIP’ Calvinism Compared to Wesleyan Perspectives," *The Voice: Biblical and Theological Resources for Growing Christians*, Christian Resource Institute, 2013, <http://www.crivoice.org/tulip.html> (accessed February 28, 2014). Other acrostics have been used by Wesleyans, but they have not spelled a known word or a word easily remembered. For example, James Woods told me in a letter (October 16, 2013) that he uses the acrostic ACURE, which represents: 1) Almost total depravity; 2) Conditional election; 3) Unlimited atonement; 4) Resistible grace; and 5) Experience of assurance.

their theology short, not because of a lack of biblical and theological sophistication, but because of poor promotion of their beliefs, values, and practices. It may actually be the case that, once you hear of ACURA, you may not be able to forget it! Finally, on a humorous note, the popularization of both acrostics may become crucial because, after all, what would you rather own: a TULIP or an ACURA?

Some have caricatured Wesleyan and Arminian beliefs by the acrostic DAISY, saying “God loves me; God loves me not,” presumably because they are perceived to be weak with regard to the perseverance of the saints as well as the sovereignty of God. On a more serious note, however, the acrostic DAISY has genuinely been used to contrast TULIP. In this acrostic, the letters stand for: 1) Diminished depravity; 2) Abrogated election; 3) Impersonal atonement; 4) Sedentary grace; and 5) Yieldable justification.<sup>14</sup> The acrostic basically follows the doctrinal affirmations of ACURA, though technically Arminians doubt whether believers may reject their saving faith, while Wesleyans assert that true Christian believers may intentionally and habitually repudiate their salvation. But the acrostic DAISY has not caught on, undoubtedly, for several reasons. First, completely different words are used doctrinally for DAISY, vis-à-vis TULIP, while ACURA uses many of the same words or their antonyms (e.g., conditional vis-à-vis unconditional; unlimited vis-à-vis limited; and resistible vis-à-vis irresistible). Second, the words used for DAISY are not easily understood (e.g., abrogated, sedentary, and yieldable). Finally, the association of DAISY with the caricature by Calvinists about Wesleyans and Arminians is, by itself, sufficient reason not to use it, especially if one wants an acrostic to be taken seriously (and not used as the butt of a joke).

Other acrostics have been formulated, which are different from TULIP, but complement it (and contrast with ACURA). For example, the acrostic FAITH is intended to complement the five-points of Calvinism. In this acrostic, the letters stand for: 1) Fallen humanity; 2) Adopted by God; 3) Intentional atonement; 4) Transformed by the Holy Spirit; and 5) Held by God.<sup>15</sup> Another example of an acrostic is ROSES, purportedly a Molinist alternative to TULIP. In this acrostic, the letters stand for: 1) Radical depravity; 2) Overcoming grace; 3) Sovereign election; 4) Eter-

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<sup>14</sup>Aaron Earls, “Theological Flower Bed: TULIP, DAISY & ROSES,” *The Wardrobe Door*, August 2, 2010, <http://thewardrobedoor.com/2010/08/theological-flower-bed-tulip-daisy-roses.html> (accessed March 12, 2014).

<sup>15</sup>For example, see Jim Osterhouse, *Faith Unfolded: A Fresh Look at the Reformed Faith* (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 2000), 5-6. Osterhouse discusses the acrostic FAITH, but does not claim to have coined it.

nal life; and 5) Singular redemption.<sup>16</sup> Despite efforts by Molinists to provide an alternative to TULIP, presenting a different order of the five-points, there seems to be little difference from Calvinism. The only clear distinction has to do with the second point—the resistibility of grace (four-point Calvinism?). But it is difficult to see how Molinism, described by ROSES, differs all that much from TULIP. In the end, ACURA represents the best theological acrostic to contrast with the five-points of Calvinism.

### More ACURA than TULIP

The title of my book on *Calvin vs. Wesley* has the subtitle of *Bringing Belief in Line with Practice*. A central thesis in my book is that most Protestant Christians do not live like Calvin and his theology; instead, they live more like Wesley as he understood, wrote, and preached about salvation and the Christian life. It may sound presumptuous of me to make this claim, without providing empirical evidence. But, in my opinion, Calvinism functions more persuasively as a systematic presentation of theological ideas than as a systematic explanation of how people live their lives day to day, with all the decision-making required for their spiritual well-being as well as for other aspects of their lives.

When I teach, I eventually write on the board the following words: *theory and practice*. Theory pertains to matters of beliefs and values; practice has to do with the applications of those beliefs and values in personal life, social life, and ministry. Now, people I know usually think that they exhibit better theory than practice. However, sometimes they have better practice than theory, and they need to adjust their beliefs and values, rather than their practices. A case in point may include Calvinism. I argue that self-proclaimed Calvinists often live in ways that are more reflective of conditional election, unlimited atonement, resistibility of grace, and so on. For this reason, I have met Christians, who claim to be four-Point Calvinists, three-point Calvinists, or even two-point Calvinists (or some variation thereof). But if Calvinism is heavily invested in its systematic coherence, then one wonders whether variation in even one point of Reformed theology does not leave a person identifying with Wesley (as well as with Arminianism, and the whole of the Anglo-Catholic tradition) more than Calvin.

Not only do I think that Wesleyanism makes better sense in practice, I think it makes better sense of Scripture. As appealing as Calvin's system-

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<sup>16</sup>Earls, "Theological Flower Bed: TULIP, DAISY & ROSES."

atically oriented theology is to Western civilization's rational sensibilities, it does not reflect the messiness (or theological inexactitude) of life and salvation, which can be found in Scripture as well as in people's lives. Although Christians believe that Scripture is divinely inspired, close investigation of it reveals that hard work is sometimes required in interpreting, categorizing, and applying the words of Scripture. As such, it should not be surprising that theological summaries of Scripture may not readily lend themselves to systematization. On the contrary, theologies that embrace the messiness of Scripture as well as of Spirit-led lives may come far closer to the truth of matters. I have always liked the words used by Glenn Hinson to describe Wesleyanism. He said, "Wesleyan thought has always come out better in practice than in theory."<sup>17</sup>

### Conclusion

"What then should we do?" (Luke 3:10). These words found in the story of John the Baptist's preaching, concerning the response of people to him, remind us of the need to hold together the best of Christian theology (beliefs and values) and practice (applications of our beliefs and values). And I argue that ACURA as a summative statement of Wesley's view of salvation holds together both biblical teachings and real-life Christian living far better than does the Calvinist acrostic of TULIP.

In talking about salvation, we would do well to emphasize more ACURA than TULIP. The acrostic ACURA provides an easy way to understand and promote Wesley's beliefs, values, and practices for life. As such, it provides an easier and—it is hoped—more effective way of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ in both word and deed.

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<sup>17</sup>E. Glenn Hinson, "A Contemplative Response," in *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification*, ed. Donald L. Alexander (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 129.

**BEFORE AMERICAN METHODISTS  
BECAME AMERICAN:  
METHODIST COUNTERCULTURAL WITNESS  
DURING THE REVOLUTIONARY ERA\***

by

**Greg Coates**

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July 1780, a gentleman-soldier named Nathaniel Potter wrote a letter addressed to Thomas Sim Lee, the second Governor of Maryland, complaining of the difficulty he encountered at recruiting fresh troops for the war effort:

The Spiritt [*sic*] of Methodism Reigns so much amongst us that few or no men will be Raisd for the War. For the instant a man becomes a Classik he Lays down his Arms and in that Way declares himself an Enemy to his Country. . . . I am Satisfied as soon as they find themselves sufficiently Strong they will oppose with Force.<sup>1</sup>

Nathaniel Potter was not alone in noticing this phenomenon. In fact, a rather disturbing pattern was being noted among military recruiters across the mid-Atlantic region: this rather odd group of religious fanatics, possessed with the “Spiritt of Methodism,” was freely and willingly refusing to bear weapons against Britain. How or if Governor Lee replied to Mr. Potter is unknown.

That the surrounding American patriots treated the first American Methodists with great suspicion—and even outright persecution—has been well documented by Methodist historians and requires no elabora-

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\*Author’s Note: I am grateful to the 2015 Wesleyan Studies Summer Seminar, hosted at Asbury Theological Seminary, where I was able to fully develop this article.

<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Keith Mason, “Localism, Evangelicalism, and Loyalism: The Sources of Discontent in the Revolutionary Chesapeake,” *The Journal of Southern History* 56, no. 1 (1990): 40.

tion here.<sup>2</sup> Frequently, however, the distrust that these Methodist dissenters faced is attributed to either John Wesley's widely distributed anti-American letter, *A Calm Address to Our American Colonies*, or to the British and Anglican background of the Methodists themselves. While clearly both of these theories have merit and certainly *did* impact the way Methodists were perceived by their surrounding culture, I maintain that, in addition, the Methodists also brought such mistrust upon themselves by genuinely opposing the violence of the war through both their speech and actions.

This paper contends that while the colonial patriots and minutemen of Revolutionary America were banging the war drums against Britain, the few thousand Methodists who were scattered along the eastern seaboard frequently resisted the feverish demand to enter into the conflict. While certainly there are plenty of examples of Methodists who did join the war, the surprising finding, given the political climate of the day, is not how many *joined* the revolutionary cause, but how many *refused* to do so. But why, in the midst of such fervent and widespread patriotic zeal, did many of the first American Methodists fail to join the cause of the revolution? What undergirded their refusal to adopt as their own the political rhetoric and embryonic civil religion of the newly independent nation-state? Why did the American Methodists prior to 1804, unlike other more established Churches, decline to associate the mission of God with the mission of the American nation?<sup>3</sup> In short, why were the eighteenth century American Methodists not more American?

This paper is divided into two parts. In the first, I intend to show that the young American Methodist movement did not wholeheartedly support the patriot cause in contradistinction to churches of the Reformed Tradition, which mobilized recruits *en masse*, having ideologically committed to the war as a result of its dual doctrinal emphases on covenant

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<sup>2</sup>See for example, Dee Andrews, *The Methodists and Revolutionary America, 1760-1800: The Shaping of an Evangelical Culture* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 55-62; Eric Baldwin, "The Devil Begins to Roar": Opposition to Early Methodists in New England," *Church History* 75, no. 1 (2006); Jessie Shuman Larkins, "John Wesley among the Colonies: Wesleyan Theology in the Face of the American Revolution," *Methodist History* 45, no. 4 (2007): 240-42; Barry Paige Neville, "For God, King, and Country: Loyalism on the Eastern Shore of Maryland During the American Revolution," *International Social Science Review* 84, no. 3/4 (2009): 142-45; Russell E. Richey, "Early American Methodism," in *The Cambridge Companion to American Methodism*, ed. Jason Vickers, *Cambridge Companion to Religions* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 48-49.

<sup>3</sup>The reasons for the year 1806 will become clear later in the paper.

and divine providence. I then offer examples of key Methodists leaders who either deliberately resisted the call to bear arms or chose to take a passive stance during the conflict. In the second part, I suggest that the following three factors contributed to Methodist reluctance to support the war through either action or rhetoric: 1) they were attempting to remain faithful to the advice of their leader, John Wesley, who, prior to the war, urged them to remain passive and non-partisan as tensions escalated; 2) the itinerant leaders perceived their divine mission to be primarily spiritual rather than socio-political, leading them to focus their attention on the mission of the *church* rather than the *polis*; and 3) the egalitarian, populist appeal of the original Methodist message, as well as the sectarian *communitas* that formed around such preaching, chafed against the powerful Whiggish gentry within old colonial society—a gentry who, in the mid-Atlantic, served as the catalyst behind the war effort. Yet before addressing these factors, it is first necessary to take a step back and ask, “To what extent is it even *true* that Methodists did not join in the revolutionary cause?” Or am I simply guilty of the fallacy of *petitio principii*?

### **Part I: American Methodists: Non-Participants in the Revolution**

A survey of the sermons, journals, and letters of Methodist leaders during the Revolutionary era reveals a striking absence of the adoption of the political and religious language used to undergird the war effort. This observation is all the more striking when contrasted to the typical rhetoric coming from the pulpits of more established churches, particularly those of the Reformed Tradition. The Revolutionary Era historian Ruth H. Bloch observes,

The popular support for the American Revolution came overwhelmingly from Congregationalists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and southern lay Anglicans, almost all of whom can be loosely described as Calvinist. . . . To be sure, the Revolution also enlisted the support of a number of religious rationalists, particularly among the urban elite and the southern gentry, but, on a more popular level, the religious faith of American revolutionaries was in the main Calvinist. The non-Calvinist Quakers, Methodists, and northern Anglicans drifted disproportionately toward neutrality and loyalism, and typically Calvinist preoccupations underlay much of the development of revolutionary ideology.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Ruth H. Bloch, “Religion and Ideological Change in the American Revolution,” in *Religion and American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the Present*, ed. Mark A. Noll and Luke E. Harlow (Cary, NC: Oxford University Press, 2007), 49.

Thus, the early Methodists had *theological* and *ideological* reasons for resisting the rush to war with England. Theologically, Calvinist and Reformed churches eagerly supported the war effort based upon two key, foundational doctrines from their tradition, neither of which was embraced in the same way by those of the Wesleyan-Arminian tradition: their understanding of covenant and the doctrine of the providence of God.

By appealing to the doctrine of covenant, Reformed preachers in colonial America drew from a tradition dating back to Calvin's Geneva through the Mayflower Compact and into their own day; it was a theological construct in which no distinction was to be made between the individual, the social, the political, and the economic spheres of life. Throughout the First Great Awakening, Jonathan Edwards retained the traditional Puritan conviction that "God, self, church and society were intimately interconnected."<sup>5</sup> After Edwards' death, however, many of the high churches of New England began to adopt what Nathan Hatch calls "civil millennialism," in which preachers and religious leaders adapted religious language—particularly *apocalyptic* language—in order to stress "repeatedly that American liberty was God's cause, that British tyranny was the Antichrist's, and that sin was failure to fight the British."<sup>6</sup>

Particularly significant in this transition to "civil millennialism" was the irrevocable melding of the concepts of biblical, spiritual "liberty" with political "liberty" (i.e., that "liberty" which formed the heart of Thomas Paine's famous pamphlet). Thus, the Reformed theology of covenant, and the subsequent "civil millenarianism" which grew from it, provided a theological and religious rationale for the American Revolution. Through her extensive analysis of the sermons of revolutionary era Calvinist sermons, Bloch has concluded, "By the mid-1770s, then, religion was so deeply intertwined with revolutionary political ideology that it seems virtually impossible to distinguish between them."<sup>7</sup> The preaching and teaching of these millennial Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Baptists—who composed roughly half of the white populace in the American colonies in the second half of the eighteenth century—served as the primary religious engine behind the war effort.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 47.

<sup>6</sup>Nathan O. Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 22.

<sup>7</sup>Bloch, "Religion and Ideological Change," 51.

<sup>8</sup>*Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought 1756-1800* (Cambridge Cambridgeshire ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), xiv.

Secondly, the Reformed emphasis on divine providence provided another theological rationale in support of the war for independence. Since the providential hand of Almighty God directs all human events, then the war itself must be interpreted as God's will. A prime example of such thinking is found in the writings of John Witherspoon, the sixth president of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University), who wrote in a letter dated September 3, 1778, in which he interpreted the war with England as a "visible intervention of Providence."<sup>9</sup> Witherspoon writes,

It seems to me the *intention of Providence for many reasons*, which I cannot now enumerate, but in a particular manner for the following—that I cannot recollect any instance in history in which a person or people have so totally and uniformly mistaken the means for attaining their own ends, as the King and the Parliament of Britain have in this contest.<sup>10</sup>

The Reformed theology just described stands in stark contrast indeed with what is found among the journals, sermons, and letters of the early American Methodists. Both the emphasis upon nation-as-covenant and upon the war as the providential work of God in human history are markedly absent from Methodist writing and teaching in the decades of the 1770's and 80's.<sup>11</sup> American Methodist historian Russell Richey

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For more on the religious—especially Calvinist—underpinnings of the Revolution, see also Hatch, *Sacred Cause of Liberty*, 21-54; Bloch, *Visionary Republic*, 3-93; Page Smith, *Religious Origins of the American Revolution* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press for American Academy of Religion, 1976), 1-8; Noll, *America's God*, 31-50.

<sup>9</sup>John Witherspoon, *The Works of Rev. John Witherspoon*, 4 vols. (Philadelphia: William W. Woodward, 1802), IV: 376.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.* *Italics added for emphasis.*

<sup>11</sup>Inasmuch as the American Methodists were reluctant to attribute the evils of war to the providential will of God, they were only following the example of their leader, John Wesley. Wesley, although by no means a pacifist, detested the violence of war and, on more than one occasion, wrote about the sinfulness and evils of it. Perhaps, most famously, he used war to illustrate the fallen nature and sinfulness of humanity in his 1757 treatise *The Doctrine of Original Sin*:

But there is a still greater and more undeniable proof that the very foundation of all things, civil and religious, are utterly out of course in the Christian as well as in the heathen world. There is still a more horrid reproach to the Christian name [than the immorality and corruption of society], yea to the name of man, to all reason and humanity. There is *war* in the world! War between men! War between Christians! I mean those that bear the

acknowledges as much in his comments on the Methodists' first decades on the continent:

America as God's chosen people, of a covenant between God and the nation, of eternal purposes being worked out through the American experiment, of America as the light to the world, of religion as requisite to national prosperity, of American history itself as sacred, of the millennium as an American affair— notions certainly available to Methodists had they wanted to adopt them—are absent.<sup>12</sup>

One seeks in vain through the letters and journals of Francis Asbury, for example, in hopes of finding a hint of an articulated political theology only to discover, in the words of John Wigger, that for Asbury “faith and politics were never connected in the way they were for Wesley”—or for the American patriots, for that matter—since to Asbury “all human governments were corrupt, and none deserved absolute allegiance.”<sup>13</sup> Just such a conviction about the nature of worldly political power would apparently remain within Asbury's heart for the remainder of his lifetime, for in his valedictory addressed to William McKendree in August of 1813, the elderly Bishop wrote,

Then, according to our author, we are apostolic bishops; for we have planted and watered, and do water still. As to temporal

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name of Christ and profess to ‘walk as he also walked.’ Now who can reconcile war (I will not say religion, but) to any degree of reason or common sense?

(John Wesley, *The Doctrine of Original Sin*, Part I (1757), § 10, in *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises I*, ed. Randy Maddox, vol. 12 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976 - ), 192.) Nevertheless, despite such a strong statement, Wesley did condone war on other occasions under different circumstances. See especially Briane K. Turley, “John Wesley and War,” *Methodist History* 29, no. 2 (1991); Theodore R. Weber, *Politics in the Order of Salvation: New Directions in Wesleyan Political Ethics* (Nashville, Tenn.: Kingswood Books, 2001), 353-88; Larkins, “John Wesley among the Colonies: Wesleyan Theology in the Face of the American Revolution,” 232-39. And, most recently, for a superb article which interprets Wesley's doctrine of war as standing within a dialectical tension between his soteriology and hamartiology, see Stephen W. Rankin, “John Wesley and War: Guidance for Modern Day Heirs,” *Methodist Review (Online)* 3 (2011).

<sup>12</sup>Russell E. Richey, *Early American Methodism*, Religion in North America (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 39-40.

<sup>13</sup>John H. Wigger, *American Saint: Francis Asbury and the Methodists* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 90.

power, what have we to do with that in this country? We are not senators, congressmen, or chaplains; neither do we hold any civil offices.<sup>14</sup> We neither have, nor wish to have, anything to do with the government of the States, nor, as I conceive, do the States fear us. Our kingdom is not of this world. For near half a century we have never grasped at power.<sup>15</sup>

Asbury had far more important matters with which to devote his intellectual energies: the evangelistic mission of the church, overseeing the episcopal structure and itinerancy of early Methodism, and, perhaps most importantly, admonishing his fellow Methodists to “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.”<sup>16</sup> Hence, identifying a clearly articulated political theology within Asbury’s journals and letters marked by such pious apoliticism turns out to be a fool’s errand. Theodore C. Linn, in his dissertation, discovered a dearth of concern for political matters among the writings of the “determinedly apolitical”<sup>17</sup> preacher. He notes that even during the war,

Asbury’s Journal is almost lacking in reference to the political situation in America. He made no reference in his Journal to the discussion at the conference of 1775 of the position the preachers were to take regarding the political crisis. Further, although he sometimes noted the events of war, he did not apparently preach about them.<sup>18</sup>

This observation is all the more remarkable when one considers the ever-flowing stream of support for the war coming from the pulpits

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<sup>14</sup>As the editor of his journals have pointed out, Asbury must have either forgotten or deliberately overlooked the fact that Jesse Lee was chaplain of the House of Representatives in Washington D.C. when this was written!

<sup>15</sup>Francis Asbury, *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, ed. J. Manning Potts, Elmer T. Clark, and Jacob S. Payton, 3 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1958), 480; hereafter referred to as *JLFA*.

<sup>16</sup>This was Asbury’s message to “every minister,” including the “unlettered men” whom God will raise “up to preach the gospel with the power of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.” (*The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, ed. J. Manning Potts, Elmer T. Clark, and Jacob S. Payton, 3 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1958), 481.)

<sup>17</sup>Wigger, *American Saint : Francis Asbury and the Methodists*, 87.

<sup>18</sup>Theodore C. Linn, “Religion and Nationalism: American Methodism and the New Nation in the Early National Period 1766-1844” (Ph.D., Drew University, 1971), 41-42.

of Congregationalist, Baptist, Presbyterian, and other Reformed churches.<sup>19</sup>

Such political naiveté, however, was by no means confined to Asbury. Although the theological language of the Calvinists and the earlier Puritan tradition had thoroughly invaded the patriot movement by the early to mid 1770's not only in New England but also in the mid-Atlantic region, Methodists, particularly several high-profile Methodist leaders, maintained a markedly apolitical stance in the midst of rising tensions.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps the two most famous examples of Methodists who refused to join the patriot cause during the American Revolution are Freeborn Garrettson and Jesse Lee, both of whom went beyond Asbury's position of neutrality to embrace active, pacifist resistance throughout the bloody conflict.

Freeborn Garrettson, the son of a slave-holding Maryland Anglican, initially sympathized with the cause of the American Revolution, but after a series of religious experiences in which he nearly drowned and was trampled to death by his own horse, Garrettson underwent a radical con-

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<sup>19</sup>Alan Heimert succinctly summarizes the clarion call to arms that Calvinist preachers sounded from 1758 to 1775:

In 1758 Samuel Davies called "for the all-prevailing force of Demosthenes' oratory"—only, to be sure to "correct" himself, and implore instead "the influence of the Lord of armies" to "fire" Virginians "into patriots and soldiers." In doing so he set the Calvinist ministry on a career that would see them seeking to overcome the domestic enemies of the Kingdom and by 1775 to inspire Americans to overbear all opposition. The Calvinist discovery and communication of a new order of sublimity was successful beyond all expectation in getting the American people to excite their wills . . . [into leaving] as their legacy . . . the democratic nation that they helped bring into existence.

(Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind: From the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 236.)

<sup>20</sup>Bloch cites as an example Richard Bland of Virginia who in 1771 described "High Church plans to found a colonial bishopric as 'Papal Encroachments upon the Common Law,' [which suggests] the overt blurring of religious and political categories was a feature of popular revolutionary politics...[outside of New England] in the early years of resistance as well." (Bloch, "Religion and Ideological Change," 53.) For an account recording how New England covenant theology spread to blanket the entire thirteen colonies via clerical religious rhetoric, see Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 282-311.

version experience that convinced him to join the Methodists.<sup>21</sup> As a result of this encounter with God he changed his position on the revolution, stating, “I was determined I would have nothing to do with the unhappy war; it was contrary to my mind and grievous to my conscience, to have any hand in shedding human blood.”<sup>22</sup> He then itinerated throughout the Delmarva Peninsula, preaching a message of personal, decisionistic salvation available to all, and proclaiming a gospel message complimented by the motifs of *sola fide*, pacifism, and egalitarianism.

Garrettson’s outspoken opposition to the war within a context of such a torrent of patriotism nearly cost him his life on several occasions. First, on June 24, 1778, Judge John Brown of Chestertown, Maryland mustered an angry mob that assailed Garrettson, beating him with sticks. They sought to hang him, but an elderly lady intervened on his behalf.<sup>23</sup> Then, only three months later, another mob—this one in Dover, Delaware—attempted to lynch Garrettson, but again a sympathizer came to his rescue—this time a local shopkeeper who hid him safely in his shop.<sup>24</sup> Beyond this, historian Barry Neville has counted at least five other occasions in which Garrettson’s life was threatened—once for angering white slave-owners in North Carolina after preaching to their black slaves, and four more times in Maryland, “including once in Salisbury where a man tried to shoot him as he preached, [but] the gun misfired.”<sup>25</sup>

Garrettson’s pacifist position and his association with the Methodists made him the object of suspicion in the minds of many patriots who suspected he was a Loyalist to the British Crown, despite the fact that Garrettson was born and raised in Maryland and that he was a conscientious objector for solely theological reasons. His refusal to take the Maryland Loyalty Oath, which demanded a declaration of allegiance to the newly formed state, for example, riled the anger of Maryland patriots, yet Gar-

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<sup>21</sup>Nathan Bangs, *The Life of the Rev. Freeborn Garrettson: Compiled from His Printed and Manuscript Journals, and Other Authentic Documents*, Fifth ed. (New York: J. Emory & B. Waugh, 1832), 29-30.

<sup>22</sup>Freeborn Garrettson, *The Experience and Travels of Mr. Freeborn Garrettson, Minister of the Methodist-Episcopal Church in North-America. [One Line from I Samuel]* (Jos Crukshank, 1791), 42.

<sup>23</sup>Bangs, *The Life of the Rev. Freeborn Garrettson: Compiled from His Printed and Manuscript Journals, and Other Authentic Documents*, 50-60; Neville, “For God, King, and Country: Loyalism on the Eastern Shore of Maryland During the American Revolution,” 143-44.

<sup>24</sup>“For God, King, and Country: Loyalism on the Eastern Shore of Maryland During the American Revolution,” 144.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*

rettson's reasons for refusing to take the oath were deeply rooted in his faith, not because he sympathized with the British monarchy. As Garrettson explained,

About this time the state oath began to be administered, and was universally complied with, both by preachers and people where I was; but I could by no means be subject to my rulers in this respect, as it touched by conscience toward God: so I informed I must either leave the state, take the oath, or go to jail. I told those who came to tender the oath to me, that I professed myself a friend to my country: that I would do nothing willingly or knowingly to the prejudice of it: that if they required it, I would give them good security of my friendly behaviour during my stay in the state. "But why," said they, "will you not take the oath?" "I think," said I, "the oath is too binding on my conscience; moreover, I never swore an oath in my life . . . I want in all things to keep a conscience void of offence, to walk in the safest way, and to do all the good I can in bringing sinners to God."<sup>26</sup>

Despite the continual opposition that Garrettson faced during his time in the Mid-Atlantic region, he continued to preach "with zeal and success" and to spread his message of salvation by faith, simplicity of heart, and the equality of mankind to whites and blacks alike throughout the states of Maryland, Virginia, Delaware, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and North Carolina from the years 1775 to 1784.<sup>27</sup> During that same time span, the Methodist church in the southern states of Maryland, Virginia, Delaware, and the Carolinas, where Garrettson invested most of his time, increased in membership from 1,454 to 13,381—a nearly ten-fold increase in less than a decade, due largely to the enduring witness of Garrettson throughout the war years.<sup>28</sup>

Jesse Lee, born in 1758 in Prince George County, Virginia to "respectable and moral" Episcopal parents, experienced a radical moment of conversion, like Garrettson, after a period of four weeks of intense spiritual agony in late 1772.<sup>29</sup> After joining the Methodists under the influ-

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<sup>26</sup>Bangs, *The Life of the Rev. Freeborn Garrettson: Compiled from His Printed and Manuscript Journals, and Other Authentic Documents*, 58.

<sup>27</sup>Ezra Squier Tipple, *Freeborn Garrettson* (London: R. Culley, 1910), 53-54.

<sup>28</sup>Linn, "Religion and Nationalism," 58.

<sup>29</sup>Jesse Lee and Minton Thrift, *Memoir of the Rev. Jesse Lee. With Extracts from His Journals* (New York: Published by N. Bangs and T. Mason, for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1823), 3-10.

ence of the itinerant preacher Robert Williams, Lee soon became convinced that the pure love of God and love of neighbor formed the heart of the Christian ethic. Therefore, when the Revolutionary War embroiled the colonies and he was drafted into the North Carolina Militia, he struggled with how to respond, writing,

I weighed the matter over and over again, but my mind was settled; as a Christian and as a preacher of the gospel I could not fight. I could not reconcile it to myself to bear arms, or to kill one of my fellow creatures; however I determined to go, and to trust in the Lord; and accordingly prepared for my journey.<sup>30</sup>

Lee went and reported for duty, but when the sergeant offered him a gun, he refused to take it, despite the commands of his superior officers. He recorded in his journal that many were moved by his example, but others were angered; yet, he wrote, "I do not think that I ever felt more willing to suffer for the sake of religion than what I did at that time."<sup>31</sup> Eventually for his insubordination, Lee was relieved of his duties as a soldier and given the work of a non-combatant, steering the baggage wagon. With many tears, Lee preached to the soldiers in the regiment with which he travelled, refusing to take the payments that they offered to him, and was pleased to see that "man of the people, officers as well as men, were bathed in tears" before his sermons had ended. Lee apparently persuaded others to lay down their own arms and to refuse to fight, undoubtedly to the chagrin of his militia leaders.<sup>32</sup>

Although I have cited in detail only three examples above—Francis Asbury, Freeborn Garrettson, and Jesse Lee—numerous other less prominent examples may be found of Methodist itinerant preachers who practiced either neutrality or active nonviolence during the American Revolution. The Methodist preacher Philip Gatch, for example, once faced an angry mob that began the process of covering him in boiling tar—a situa-

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<sup>30</sup>*Memoir of the Rev. Jesse Lee. With Extracts from His Journals* (New York: Published by N. Bangs and T. Mason, for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1823), 26.

<sup>31</sup>*Memoir of Jesse Lee*, 26-27.

<sup>32</sup>*Memoir of Jesse Lee*, 28-29. See also Donald W. Dayton and Lucille S. Dayton, "An Historical Survey of Attitudes toward War and Peace within the American Holiness Movement," in *Perfect Love and War: A Dialogue on Christian Holiness and the Issues of War and Peace*, ed. Paul Hostetler (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Press, 1974), 136; David L. Cubie, "Early Methodism: A Paradigm for Non-Violence: An Exercise in 'Vision Ethics,'" *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 37, no. 1 (2002): 99-100.

tion he managed to escape, but not before his eye was permanently injured by the hot pitch. Nevertheless, Gatch prayed for his attackers and wrote later of his assailants, "If ever I felt for the souls of men, I did for them" and praising God that "several others of the mob were afterwards converted."<sup>33</sup>

William Duke, Edward Dromgoole, Joseph Hartley, John Littlejohn, William Watters, Benjamin Abbott, and his son David Abbott—in addition to Garrettson, Lee, and Gatch—were all imprisoned and fined for resisting the military draft and refusing to fight for the patriot cause.<sup>34</sup> The fundamental issue for these preachers, according to Douglas R. Chandler, was their inability to "reconcile fighting with their ministerial calling"—a problem that plagued not all, but at least "the majority" of Methodist itinerant preachers at the beginning of the war in 1775.<sup>35</sup> Garrettson's biographer, Ezra Tipple, also records her own list of "native ministers" who suffered for their "conscientious scruples" which were unfavorable to war: William Watters, Thomas Morrell,<sup>36</sup> and Caleb Pedicord, who was "cruelly whipped, and carried his scars to the grave" for his refusal to fight the British.<sup>37</sup> Joseph Hartley, another of those imprisoned for his disdain for violence, used his time in prison to preach through the gratings of his window to the crowds who would gather to hear him.<sup>38</sup> And again, in Francis Asbury's journal from the spring of 1778, he mentions several Methodists who suffered persecution for refusing to fight during the war including Garrettson, Hartley, Wren, Forest, and others.<sup>39</sup>

Of course, many of the names of the early Methodists who refused to participate in the war with Britain have been lost to history. Theodore Linn has shown, for example, that the court of Maryland in October of

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<sup>33</sup>Elizabeth Connor, *Methodist Trail Blazer, Philip Gatch, 1751-1834: His Life in Maryland, Virginia and Ohio* (Rutland: Academy Books: Distributed by C. E. Tuttle, 1970), 46-48.

<sup>34</sup>Andrews, *Methodists and Revolutionary America*, 56.

<sup>35</sup>Douglas R. Chandler, "Prelude to a Church, 1774-1784," in *Those Incredible Methodists*, ed. Gordon Pratt Baker (Nashville, TN: Parthenon Press, 1972), 48.

<sup>36</sup>What Tipple means by referring to Thomas Morrell's "conscientious scruples" is unclear, however, since he eventually fought in the Revolutionary War as an officer. (John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America*, 1st Illinois paperback. ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 223n95.)

<sup>37</sup>Tipple, *Freeborn Garrettson*, 51.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Linn, "Religion and Nationalism," 55.

1778 indicted no less than *twenty* prominent Methodists for their continued preaching and defiance of the loyalty oaths.<sup>40</sup> Thomas Rankin, the Scottish Methodist missionary sent to America to serve as Wesley's representative, seized the opportunity to publicly explain the motives of such dissenters:

I . . . let the people know that it was from a principle of conscience alone, that the people (called Methodists) do not take up arms, as others had done, and therefore, if we are called to suffer on this account, we will suffer for conscience sake.<sup>41</sup>

Taking together the combined evidence of 1) the relatively large number of dissenting voices among the still very small sect of Methodists, 2) the heated political and religious context of revolutionary America, and 3) the stark contrast between Methodist and Calvinist praxis and doctrine as identified above, Donald Dayton's brief assessment of American Methodism in the revolutionary era seems accurate: "It is striking, particularly in contrast to British Methodism, that the major witness left by American Methodists during the Revolutionary War was one of conscientious objection." I contend that historians have overlooked the extent to which the first Methodists—albeit quite a small group prior to the war's end in 1783—made a deliberate decision to separate themselves from the growing civil religious discourse in the new nation. Furthermore, the Methodists successfully resisted the melding of nationalistic and theological language that was taking place more explicitly in Calvinist denominations. The examples above, although but a small sample of the whole, speak to a definite difference in the Methodist political theology of the pre-war and wartime eras. In short, many of the American Methodists of this era had yet to become properly *American*.

## **Part II: Methodists in Eden**

Methodists during the American Revolution proved largely impervious to the "nationwide" groundswell of nationalistic patriotism, opting instead to play the role of the prophet on the margins—suffering for the sake of their simple gospel message, refusing to bend to cultural tides, and preserving a sectarian, separatist language that accommodated neither to the dominant discourse of the "respectable" churches nor the political rhetoric of the American revolutionaries. Yet what motivated such a stance? Although certainly not alone in their opposition to the war—or, at

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Quoted in "Religion and Nationalism," 55-56.

minimum, their abhorrence of violence and earnest desire for the war to come to a speedy end—how do we explain historically, theologically, or sociologically why the first American Methodists refused to embrace as their own the preponderant political theology surrounding them?<sup>42</sup>

### **The English Connection: Loyalty to Wesley and the Church of England**

First and perhaps most obviously, the American Methodists still maintained an ecclesial connection to John Wesley and the Church of England until the Christmas Conference of 1784, although the course of separation, as Richey, Rowe, and Schmidt have explained, was a gradual process covering many years.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, the American Methodist leaders and preachers, even those born in the colonies, maintained a strong loyalty and respect toward their father in the faith, John Wesley.

While tensions between England and the colonies grew ever more intense in the decade before the war—for this was the era of the Stamp Act riots in the summer of 1765, the Townsend Revenue Duties imposed upon the colonies two years later, the Boston Massacre in May of 1770, and the dumping of British tea into Boston Harbor in December of 1773—Methodists precariously struggled to maintain their unique relationship with England and, despite the odds, to strengthen their ties with the British Methodists however possible. At the zenith of the ill will between the two peoples and immediately prior to the conflicts at Lexington and Concord, John Wesley wrote to his preachers in the colonies:

You were never in your lives in so critical a situation as you are at this time. It is your part to be peace-makers, to be loving and tender to all, but to addict yourselves to no party. In spite of all solicitations, of rough or smooth words, say not one word against one or the other side. Keep yourselves pure, do all you can to help and soften all. . . . Be in peace with each other, and the God of peace will be with you.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>For an account of other sectarian groups who opposed the Revolutionary War such as the Freewill Baptists, the Universalists, and the Shakers, see Stephen A. Marini, *Radical Sects of Revolutionary New England* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982).

<sup>43</sup>Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience in America* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 33-72.

<sup>44</sup>John Wesley, Letter to My Dear Brethren (1 March 1775), *The Letters of John Wesley*, ed. John Telford, vol. 6 (London: The Epworth Press, 1931), 142-43; hereafter referred to as *Letters*.

And, again, to his trusted colleague in the colonies, Thomas Rankin, he confided, “I am of neither side, and yet of both; on the side of New England and of Old. Private Christians are excused, exempted, privileged, to take no part in civil troubles.”<sup>45</sup> Thus the Methodist strategy was one of deliberate neutrality—peace with all, entangling, partisan alliances with none. Andrews explains, “Like the adherents of the Primitive Church, the true Methodist would cultivate a pacific relationship with both church and state and resist combining political with religious affairs.”<sup>46</sup> Perhaps Ezekiel Cooper’s quip about Francis Asbury—“he never meddled with politiks”—reveals Asbury’s fidelity to this aspect of Methodism’s original DNA.<sup>47</sup>

Although Wesley originally sympathized with the plight of the American colonists, his Tory leanings and deep-seeded loyalty to the British crown, which can be traced back to his childhood, eventually prompted him to change his tone once the tensions escalated to outright war and, from his loyalist perspective, treason.<sup>48</sup> To the dismay of the American Methodists, later that same year in 1775 Wesley published a very public tract, entitled *A Calm Address to Our American Colonies*, in which he chastised the colonists for claiming that the English Parliament had no right to tax them. For Wesley, rights did not simply derive naturally from God above, as many colonists were claiming, but were granted only through the proper political structures by way of King, Parliament, and English citizenship. Moreover, Wesley scoffed at the duplicity and hypocrisy of those using such universal rights-based language while the Americans continued to subjugate slaves “fainting under the load, bleeding under the lash!”<sup>49</sup> Wesley’s pamphlet sold well in Britain—approximately forty thousand copies within three weeks—and, capitalizing on his newfound success, Wesley subsequently published at least seven more pamphlets declaring his loyalty to the crown.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Wesley, “Letter to Thomas Rankin” (1 March 1775), *Letters*, 6:143.

<sup>46</sup>Andrews, *Methodists and Revolutionary America*, 48.

<sup>47</sup>Cooper, *Funeral Discourse*, 83.

<sup>48</sup>For an overview of the Wesley’s evolving attitude toward the colonies, see Allan Raymond, “I Fear God and Honour the King: John Wesley and the American Revolution,” *Church History* 45, no. 3 (1976): 316-28; Weber, *Politics in the Order of Salvation: New Directions in Wesleyan Political Ethics*, 111-24.

<sup>49</sup>John Wesley, “A Calm Address to Our American Colonies” (1775), *Works* (Jackson), 11:81.

<sup>50</sup>Andrews, *Methodists and Revolutionary America*, 50.

The response in America to Wesley's *Calm Address* and his subsequent attacks on the patriotic cause was, as one might imagine, anything but calm. Much of the persecution Methodists faced, particularly in regions like the Delmarva Peninsula, has been attributed to Wesley's vocal opposition to the revolution. Yet the American Methodists chose to remain faithful to the message of the earlier, less partisan and more pacific Wesley. Their first corporate act after Wesley's *Calm Address* was to meet in Philadelphia to call upon all American Methodists to fast and to pray for peace both in America and Britain, omitting any official statements about the war.<sup>51</sup>

Unlike the Methodist ministers in America, Wesley never witnessed for himself the horrors of the war. But those Methodists in the States, many of whom had friends and relatives on both sides of the conflict, abhorred the violence of the war. Even the Methodists who did eventually fight in the war, such as Thomas Ware, perceived it to be a very grim necessity. Ware recorded in his journal that the battles were "violent and cruel beyond comparison . . . [and so] I imbibed a settled aversion to [war]."<sup>52</sup> Francis Asbury, after the Battle of Long Island in 1776, lamented in his journal on the "Lord's Day, September 1,"

But, alas! we hear of bloodshed and slaughter. Many immortal souls are driven to eternity by the bloody sword. This is a grief to my soul! Lord, scatter them that delight in war and thirst for human blood! It is well for the righteous that this is not their home. No: they are blessed with a pacific spirit, and are bound for a kingdom of peace, where "No horrid alarum of war / shall break our eternal repose."<sup>53</sup>

In the subsequent years, Asbury and many of his fellow Methodists did attempt to remain faithful to Wesley's original admonitions to "addict yourselves to no party," yet Asbury likely expressed the sentiments of many of the American Methodists when he penned the words in his journal on the 19<sup>th</sup> of March, 1776, "I . . . am truly sorry that the venerable man ever dipped into the politics of America."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Thomas Ware, *Sketches of the Life and Travels of Rev. Thomas Ware, Who Has Been an Itinerant Methodist Preacher for More Than Fifty Years* (New York,: T. Mason and G. Lane, for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1839), 33-34.

<sup>53</sup>Asbury, *JLFA*, I: 198-99.

<sup>54</sup>*JLFA*, I: 181.

### **The Spiritual, Ecclesial Mission of Methodism**

A second reason, closely related to the first, that Methodists remained largely immune to the predominant political theology of war during the revolutionary era was related to their self-perceived mission, which they understood to be primarily spiritual rather than political. Both the close ecclesial and spiritual relationship between Wesley and many of the first Methodist leaders in the colonies, as well as the Methodist itinerant's self-perceived mission on the American continent, which set them apart from the other religious groups in America during the 1760's and 1770's, enabled the Methodists to avoid a significant pitfall: a phenomenon Ruth Bloch has called the "Manichaeism" of Puritan and Calvinist political theology, which was utilized by preachers to legitimate militant, revolutionary nationalism. Such dualism, which she traces back to the tumultuous decades of the 1640's and 1650's in England, blossomed to full fruition in the New England of the 1770's such that political and religious ideology became inextricably intertwined in a singular matrix. "American patriots often went beyond the loose imputations of moral evil characteristic of radical whig ideology," Bloch explains,

to more systematic Manichaeism conclusions. British tranny was viewed not only as evil but as part of the devil's continuing quest for cosmic power. The universe was divided into opposing forces of Christ and the Antichrist, sin and righteousness, and all of human history—including the imperial conflict—was fundamentally the struggle between them.<sup>55</sup>

Methodists, like their Calvinist counterparts, readily embraced dualistic language in their preaching. However, the Methodists directed such rhetoric toward matters of the *soul*, i.e., the inward struggle for purity of heart or complete surrender to God.<sup>56</sup> Markedly absent, however, from early American Methodist preaching—especially when contrasted to preachers of the Reformed tradition—is this same Manichaeism in reference to America and Britain or to the political struggle for independence. It is my contention that both the ecclesial ties and the personal relationships that the early Methodists had with Wesley and British Methodism, including many of the British Methodists who served in the

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<sup>55</sup>Bloch, *Visionary Republic*, 61.

<sup>56</sup>On this, see Michael K. Turner, "Revivalism and Preaching," in *The Cambridge Companion to American Methodism*, ed. Jason Vickers, *Cambridge Companions to Religion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 120-31.

colonies before the outbreak of the war, helped Methodism to avoid falling into such dualistic categories.

Methodists were content, in other words, to be a missionary movement and to focus on the spiritual growth of the newly converted members of the sect. They were so singularly focused on their missionary calling, in fact, that they made no concerted effort to articulate a public theology for the reform of the nation. Prior to the dawn of the nineteenth century, Methodists maintained, according to Russell Richey, an “Edenic dimension to [their] self-understandings” for in their earliest sectarian form, they remained in something of a sectarian garden, “intellectually naïve, naked, lacking the knowledge of good and evil.”<sup>57</sup>

This political naiveté stemmed theologically from an unqualified obsession with the kingdom of God and the mission of the church, which so governed the attention of the Methodist itinerant evangelists, that all else seemed a distraction. Asbury’s words epitomized the sentiments of many of his fellow Methodists when he wrote in 1806, “All the prospects of the world are dead to me. . . . The glory of the Kingdom of Christ, the organization of a primitive Church of God, these are all my objects.”<sup>58</sup> The destination of the people of God (or, to use the original Methodist term, “Zion”) was the proper object of all of the divine promises found within Scripture. Unlike Calvinist preachers who readily applied the language of Zion to *both* the church *and* to the nation of America, Methodists were confident that God was working out his purposes through the revival of the Spirit being wrought in the hearts of Methodist converts from the streets of Philadelphia to the marshes of South Carolina. They sought the prosperity of Zion, *but that prosperity was not Zion the nation-state, it was Zion the church*. “Hence Methodists who indeed sought the prosperity of Zion would understandably be at a loss to say much meaningful about the new nation,” Richey observes. “For they had already allocated to a holy people what others would assert of the public. . . . The visible expression of God’s New Israel was not state but ecclesia.”<sup>59</sup>

Eventually, this would all change, once the Methodist movement entered the nineteenth century, growing in numbers and in power. American Methodists, who had almost no political theology of their own, would soon assimilate the alternative theologies of nationhood offered by the descendants of Puritans and Calvinists, adopting these views as their

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<sup>57</sup>Richey, *Early American Methodism*, 45-46.

<sup>58</sup>Asbury, *JLFA*, III: 566.

<sup>59</sup>Richey, *Early American Methodism*, 44.

own. Perhaps once Methodism developed a corporate concern for its societal role within the nation-state, this choice to inculcate the public theologies that others had been working hard to construct for centuries seemed entirely natural for Methodists. The absorption of American civil religion into the Methodist Church and the role that the Methodists played in the Christianization of America is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is interesting to note that Russell Richey dates the crucial turning point to a sermon preached by John Dow on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, 1806 in which, for the first time from a Methodist pulpit, he

marshaled the essentials of American political belief – Israel as example; righteousness and piety as requisite to national peace and prosperity; republican government as favorable to religion, truth, and virtue; despotism and strengthening superstition, error, and delusion; American independence as providential; territory, climate, soil, arts, agriculture, trade as blessings.<sup>60</sup>

Yet before this neo-Constantinian wedding of 1806, suggests Richey, were you to put a magnifying glass to the heart of a Methodist, you would find that “God’s kingdom, not American citizenship, was imprinted there.”<sup>61</sup>

### **The Egalitarian Kingdom**

Methodist historian William Henry Williams refers to the Delmarva Peninsula, in his 1984 history of the Methodism of that region, by the term “garden of American Methodism.”

Third and finally, the egalitarian message of itinerant Methodist preachers, and the tightly-knit social units built around their simple gospel message, served to undermine the authority of the political interests of the gentry, contributing to Methodist reluctance to unanimously support the patriot cause during the revolutionary era. In order to elucidate this theory in greater depth, it is necessary to examine what has been

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<sup>60</sup>*Early American Methodism*, 40-41.

<sup>61</sup>*Early American Methodism*, 44. This is not the entirety of Richey’s thesis as it is presented in the third chapter of his book. His thesis, which I agree with in part, is that early Methodists were paradoxically both “highly conscious of and oblivious to” the new republic, since they were primarily oriented to think in terms of *continent* rather than nation. *Ibid.* I agree that Methodists were independent in their thinking about the nation-state, but disagree with his contention that most were also “staunchly ‘American’” and “prided themselves on their patriotism.” I maintain that such attitudes dominated Methodism after the end of the revolutionary era. (*Early American Methodism*, 34.)

termed the “garden of American Methodism”—that mid-Atlantic region including Delaware, Maryland, and eastern Virginia so crucial to the origins of American Methodism.<sup>62</sup> As previously mentioned in this paper, much of the dissent—such as that of Freeborn Garrettson, Jesse Lee, Philip Gatch, as well as the political neutrality of Francis Asbury—took place in this region. In the Delmarva Peninsula, where by 1781, three to four percent of the adult population was Methodist, militia commanders were complaining about the difficulty of motivating Methodists to bear arms.<sup>63</sup> In fact, one such commander complained that when his recruits would “embrace the Methodist faith, they [would also] change their attitude toward war.”<sup>64</sup> But, for a sociological perspective, what might account for such widespread dissent among the Methodists of this region?

Economic and political historian Ronald Hoffman, in his regional history of Maryland during the Revolutionary Era, records that Maryland’s political elite were forced to fight a war on two fronts: not only were they at war with Britain, but the Whig gentry faced dissension among the militiamen from economically marginalized homes, who were blatantly deserting and disobeying the orders of their military commanders. Large groups from the “lower and middle ranges of [Maryland] society rose up in opposition to the . . . authority” of “those who held positions of dominance in [their] immediate environment.”<sup>65</sup> The primary motivation behind such dissension, argues Hoffman, was the exasperation of “having lived with the economic and psychological disadvantages of being a subordinate class.”<sup>66</sup> Prior to the Revolution, the yeoman generally accepted their lot in life, however the war stirred up expectations of an entirely new

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<sup>62</sup>Methodist historian William Henry Williams refers to the Delmarva Peninsula, in his 1984 history of the Methodism of that region, by the term “garden of American Methodism.”

<sup>63</sup>William Henry Williams, *The Garden of American Methodism: The Delmarva Peninsula, 1769-1820* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1984), 43.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup>Ronald Hoffman, *A Spirit of Dissension: Economics, Politics, and the Revolution in Maryland* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 223-24.

<sup>66</sup>*A Spirit of Dissension: Economics, Politics, and the Revolution in Maryland* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 224. Hoffman then examines the tax records of Maryland from 1778-1781 to show the enormous economic gap between the wealthy, landowning gentry who held political power and the “ubiquitous small farmer, be he tenant, renter, or owner, who scratched out a crude but bearable living.” (*Spirit of Dissension*, 225.)

order—of active participation in localist politics by *all peoples*, of the permanent abolition of the aristocracy, and newfound community solidarity.<sup>67</sup>

Such was the socio-economic climate of Methodist itinerant preachers, who entered on horseback the small seaside villages of Delaware, Maryland, and elsewhere, proclaiming a simple message in simple language for simple people. This message, due to its unpretentious emotivism and self-effacing desire to instill within the hearts of its hearers a primitive, earnest form of the Christian faith, served as a social equalizer within a stratified society—a society split not only economically, but also racially. The itinerants came proclaiming, “God is no respecter of persons.” Men, women, black, white, poor farmers, the hard-working independent middle-class, even the landed gentry—all were invited to join this new missionary movement of God, yet evidence indicates that pre-revolutionary and revolutionary era Methodism persuaded few from the gentry to join the movement. Most mid-Atlantic rural converts were of the “middling and lower sorts.”<sup>68</sup> Donald Matthews’ description of evangelicalism’s first years apply equally to Methodists like Asbury and Garrettson: “The fact that a majority of white members were women and that blacks were converted in such great numbers...strengthens the impression that Evangelicalism attracted people who were dissatisfied with conventional society. . . . [B]oth groups were assigned a higher role than elsewhere.”<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>On the establishment of localist politics, see Mason, “Localism, Evangelicalism, and Loyalism,” 23-32. And for a classic work on the ideological expectations behind the Revolution, see Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), 55-93.

<sup>68</sup>By 1783, *some* prominent, wealthy families had joined the Methodist sect, including the Barratt, Bassett, and White families of Delaware and at least eight families in Maryland; however, wealthy families composed a small part of the Methodist movement in the eighteenth century, especially south of the Potomac River. (Williams, *The Garden of American Methodism : The Delmarva Peninsula, 1769-1820*, 99.) Yet even in 1789, Asbury bemoaned the difficulties his fledgling Methodist movement faced in raising money, noting in his journal, “The poverty of the people, and the general scarcity of the money, is the great source of our difficulties... We have the poor, but they have no money, and the worldly, wicked rich, we do not choose to ask,” suggesting that Methodism had managed to successfully attract large numbers, yet they were those who “have no money.” (Asbury, *JLFA*, I: 612.) And even of the urban society in Philadelphia, he noted in 1790 that the members were “generally poor.” (*JLFA*, I: 651.)

<sup>69</sup>Donald G. Matthews, *Religion in the Old South*, Chicago History of American Religion (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 37.

The narratives of early Methodist conversions also testify to the equalizing power of the Methodist message. Dee Andrews, in her survey of the conversion experiences of John Littlejohn, Phillip Gatch, Benjamin Abbott, Lucy Watson, Richard Allen, and Catherine Livingstone, concludes,

It is testimony to the power of Wesleyan discourse, then, that Methodist converts sound so much alike. While they brought the framework of their quotidian lives and social identities to their religious experiences, they also endowed them with the meaning and significance of Wesleyan language and doctrine imbibed from their new revivalist culture. . . . Repeatedly, one of the fundamental attractions of Methodism was the escape it provided from constrictive social taxonomies. Methodist ideology, as Donald Mathews writes, represented “an abrupt, oral, radical intrusion into a world of rank, invidious distinctions, and careless convention.”<sup>70</sup>

As a result of the powerful egalitarian message of the Methodist preachers and the intensely personal and subjective conversion experiences resulting from their missionary work, strong community bonds formed in the first Methodist societies. These societies became the primary social unit for new converts, demanding higher levels of loyalty and allegiance than any other group.<sup>71</sup> These communities, based on the practices of mutual accountability, prayer, love feasts, and preaching, provided a counterculture that erased societal distinctions based upon class and social status.

Both the landed gentry seeking to recruit soldiers for the cause of independence and the established “high” churches of the region perceived this as a threat to their power.<sup>72</sup> And they were right to be worried.

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<sup>70</sup> Andrews, *Methodists and Revolutionary America*, 90-91.

<sup>71</sup> Anthropologists classify these Methodist societies according to what Victor Turner refers to as *communitas* in a state of liminality; that is, a “communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders...giving recognition to an essential and generic human bond, without which there could be no society.” (Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, The Lewis Henry Morgan Lectures (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1995), 96-97); see also, Mason, “Localism, Evangelicalism, and Loyalism,” 39.

<sup>72</sup> For a fascinating example of a “heated argument” between Asbury and an Anglican minister over “the Anglican church’s authority and the decadence of the dominant gentry culture,” see “Localism, Evangelicalism, and Loyalism,” 37-38.

Methodism had, perhaps unknowingly, tapped into a wellspring of discontent among masses of middle to lower class Americans looking for an alternative to the ritualistic religion of high church Anglicanism, the pyramidal structure of southern society, the ostentatious displays of wealth so beloved by the nobility, and the concentration of political power held by the few who were born into the correct families. As Revolutionary War historian Edward Countryman noted, when the Methodists appeared,

they challenged virtually everything for which planter Anglicanism stood. In place of stately ritual, they offered emotion and enthusiasm. In place of social hierarchy, reflected even in the way that people entered the church building to worship, they offered an equality of brothers and sisters. In place of conspicuous self-display, they offered self-effacement. Most dangerous of all, they welcomed blacks. . . . [They] were no abolitionists. But their teaching and their practice threatened destruction of everything the planters had so painfully achieved.<sup>73</sup>

Hence, when the Revolutionary War began, spearheaded by plantation owning patricians, and officers from the landowning class came seeking recruits, it is little wonder that many who had found solace in Methodism also resisted the call to war, a war which, in the minds of the “middling and lower sorts,” was not thought to represent their own immediate interests.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, early American Methodism proved curiously resistant during the revolutionary era to the political ideology of the nation-state, which ushered forth from the pen of men like Thomas Paine, as well as to the religiously inspired covenant theology of the Reformed tradition, which proclaimed America as God’s divine instrument upon the earth (and, as it happened, Britain as the Antichrist). As a result, a close examination of the record of key Methodist leaders during the War of Independence reveals that, in contrast to members of other denominations, many resisted the nation-wide ardor to bear arms and cry “Liberty or Death!” The Methodists had an alternative understanding of liberty. Rather than take up their weapons, many Methodists chose instead to suffer silently on behalf of peace, or to fast and to pray for God to bring a swift end to the bloody, damnable war.

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<sup>73</sup>Edward Countryman and Eric Foner, *The American Revolution*, American Century Series (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985), 29-30.

I have suggested three reasons why the first Methodists in America chose to take such a difficult, lonely path: they sought to remain faithful to the nonpartisan admonitions of their father in the faith, John Wesley; they earnestly believed that the mission of the church and salvation of souls far outweighed “wars and rumors of wars” in importance; and they so radically identified with the middle and lower classes of society—and the community formed with them—that the political agenda of the gentry seemed, if not inconsequential, at least somewhat shallow pursuits. Asbury, Garrettson, Lee, Gatch, Hartley—these Methodists and many others were longing for Zion, not America. They were longing for a transcendent kingdom, inclusive of all, and this kingdom demanded their undivided allegiance.

## THE ESTABLISHMENTARIAN TURN IN MIDDLE METHODISM

by

Barry W. Hamilton

After the death of John Wesley (1791), Methodism's enemies unleashed a furious attack on his spiritual heirs.<sup>1</sup> Their plans culminated in the oppressive provisions of Lord Sidmouth's Bill (1811), which would have required non-Establishment ministers to obtain licenses from local magistrates. Had this bill been enacted, Methodist preachers would have been humiliated, harassed, and suppressed; the bill might have effectively outlawed preaching in Methodist chapels.<sup>2</sup> The leaders of the Wesleyan Methodist Church were alarmed to discover just how precarious their existence had become. Well-placed adversaries sought to strip the preachers of their liberties and thus silence Methodism.<sup>3</sup> Wesleyan ministers

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<sup>1</sup>For example see Robert Nares, *On the Influence of Sectaries, and the Stability of the Church. A Charge, Delivered to the Clergy of the Archdeaconry of Stafford, on the Days of Visitation at Cheadle, Stafford, and Walsall, in June, 1812.* London: Law and Gilbert, 1813. For a pamphlet that expressed sentiments comparable to Nares' see *The Monstrosities of Methodism, Being an Impartial Examination into the Pretensions of Our Modern Sectaries, to Prophetic Inspiration, Providential Interferences, and Spiritual Impulse. With a Preliminary Notice of Dr. Walker's New Sect, and the Disputing Society in Stafford Street. By a Curate of the Church of England.* London: J. Charles, 1808. See also William Russel, *A Few Hints for the Consideration of the Methodists and Other Dissenters: In Answer to the Remarks of Mr. Joseph Benson, of Manchester, on the Celebrated Sermon of Rev. Dr. Tatham.* Worcester: J. Lymbs, 1793. These are only three examples of a voluminous literature of calumny toward the Methodists.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas Jackson, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Rev. Richard Watson, Late Secretary to the Wesleyan Missionary Society* (New-York: B. Waugh and T. Mason, 1834), 83-84.

<sup>3</sup>For example see Charles Wicksted Ethelston, *The Unity of the Church Inculcated and Enforced* (Manchester: C. Wheeler and Son, 1814), 38-45. An author who adopted the name, "A Careful Observer," noted this concerted attempt to rob Methodists of their liberties: "There have not been wanting some, even since the commencement of the nineteenth century, who have contended earnestly for the interference of the Legislature in order to stop the progress of

defended their civil liberties and petitioned Parliament to defeat the measure.<sup>4</sup> Taking the warning, British Methodists adopted a strategy toward theological identification with the Church of England.<sup>5</sup> Methodist theology became alienated from its Wesleyan roots and set itself up for an identity crisis. With the publication of its first systematic theology textbook, Richard Watson's *Theological Institutes*, Methodism passed over its founder's distinctive contributions for the sake of political *rapprochement*.

One must resist the temptation to minimize the importance of the British political context for the doctrinal development of Middle Methodism. The British Methodists stood at the cusp of complete disenfranchisement. While they regarded their founder with the deepest respect, Methodist leaders could not ignore the enfilade of hatred and contempt from inveterate enemies.<sup>6</sup> The heirs of John Wesley revered his memory and treasured his works as the standards of Methodist belief and practice. Yet,

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Methodism. The Sunday schools, generally in the hands of the Methodists . . . have been represented, by the enemies of toleration, as seminaries for the purpose of instilling into the minds of the lowest order, the principles of infidelity and rebellion. Such a calumny is too gross to be honoured with a confutation; it is enough to say, it is an abominable falsehood." *Strictures on Methodism. By a Careful Observer* (London: Richard Edwards, 1804), 32. Thus Sidmouth's Bill represented the culmination of several years of agitation to effectively outlaw Methodism.

<sup>4</sup>*Resolutions of the Methodist Ministers of the Manchester District, Assembled in Liverpool, May 23, 1811, on the Subject of a Bill Introduced into Parliament by the Right Hon. Lord Viscount Sidmouth: To Which is Annexed, an Abstract of the Debate in the House of Lords, on Tuesday, May 21<sup>st</sup>, 1811, When the said Bill was rejected.* Liverpool: Thos. Kaye, (1811).

<sup>5</sup>For example see *Methodism Vindicated, from the Charge of Ignorance and Enthusiasm. Being a Reply to a Sermon, Preached by the Rev. Samuel Clapham, M.A. at Boroughbridge in Yorkshire, September 2, 1794. Intituled, How far METHODISM conduces to the Interests of Christianity, and the Welfare of Society: and Published by Command of the Right Reverend Father in God, William, Lord Bishop of Chester. By a Member of the Church of England* (Margate: W. Epps, 1795), 32-34.

<sup>6</sup>Enemies such as Robert Nares sought to discredit John Wesley and George Whitefield, who preached in open fields when the Established churches closed to them: "If they were excluded from the Churches, by persons possessing a regular authority, it was their duty to acquiesce and be silent, unless circumstances manifestly paramount to all ordinary rules had imperiously demanded their interference. Here again we are at issue with their followers who pretend that there was that urgency of circumstances, as well as the particular call, both of which we utterly deny." Nares, *On the Influence of Sectaries*, 13.

if the British Methodists had written a systematic theology textbook modeled after Wesley's own teachings, they would have set themselves apart from the Establishment and validated the accusations of their antagonists. The Wesleyan Methodist Church would have been confirmed, in the minds of her accusers, as a dangerous, enthusiastic sect bent on the delusion of its members and the destruction of the Church of England. As T. E. Owens and other critics cried out, "The Church is in danger!"<sup>7</sup> As a matter of fact, these enemies were a vocal faction within the Established Church who saw the national church as the only duly appointed means of grace. They held a deeply embittered contempt for and prejudice against all dissenting groups and particularly for those who claimed familial ties with the Church of England. Anglican vicars often led persecuting mobs in their assaults on Methodists, and sometimes published vituperative pamphlets that portrayed Methodism in the worst possible light.<sup>8</sup> In response, Methodist leaders insisted that there was no difference between Methodism and the Church of England.<sup>9</sup> This strategy protected Methodists from outright annihilation and attracted the protection of the British government. But in terms of Methodist theology and identity, the results were less than positive.

When British Methodists claimed that there was "no difference" between their movement and the Church of England, they were surely equivocating for political reasons. Certainly the leaders of Middle

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<sup>7</sup>See T. E. Owen, *Methodism Unmasked, or the Progress of Puritanism, from the Sixteenth Century to the Nineteenth Century: Intended as an Explanatory Supplement to "Hints to Heads of Families"* London: J. Hatchard, 1802. In his concluding remarks on pages 117-123, Owen charged Methodist leaders with being "Traitors" and "Atheists" who planned the revolutionary overthrow of the social order. He urged Methodists to flee from the "Jacobinical mysteries of Methodism" and return to the Established Church.

<sup>8</sup>For example William Clubbe accused Methodist preachers of ignorance "not knowing the Scriptures" and "that the Doctrines of Methodism are no where [sic] to be found in the Gospel, but are a direct violation of its principles." William Clubbe, *An Address to the Lower Class of the Parishoners [sic] on the Subject of Methodism: from the Minister of Their Parish* (Ipswich: J. Raw, 1806), 23-27.

<sup>9</sup>Jacob Stanley pointed out that John Wesley was at times banished from Anglican pulpits because he had in fact preached the doctrines of the Church of England. See Jacob Stanley, *The Increase, Influence, and Stability of Unestablished Religion: No Cause of Alarm to Established Christians: Being a Reply to Archdeacon Nares's Charge 'On the Influence of the Sectaries, and the Stability of the Church'* (Wednesbury: J. Booth, 1813), 28, 49.

Methodism shared John Wesley's ambivalence toward separation from the Established Church. They stoutly resisted any suggestion that they were dissenters and regarded themselves as loyal Anglicans separated by providential circumstances. On the other hand, the Wesleyan Methodist Church scorned Mark Robinson's "Church Methodism" campaign and viewed him as a simpleton who played into the hands of Methodism's enemies.<sup>10</sup> They knew that capitulation meant suppression and extinction, and that their critics would settle for nothing less than the complete destruction of "all things Methodist." The British Methodists had to maintain independence to insure their existence. Yet they could not deny their core identity as faithful to the ideals of the English Reformation.<sup>11</sup> Methodist leaders were constrained to articulate an Establishmentarian theology while remaining separated to their own spiritual practices.<sup>12</sup> To these circumstances can be traced the longstanding division between Methodist doctrine and Methodist practice. The brainchild of Jabez Bunting and Richard Watson, this strategy involved the production of a systematic theology textbook that articulated a particular kind of English Protestant doctrine centered on Athanasian Trinitarianism.

### Rendezvous on the Road

Bunting and Watson were two young men on their way home from preaching appointments when they chanced to meet on a road near

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<sup>10</sup>See the letter to Jabez Bunting "From Humphrey Sandwith" (Bridlington, March 5, 1825) in *The Early Correspondence of Jabez Bunting 1820-1829*, edited for the Royal Historical Society by W. R. Ward (London: Offices of the Royal Historical Society, 1929), 109. For the ill-will and embarrassment engendered by Mr. Robinson's fundraising efforts directed toward Methodists of substance, see the letter "From Robert Johnson" (Hull, December 4, 1824) in *The Early Correspondence of Jabez Bunting 1820-1829*, 102-103.

<sup>11</sup>For the notion that God had raised up the Methodists to propagate scriptural Christianity see Joseph Sutcliffe, *The Divine Mission of the People Called Methodists, to Revive and Spread Religion: Illustrated and Defended in a Sermon Preached before the District Meeting Assembled in Macclesfield, May 27, 1813*. New-York: Daniel Hitt and Thomas Ware, 1815. On page 7 Sutcliffe drew a parallel between the ministry of the apostles and the rise of Methodism: ". . . the seals of their mission were conspicuous in the lives of their converts. These were living epistles known and read of all men."

<sup>12</sup>See *Methodism Vindicated*, 39-40. After several pages of extensive quotes from Anglican sources, the author made the case that Methodism consisted in the renewal of the doctrines of the Church of England. The Established Church had in large measure neglected the doctrines of Scripture and its own originating reformers.

Manchester in 1811.<sup>13</sup> The former was a rising star in the Wesleyan Methodist Church, the youngest minister to be welcomed into the esteemed Legal Hundred. The latter was an obscure furniture-maker who had voluntarily left the Wesleyan Methodist Church on account of mistreatment by parishioners, and joined the Methodist New Connexion.<sup>14</sup> Convinced he had been mistaken in his choice, Watson sought a means by which he could honorably re-join the Mother Church, and found that opportunity in his new friend. However, he held off on account of his ill health and his outspoken critics in the “Old Connexion” (who regarded him an opportunist). After Watson transferred his membership in 1813, Bunting presented him with exceptional chances to advance through the ministerial ranks and Watson never hesitated to accept them.<sup>15</sup> A cunning politician,

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<sup>13</sup>For more on the friendship of Richard Watson and Jabez Bunting see PLP.III.7.2, 76. [Watson Manuscript Collection/JRLUM] For an account of the initial meeting see Richard Wrench, *Eminent Divines: Or, Biographical and Critical Sketches of Richard Watson and Robert Hall* (Selby: Brown & Forbisher, 1861), 10-11; Jackson, *Memoirs*, 84. Jackson pointed out that when these two men met, “Lord Sidmouth’s bill became the principal subject of conversation. They both acknowledged, that, if this bill were to pass into a law, it would be ruinous to the Methodists, whose ministry is itinerant; and that it would be very injurious... upon the dissenters generally.”

<sup>14</sup>Some primary sources blame inauspicious circumstances for Watson’s departure from the Wesleyan Methodist Church. “For a young man of his mental temperament, the times when he began to travel were most unfavorable. The Societies had long been agitated by the questions of the Sacraments, and other points of church order and discipline, and for want of a little fostering care and the guiding hand of experience, before he came of age, he was prevailed on to leave the Society in which he had labored successively at Castle Donington, Leicester, Derby, and Hinckley and he joined the Methodist New Connexion in 1801, and preached for them.” PLP.III.7.2, 76. [Watson Manuscript Collection/JRLUM]

<sup>15</sup>After Watson’s return to the Wesleyan Methodist Church in 1813 and his subsequent meteoric rise in the ranks of the preachers, Watson’s enemies accused him of ambition to the end of his life and even after his death. With regard to his leadership in Methodist missions, observers pointed out how this took place at the initiative of Jabez Bunting. “In that most important work, Mr. Bunting secured the able and masterly advocacy of Richard Watson, and by thus introducing him into the foremost ranks of Methodism, both in the pulpit and on the platform, there Mr. Watson found the most ample scope for the exercise of all the genius which his piety and intellect could command. The occasion was one which exactly suited the mind of Richard Watson, and he was not slow for accepting all the opportunities which presented themselves to testify how heartily he sympathized with the great Missionary Enterprise.” PLP III.7.2, 76-77. [Watson Manuscript Collection/JRLUM]

Bunting saw the kind of talent in Richard Watson that would help him mastermind a coup and seize the reins of denominational leadership. Over the course of his early ministry, Watson garnered a storied reputation in theological debate defending Methodism from its adversaries.<sup>16</sup> Church leaders and congregations began to recognize him as a masterful orator who could move audiences and sway public opinion. Bunting realized his new acquaintance possessed skills that he himself lacked. Bunting could devise strategy, but Watson could move people—both in the pulpit and in print—to embrace the strategy and the ideas behind it. These two friends did not have to wait long for the opportunities they sought, for the Wesleyan Methodist Church soon experienced a leadership crisis, a series of theological crises, and mounting financial woes.

What drove these two young men to pull off this daring takeover of the Wesleyan Methodist Church? While ambition could offer a partial explanation, the precipitating incident appears to have been Lord Sidmouth's Bill.<sup>17</sup> Faced with the prospect of well-placed enemies enacting a law that would cripple their movement, Bunting and Watson took the warning and determined to lead Methodism into a new day of national recognition and respect. They believed God would richly bless the British nation through Methodism's success. These plans eventuated in the overhaul of Methodist theological education, inaugurated with a systematic theology textbook—the *Theological Institutes*. To prevent the type of unfortunate circumstances that drove him from the denomination, Watson set out to rid the Wesleyan Methodist Church of every vestige of Rational Dissent—particularly Arian and Socinian sentiments—and set Methodism on the rock of Athanasian Trinitarianism.<sup>18</sup> He became a

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<sup>16</sup>An early example would be his lost letter against the Universalist opinions of Elhanan Winchester that agitated Methodists in the late eighteenth century. This correspondence pointed out Winchester's elevation of God's benevolence at the expense of God's justice and truth. Keeping faith with classical Anglican and Wesleyan theology, Watson maintained a balance among God's attributes as revealed in scripture. See Jackson, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Rev. Richard Watson*, 42-43.

<sup>17</sup>David M. Craig observes that in the years after Waterloo (1815), "mass meetings . . . frightened the government into repression." He names Lord Sidmouth as one member of the cabinet who favored "strong measures" against radicalism. David M. Craig, *Robert Southey and Romantic Apostasy: Political Argument in Britain, 1780-1840* (Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2007), 130.

<sup>18</sup>There was also a strong nationalist motivation behind the Bunting-Watson takeover, supported by similar opinions among other Methodist leaders at that time. For example Sutcliffe assessed the mission of Methodism and saw the

paragon of evangelical orthodoxy, a resounding success in the Methodist ministry, the right-hand man to the autocratic Bunting, the undisputed victor in theological debate, the stern examiner of ordination candidates, vindicated over all his enemies, and buried right next to John Wesley himself. Methodist historians should stand back and mull over the humanity of these two young men, driven by mixed motives, who shaped the course of Methodism for generations.

Even at the time of their publication, the *Institutes* were never regarded as the “official” standards of Methodism—nor could they be. Methodist theology followed the agenda of the English Reformation, which never rested on a fixed set of doctrinal formulations. The pursuit of an authentic *ecclesia* meant that the Church was always reforming. If Methodism followed Chillingworth’s dictum that the Bible is the religion of Protestants, then it dared not set up a systematic theology textbook as an “official” statement of faith. In fact the words *Methodist* and *Methodism* never occurred in the *Institutes*, nor did the word *Wesleyan*. Watson meant them to be something larger—an articulation of the restored gospel, Jesus Christ alive and working in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, bringing the victorious might of the British Empire to bear on the task of carrying this newly-restored gospel to the ends of the earth. They inescapably bore the deep imprint of their author: an authoritarian personality; the impassioned advocate of Conference Methodism; the resolute enemy of reform.

Certainly the *Theological Institutes* represented a monumental achievement among British Methodists in this period. They raised the level of theological reading among Wesleyan ministers and rebutted their enemies’ charges of ignorance, madness and fanaticism. The *Institutes* engaged the theological issues that had plagued the English Church since the 1688 revolution. Nothing in them could be attacked as distinctly Methodist; indeed, they were a remarkable synthesis of primarily English divinity. They borrowed extensively from the most respected voices of European Christianity—Stillingfleet, Paley, Chillingworth, Hey, Barrow,

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greatest effect in Britain’s national well-being. He compared the prosperity of England with the history of the Israelites. “When that kingdom was on the verge of moral and political ruin, Samuel laid the foundation of its glory by reformation. . . . Then followed the zenith of Hebrew glory. . . . The covenant blessings promised to obedience, were then fully realized; even as the curses were inflicted in the age of apostasy [sic] which followed.—In like manner, the Most High, ever propitious to Britain, has since the birth of our beloved Sovereign, an event coincident with Methodism, loaded this country with the choicest of national honors.” Sutcliffe, *Divine Mission of the People Called Methodists*, 24-25.

Warburton, Burnet, Waterland, and Mosheim—all highly respected scholars of that era. No one could attack the *Institutes* without simultaneously undermining the Established Church. On the other hand, this strategy unfortunately separated Methodist theology from Methodist practice.

### The Particularity of the *Theological Institutes*

In the *Theological Institutes* Watson dressed Methodism in Establishmentarian drag to prove the Church of England and the Wesleyan Methodist Church taught the same doctrines. Granted generous research and writing time—much of it at the British Library in London—Watson engaged the major theological issues that had vexed the English Church since the sixteenth century.<sup>19</sup> However, his *Institutes* were by no means faultless and indeed partook of the weaknesses of their author. Watson set out to publish an “all-in-one” systematic theology textbook that included large extracts from hard-to-find works of divinity. This practice made his *Institutes* at times tedious, dry, and desultory; it needlessly broke up his exposition and likely tested the patience of his readers. The *Institutes* also suffered from an opinionated point of view and at times resorted to *ad hominem* tactics. Some readers might have been impressed that the *Institutes* represented the only correct view.<sup>20</sup> Congruent with the leadership style of Conference Methodism, the *Institutes* manifested an authoritarian character: ordination candidates were obliged to endorse them or leave the denomination.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>See Thomas Jackson, *Memoirs of the Life, Ministry, and Writings, of the Rev. Richard Watson, Late Secretary to the Wesleyan Missionary Society* (New York: B. Waugh and T. Mason, 1834), 336-338.

<sup>20</sup>For a perceptive critique of the *Theological Institutes* see “Observations on Watson’s Theological Institutes,” *Methodist Magazine and Quarterly Review*, Vol. XIX, New Series Vol. VIII, (New-York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1837), 332-346. Signed ‘W.M.B.’, the article pointed out several weaknesses in Watson’s arguments, e.g. on page 335 it stated that the three chapters named “The Necessity of Revelation” were “presumptive.” On page 333 he noted that he differed with Watson with several of these “presumptions.” These were points where Watson simply assumed the foundations of his arguments without proof. These would have been open to objections.

<sup>21</sup>Conference Methodism brought independently-minded preachers into line with the denominational mission, e.g. in its dealings with George Pocock, “a Bristol schoolmaster and local preacher, [who] with the assistance of other local preachers, had begun missions over a wide area between South Wales and Berkshire in 1814 . . . [and was] expelled in 1820 for refusing to settle [new chapels he built] on the Conference plan. . . . Pocock’s view was that the preachers ‘only cry is Rule, Rule Methodist Rule, Conformity or expulsion.’” William Griffith to Jabez Bunting (Hungerford, December 20, 1820), *The Early Correspondence of Jabez*

Concomitantly the *Institutes* despised republicanism and inculcated the traditional British subordination of the lower social classes.<sup>22</sup> They validated the distinction between “those who think” and “those who work”; the former were meant to rule and the latter were ordained to toil for their bread. Methodist leaders spurned political empowerment for the working classes; hence Watson deflected any criticism that the Methodists were closet Jacobins.<sup>23</sup> In fact, the king had no better friends than the Methodists.<sup>24</sup> The *Institutes* were through-and-through anti-revolution-

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*Bunting 1820-1829*, 54. See George Pocock, *A Statement of Facts Connected with the Ejection of Certain Ministers from the Society of Wesleyan Methodists in the City of Bristol* (Bristol: n.p., 1820) and George Pocock, John Pyer, and Samuel Smith, *Facts without a Veil* (Bristol: n.p., 1820).

<sup>22</sup>For example, see Part Second, Chapter VI, “Attributes of God—Goodness,” in which Watson blamed humanity for its miseries. Redeemed people would submit to God with respect to their place in which Providence had placed them. See Richard Watson, *Theological Institutes: or a View of the Evidences, Doctrines, Morals and Institutions of Christianity*, Vol. 1 (New-York: N. Bangs and J. Emory, 1825), 465. Watson quoted extensively in this chapter from William Paley’s *Natural Theology*, and this would have favored a traditional view of British society. No one in the Established Church would have accused Paley of enthusiasm or republicanism.

<sup>23</sup>Since his youth Watson had earned a reputation for his patriotism. See Jackson, *Memoirs*, 68-71. On page 69 Jackson states: “His heart was truly British; and his attachment to George III, and to the favourite ministers of that revered monarch, was strong and decided.” Patriotism was a distinguishing characteristic of Middle Methodist leaders. Sutcliffe called the accusation of rebellion “a slander coequal with persecution.” Such a charge was groundless as Methodism “did not originate in any political feud, or religious schism. It has never sucked the breasts of Atheism and revolt. It has never had any dispute with the civil government of this country, but uniformly received from it kindness and protection.” Sutcliffe, *Divine Mission of the People Called Methodists*, 44-45.

<sup>24</sup>This appeared to be a common sentiment among the defenders of Methodism. Miles Martindale exclaimed, “We call upon men to forsake their sins, we preach repentance from dead works, conversion to God, holiness of heart and life...we teach love to God, obedience to the laws of our land, loyalty to our King...and respect for all in authority.” See Miles Martindale, *Methodism Defended, in a Discourse Delivered on Laying the Foundation Stone of Albion Chapel, Skeldergate, York, May the 7<sup>th</sup>*, 1816 (York: Spence and Burdekin, 1816), 23. John Furness strenuously defended the constitutional rights of Methodists to worship, and supplied examples how Methodists’ loyalty to the king often exceeded that of the Anglicans. See John Furness, *The Principles and Conduct of Methodists Vindicated: An Answer to a Pamphlet Written by the Rev. Thomas Sikes, M.A. Vicar of Guilsborough; “Concerning the Christian’s Liberty of Choosing His Own Teacher, &c.”* Shewsbury: Wood and Watton, 1811. On page 8 Furness notes with respect to the Anglican clergy “that were they to *legislate* for the dissenters, and the Methodists in particular, if they did not yield implicit obedience thereto, that they would *teach* obedience by the *mild* and *gentle* logic of *fire* and *faggot*.”

ary and gave critics no basis for accusing the Methodists of plotting to overthrow the British Government.<sup>25</sup> The *Institutes* could have been endorsed by a majority of Anglicans—after all, Watson wrote them to confirm that there was no difference between them and the Methodists. Those who read the *Institutes* would have found nothing distinctly Methodist about them. They set out to immerse their readers in scriptural Christianity, in this instance a repristination of orthodox English divinity. Some Methodist scholars have scorned the *Institutes* because they scarcely mention John Wesley.<sup>26</sup> However, this misses the point that Watson made regarding the sameness of Methodist and Anglican belief. Had Watson looked extensively to John Wesley as a theological mentor, Methodism's enemies would have immediately noticed the yawning chasm of difference and have been confirmed in their opinions that Methodism was a separatist sect bent on the destruction of the Church of England.<sup>27</sup>

Instead Watson largely cited Anglican theologians and a handful of continental divines such as Grotius and Arminius. Steeped in English Protestant thought, they defended the *a posteriori* epistemology of John Locke against the *a priori* thought of modernists like Samuel Clarke and Isaac Newton. Lockean epistemology renounced absolutist and anthro-

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<sup>25</sup>This inclination toward loyalty was apparently widespread by 1813. John Hughes defended the Methodists in terms of their effects on the general population, and this included making them “the most peaceable and loyal.” John Hughes, *A Plea for Religious Liberty, or, A Vindication of the Methodists: To Which is Subjoined the Controversy Between the Author and Civis in the Macclesfield Courier* (Macclesfield: E. Bayley, 1813), 43. See also Samuel Bradburn, *Methodism Set Forth and Defended, in a Sermon, on Acts xxviii.22. Preached at the Opening of Portland-Chapel, Bristol, August 26, 1792* (Bristol: Lancaster and Edwards, 1792), 51.

<sup>26</sup>For example see Randy Maddox, “Respected Founder/Neglected Guide: The Role of Wesley in American Methodist Theology,” *Methodist History* 37:2 (January 1999), 77-78; John W. Wright, “Wesley’s Theology as Methodist Practice: Toward the Post-Modern Retrieval of the Wesleyan Tradition,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 35:2 (Fall 2000), 18.

<sup>27</sup>For example see Phileleutherus, *A Defence of the British Constitution Against the Attacks of Civis upon the Methodists and Dissenters, and the Conductors and Teachers of the Macclesfield Sunday School: in Three Letters Addressed to the Editor of the Macclesfield Courier: With an Introduction and Postscript* (London: William Heseltine, 1813), 13. On page 15 he observed that repeated attacks in the press demonstrated that “wanton and deliberate malice produced his [Civis’] attack upon the Methodists.”

pocentric knowledge in favor of probabilistic knowledge, a “knowing” that required a measure of faith in sensible evidence. Since fallen humanity could never obtain knowledge of God *a priori*, Watson presumed with his sources that God had given a revelation.<sup>28</sup> Yet the problem of a particular revelation remained—why God’s revelation in the Bible had been given to a limited number of people. With the knowledge gained through an expanding British Empire, theologians like Watson were troubled that much of the world’s population had never heard the gospel. They feared some might use these circumstances to question the gospel’s normative significance for every human. Theologians sought to prove the God of the Bible actively ruled the natural world and could be known through God’s creation. The real answer for the seeming lack of knowledge was the perversity of the human heart. Those who denied that God had given a revelation in the Bible sought to undermine the universal call of the gospel as revealed in the Bible alone.<sup>29</sup> Theologians responded by amassing arrays of “evidence” that God had given a revelation in the Bible, and this revelation paralleled the natural world.<sup>30</sup> Thus Watson expatiated at length on

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<sup>28</sup>“The same observations may be made as to the existence of the Founder of the Christian religion. In the records of the New Testament he is called JESUS CHRIST, because he professed to be the Messiah predicted in the Jewish Scriptures, and was acknowledged as such by his followers; and his birth is fixed upwards of eighteen centuries ago. This also is at least uncontradicted testimony. The Christian religion exists, and must have had an author. Like the institutions of Moses, it bears the evidence of being the work of one mind, and, as a theological system, presents no indications of a gradual and successive elaboration.” Watson, *Theological Institutes* (1825), 116-117.

<sup>29</sup>For an example of a pamphlet that regarded reason and revelation as equal in authority see [Peter Annet], *A Dissertation Proving the Light of the Gospel is the Light of Nature, or That True Christianity is Rational Religion Only: for the Information of All Impartial Lovers of Truth Whether Misbelievers or Disbelievers. By a Rational Christian* (London: J. Scott, A. Browne and M. Collyer, [17—]). On page v [introduction], Annet states: “By this is God’s light seen in man. Experience proves we have no better guide....Reason and Scripture is the rule of protestants [sic]; both should go together.”

<sup>30</sup>Once enough evidence had been presented to make this case probable, people were obliged to believe and obey its teachings. Those who refused were confirmed in the “stubbornness” of their hearts. This reflects the religious epistemology of William Chillingworth and other moderate Anglicans of the seventeenth century. See Henry G. van Leeuwen, *The Problem of Certainty in English Thought 1630-1690*, International Archives of the History of Ideas 3 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), 15-32.

natural theology and even found credibility in Hutchinsonianism.<sup>31</sup> His *Institutes* sought to demonstrate how reason and faith in the right alchemical balance assured readers of a firm grip on scriptural truth. In reality, theologians like Watson had to smooth over the rough places and resort to authoritarian rhetoric to mold everything into coherence. They employed evidentialism to make different kinds of knowledge substantiate the claim of God's self-disclosure in Jesus Christ and validate the Bible as the written record. The teachings of divine revelation—e.g. Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement—were matters beyond sensible verification. Consistent with Lockean epistemology, Anglican divines piled on massive amounts of “evidence”—e.g. knowledge that vouched for biblical testimony, the antiquity of the Bible, the validity of prophecy and miracles, and the correspondence of biblical and secular history. For the *Institutes*, Christian knowledge ultimately rested on faith in the Bible as a “special revelation.”

A substantial degree of Watson's *Institutes* consisted of this rich array of English and Continental scholarship that upheld the belief that God had given a revelation in the Bible. In the end, this massive material really did not “prove” the veracity of the Bible—this still required faith. Faith and reason were not two sides of the same coin, so to speak, yet this scholarship helped preachers and their congregations keep them in respectable balance against the onslaught of skepticism. For this reason,

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<sup>31</sup>According to Friesen, “In opposition to the Newtonian cosmos, with its attractive powers acting at a distance, [John] Hutchinson promoted a mechanical universe grounded in a particular method of biblical interpretation. Because our senses were limited, Hutchinson believed that natural philosophers had to turn to revelation to acquire knowledge of the subtle mechanical agents at work in the cosmos...Hutchinson insisted on the importance of revelation as a source of knowledge for the natural philosopher and the theologian. In brief, Hutchinson's solution was to go back to the original Hebrew text of the bible [sic]. The introduction of modern or pointed Hebrew with vowels into texts was a corruption of the original pure Hebrew. By comparing Hebrew words with the same unpointed consonants or roots, Hutchinson claimed that associative meanings between words could be derived. As Geoffrey Cantor observes, this method of interpretation represented a type of biblical alchemy from which knowledge of nature could be deduced. See John Friesen, “Hutchinsonianism and the Newtonian Enlightenment,” *Centaurus* 48:1 (January 2006), 41-42. Friesen is citing Geoffrey N. Cantor, “Revelation and the Cyclical Cosmos of John Hutchinson,” in J. Jordanova and R. Porter (eds.), *Images of the Earth: Essays in the History of the Environmental Sciences* (Chalfont St. Giles: British Society for the History of Science, 1979), 3-22.

as a systematic theology textbook, the *Theological Institutes* bore the marks of their author's personality and belied their insistence of objectivity. Although they extensively cited scholars respected in the English Church, there were several points where the *Institutes* succeeded through rhetoric. In a sense, they could be characterized as an extended sermon on behalf of Athanasian Trinitarianism in its historic, English Protestant form. Theology in this sense sought to nourish faith and satisfy reason—an ongoing task for the English Church.

### An Epistemological Balance

The break with the Church of Rome set off a crisis of authority in the English Church. British citizens rallied around William Chillingworth's declaration that the Bible is the religion of Protestants. This frequently resulted in idiosyncratic exegesis—people interpreted Scripture in terms of their own perspectives. The English Church could not entirely dispense with tradition. Most theologians agreed with John Locke that the doctrine that could not be harmonized with reason should not be accepted. Yet the consistent application of this principle encouraged Unitarianism and the concomitant refusal to believe any doctrine that could not be understood. As a consequence, the Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement were promptly rejected.<sup>32</sup> Particularly in the last decade of the seventeenth century, deism challenged the viability of the Christian religion.<sup>33</sup> With Matthew

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<sup>32</sup>See Sutcliffe, *Divine Mission of the People Called Methodists*, 11-13. On page 13 he stated: "As to the state of religion in the national church during those times, and prior to the rise of Methodism, it is allowed on all hands to have been in a low and grovelling [sic] state. 'Whatever was earnest or passionate,' says Dr. Blair, 'either in the composition or delivery of sermons, was reckoned enthusiastic and fanatical.' The doctrine of the Spirit so largely illustrated in the New-Testament, Archbishop SECKER allows, was almost lost. Yea, so much so, that in all the twenty-one courses of the BOYLE Lecture, abridged by BURNET, it is scarcely named."

<sup>33</sup>The distinguishing characteristic of deism was its rejection of revelation as a source of religious knowledge. There was nothing authoritative about the Bible, which Matthew Tindal called a "well-invented flam." James E. Force, "Biblical Interpretation, Newton, and English Deism," in *Skepticism and Irreligion in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Richard H. Popkin and Arjo Vanderjagt. Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 37 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993), 283-284. Gerard Reedy traces the origin of deism in Socinianism, rather than in Anglican rationalism. As he states of John Toland's *Christianity Not Mysteriorious* (1696): "Toland's deism does not rip the mask from the cryptorationalism of the divines; it is instead rooted in and a variation of Socinian thought, particularly about

Tindal's publication of *Christianity Old as the Creation*, the morality of special revelation came under unprecedented attack. Deists sought to discredit the idea that God had revealed a scheme for human redemption, for most people had never heard—and would never hear—the message of Christianity. Rather than a mysterious plan that came through revelation, human redemption came through reason. Deists were not concerned with harmonizing Christianity with reason, but with dismissing revealed religion in favor of natural religion. On the other hand, Socinians believed Christianity to have been corrupted in the Patristic era though admixture with Greek philosophy. Rather than scriptural doctrines, the Trinity, Incarnation and Atonement were aberrations that should be replaced with the original gospel of Unitarianism. For the Socinians, no doctrine should be accepted that could not be reconciled with reason. They sought to restore a neglected, original gospel that everyone could readily understand. There would be no “God in Three Persons,” no confession of Jesus as both “fully God” and “fully human.” The primitive gospel, as imagined by the Socinians, closely resembled Islam at several points.<sup>34</sup> At the end of the seventeenth century, English divines launched a counterattack on such extreme rationalism to prove scripture's compatibility with reason and confirm scripture's teachings as those of Athanasian Trinitarianism.

During the sixteenth-century English Reformation, Athanasian Trinitarianism stood at the heart of Protestant teaching as embodied in the Thirty-Nine Articles. With the separation from the Church of Rome,

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theological method.” Gerard Reedy, “Socinians, John Toland, and the Anglican Rationalists,” *Harvard Theological Review* 70:3/4 (July-October 1977), 289. “In time Stillingfleet, who had been unwilling to assert such identity, would concede that the Socinians had aided in advancing deism: they had lessened the authority of Scripture, fomented anticlericalism, insisted on the priority of natural religion—thereby rendering revelation an indifferent thing—and supported various deists.” Robert E. Sullivan, *John Toland and the Deist Controversy: A Study in Adaptations*, Harvard Historical Studies 101 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 106.

<sup>34</sup>See Dietrich Klein, “Hugo Grotius’ Position on Islam as Described in *De Veritate Christianae, Liber VI*,” in *Socinianism and Arminianism: Antitrinitarians, Calvinists and Cultural Exchange in Seventeenth-Century Europe*, ed. Martin Mulrow and Jan Rohls. Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 134 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2005), 149-173. In the conclusion on page 170, Klein observes that “Grotius is concerned with reconciliation of the dogmatic Christological differences between Christianity and Islam.” He also notes that this interest originated with Nicholas of Cusa, who sought to facilitate “possible integration” of the Ottoman Empire into the Christian West.

the English Church advocated reform through reason and anathematized fideism. With the right use of reason, the English could institute a national church to which all its citizens would rightfully conform. The Bible would be the religion of Protestants, interpreted by reason and inspired by the Holy Spirit. Such an experiment had unintended consequences. The unfortunate events of the English Civil War, to some extent, demonstrated that biblical interpretation through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit could be characterized as idiosyncratic. This led to heated conflict and outright fanaticism, carried out in public policy and military action. After the Restoration of 1662, the English Church sought to minimize the element of inspiration and harbored a deep-seated aversion to “enthusiasm.” As exemplified by the members of the Great Tew Circle, theological discussion turned to reason as the standard of divine truth. This opened a channel for Late Renaissance humanism, especially in the form of Socinianism and particularly through Dutch scholars. At this point, before the debates of the 1690s, thinkers like Hobbes and Chillingworth sought a more rational and scriptural basis for Christianity. Convinced that early Christianity had been corrupted, they produced a voluminous literature that attempted to undermine Athanasian Trinitarianism and abrogate every vestige of mystery from Christian belief. The doctrine that could not be grasped by reason was not to be believed. This is the root of the hermeneutic that advocated that every person should read the Bible for themselves and believe its plain teachings. Once articulated as “on a more rational and scriptural basis,” the primitive gospel could be readily understood by every person who exercised one’s own reason.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Arianism established itself throughout a significant part of the Church of England, along with dissenting bodies, such as the English Presbyterians. This had a profound impact on congregations as moralism took hold on the life of the English Church. The supernatural elements of the Christian faith—justification, regeneration, and sanctification—were replaced by a greater emphasis on morality and other natural aspects. The suppression of enthusiasm led to a significant diminution of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit until the latter became in large measure figurative.<sup>35</sup> Arianism

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<sup>35</sup>To those who cried “schism” or denied the credentials of the Methodist ministry, Sutcliffe observed the hypocrisy of the Anglican Church in its break with Rome. On the same grounds as those who appealed to the Bible alone as the rule of faith, he justified Methodism’s irregularities....In their attack since the death of John Wesley, Established clergy accused the Methodists of doctrinal irregularities. In fact, the Church of England faced serious doctrinal declension

named the Father as “true God” worthy of worship, Jesus Christ as the Messiah, and the Holy Spirit dismissed altogether. While significant numbers of Anglican ministers sought to assuage their consciences by reinterpreting the Athanasian Creed on their own private terms, in 1763 several of them gathered in London at Feathers Tavern to petition Parliament to abolish the requirement that Anglican ordination candidates subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles. When this measure failed, the petitioners left the Church of England to form the Unitarian Church.

In his *Theological Institutes* Richard Watson engaged these issues that had vexed the Church of England for nearly two centuries. He drew heavily from Anglican divines who answered these enemies of orthodox Anglican belief. Watson anchored his *Institutes* in Athanasian Trinitarianism—the teaching that God eternally exists in three divine Persons—and this meant that his systematic theology textbook echoed the tone and content of the Thirty-Nine Articles and the *Book of Common Prayer*. And the scholars he extensively cited formed the backbone of theological training in the Established Church. Methodism’s enemies—nearly all of them Anglican vicars—could attack the *Institutes* only by contradicting some of the greatest voices in the Church of England. In the spirit of the English Reformation, the *Institutes* sought to articulate a vision of a restored scriptural Christianity. They intended to set forth what Thomas Cranmer and other sixteenth-century reformers regarded as the “faith of the Bible.” The centerpiece of this faith consisted of Athanasian Trinitarianism, with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; three eternal Persons in one divine essence. It was absolutely crucial, in this context, that Jesus Christ be confessed as the Eternal Son of God.

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among its own clergy. Sutcliffe illustrated this division within Anglicanism by citing John Overton’s *True Churchman Ascertained*. If there were “no defect of faith, why is all this obloquy cast on the Athanasian Creed? Its damnatory were not intended to bear on the indulgence of a scruple or doubt; but on the enlightened enemies of the Saviour’s Godhead. And as to its peculiar forms of expression, they were dictated by the logic of the age, and then necessary as strong palisades to guard the house of God.” Sutcliffe, *Divine Mission of the People Called Methodists*, 41-43. See John Overton, *True Churchman Ascertained: Or, An Apology for Those of the Regular Clergy of the Establishment, Who are Sometimes Called Evangelical Ministers: Occasioned by the Publications of Drs. Paley, Hey, Croft; Messrs. Daubeny, Ludlam, Polwhele, Fellowes; the Reviewers, &c. &c.* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. York: T. Wilson, and R. Spence, 1802. On page 415 Overton states: “The points for which we contend respect the very life of practical Christianity, the preservation of our Church, and the salvation of our country.”

### The Linchpin of Athanasian Trinitarianism

Conflict erupted in the Wesleyan Methodist Church over the Eternal Sonship when Adam Clarke pronounced the term “Son of God” synonymous with “Messiah,” and asserted that Jesus Christ became Son of God at his Incarnation.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, he stated that no one should accept a doctrine that could not be reconciled with reason. This doctrine was advanced by Hooker and transmitted by the Great Tew Circle, particularly William Chillingworth. John Locke cautiously embraced this principle in a moderate form and noted that some things in revelation were “above reason.” Isaac Newton abided by its dictates as an Arian principle.<sup>37</sup> By making this statement Clarke identified with a long line of English Protestant biblical scholars. This rational hermeneutical principle was widely held by Anglican vicars, and in many cases the latter became openly Arian and Socinian. Such a principle skirted Socinianism and presaged the rise of modern biblical scholarship. Of course, Adam Clarke was no Socinian and stoutly defended the divinity of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, his opinions could have influenced young Wesleyan ministers to question traditional Christian teaching and consider the plausibility of Arian interpretations of the Trinity, Incarnation and, Atonement. Richard Watson rose to the defense of Athanasian Trinitarianism and published a pamphlet in 1818 on the Eternal Sonship.<sup>38</sup> His argument trounced

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<sup>36</sup>Clarke advocated the co-equality of the Second Person of the Trinity on account of the term *logos* in John 1:1. He certainly was not the first or only scholar to embrace this argument. For example, Thomas Davies, Vicar of Queen-Street, Cheapside, London supported the full divinity of Jesus Christ on the same basis. Like Clarke, Davies was strongly influenced by Enlightenment rationalism and thought that the “begetter” could not be co-eternal with the “begotten.” “We cannot allow the self-contradicting idea of an unbegotten birth, and the begetter and begotten co-eternal.” Thomas Davies, *The Eternity, Personality, and Divinity of the Word, Proved and Defended from John 1.-1* (London: T. Plummer, [1805]. Davies contended for the equality of the three persons of the Godhead, and strongly denounced Sabellianism. Davies and Clarke subscribed uncompromisingly to Athanasian Trinitarianism. Those who called them “Socinian” or “Arian” were grossly unfair—they failed to grasp Davies’ and Clarke’s opinions.

<sup>37</sup>For more on Newton’s religion and its Socinian provenance see Stephen D. Snobelen, “Isaac Newton, Heretic: The Strategies of a Nicodemite,” *British Journal for the History of Science* 32:4 (December 1999), 381-419. On page 385 Snobelen states: “The theological contours of antitrinitarianism are visible throughout Newton’s thought.”

<sup>38</sup>See Richard Watson, *Remarks on the Eternal Sonship of Christ; and the Use of Reason in Matters of Revelation: Suggested by Several Passages in Dr. Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the New Testament. In a Letter to a Friend*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: T. Cordeaux, 1818).

Clarke's position and established his reputation as Methodism's greatest theologian. Clarke never publically responded but rather maintained his dignity in silence. In private he regarded Watson's and Bunting's authoritarianism with contempt.<sup>39</sup>

For the Wesleyan Methodist Church, Athanasian Trinitarianism was crucial to the ideology that joined a restored gospel to nationalism and postmillennialism. These notions were at the core of the Bunting-Watson coup of 1813 to remake the Wesleyan Methodist Church into a non-enthusiastic, Loyalist denomination, permitted to take the newly-restored scriptural Christian message to the ends of the earth.<sup>40</sup> This was the vision of Jabez Bunting, an astute observer of the times, who sensed the dramatic change in Britain's mood at the end of the Napoleonic Wars from despair to euphoria. At this crucial moment he recognized the opportunity for the respective missions of Methodism and Britain to coincide.

To convince Methodism's adversaries of her godly mission and patriotic loyalty, the Bunting-Watson ideology drove every vestige of Rational Dissent from the Wesleyan Methodist Church. The denomination endorsed a traditional English perspective on social and political matters, and rejected republicanism and the "crying up the rights of the people."<sup>41</sup> Consequently they denounced hermeneutical principles that encouraged people to read the Bible solely in light of their own reason (e.g. Socinianism and Arianism). Rational Dissent applied critical reason to Trinitarian

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<sup>39</sup>With reference to the question of the Eternal Sonship as a test of orthodoxy for ordination candidates (passed at the Conference of 1827 at the behest of Richard Watson), Samuel Dunn remarked with respect to his friend Adam Clarke: "I was lodging with him at the same house in Bristol, when the question began to be agitated in the Conference, and well knew his opinion of the whole matter. He pronounced the individual who took the lead in pressing it well fitted for the office of inquisitor-general." Samuel Dunn, *The Life of Adam Clarke, LL.D., Author of a Commentary on the Old and New Testament, Etc.* (London: William Tegg, 1863), 231-232.

<sup>40</sup>See John Ward, *A Brief Vindication of the Wesleyan Methodists, in Their Doctrine and Discipline, or What Some Would Call Their Church Government; With a View to Condemn the Inconsistent Churchman, Out of His Own Mouth. Being Some Strictures upon the Writings of Mr. Exton, and His Second. Wherein they have tried to defame the Methodists, and have thereby brought Reproach upon the true Church of England* (Northampton: W. Cooper, 1820), 23.

<sup>41</sup>See *Life of the Rev. Alexander Kilham, Formerly a Preacher under the Rev. J. Wesley; and One of the Founders of the Methodist New Connexion in the Year 1797. Including a Full Account of the Disputes Which Occasioned the Separation* (London: R. Groombridge, 1838), 215.

matters (e.g. the relationship between the Persons of the godhead). Every aspect of doctrine became subject to explanation or rejection. Those who defended traditional doctrines (e.g. Bishop Stillingfleet) pointed to an older form of Christian reason prominent in medieval theology. According to this position, there are matters in divine revelation that do not contradict reason yet human reason cannot grasp them. Medieval theologians called them “above reason.” These elements belong to “divine reason” by which God knows them; however, they cannot be grasped by human reason operating without divine assistance. The advocates of Rational Dissent offered an anthropocentric biblical hermeneutic related to common-sense realism. As a gift of God, each person’s reason was qualified to grasp the plain meaning of the Bible without authoritarian interposition. Rational Dissent eliminated the distinction between the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the individual’s reason. Those who crossed this boundary often became Unitarians and moved swiftly to modify and even eliminate belief in traditional Christian doctrines.<sup>42</sup> Those who still confessed the special inspiration of the Spirit might take on a strong anti-authoritarian bias and locate the center of religious authority in their own minds.<sup>43</sup> Clearly, Bunting and Watson rejected any biblical hermeneutic that challenged the episcopal authority of the Church of England. They renounced the critical reason that undermined the historic creeds and the Thirty-Nine Articles and set up a system of theological education that proclaimed the doctrines of Methodism and the Church of England identical. In truth they made Methodism safe for British Loyalism.

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<sup>42</sup>For example see Joseph Cooke, *Methodism Condemned by Methodist Preachers; or, A Vindication of the Doctrines Contained in Two Sermons, on Justification by Faith, and the Witness of the Spirit; For Which the Author was Expelled from the Methodist Connection* (Rochdale: T. Wood, 1807); John Ashworth, *An Account of the Rise and Progress of the Unitarian Doctrine; in the Societies at Rochdale, Newchurch in Rossendale, and Other Places, Formerly in Connexion with the Late Rev. Joseph Cooke: In Ten Letters to a Friend* (Rochdale: J. Westell, 1817), 33-38. Cooke appears to have read the Bible through a Socinian lens, for he dismissed John Wesley’s notions of “spiritual senses” and stressed the need for “rational understanding” of Christian truth.

<sup>43</sup>For an example of this individualistic, rationalistic hermeneutic and its disastrous consequences see Samuel Tucker, *The Triumph of Scriptural and Rational Truth: Displayed in a Complete Refutation of the Absurd and Unauthorized Doctrines of the Eternal Generation of the Divine Logos, and the Hypostatical Union of the Spiritual Natures in Jesus Christ: in a Series of Letters Addressed to the President of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference* (London: Marshall and Mills, 1828).

**AN INTERPRETATION OF THE UNITED  
METHODIST LITURGY OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM:  
“BY WATER AND THE SPIRIT,”  
IN THE MATRIX OF JOHN WESLEY,  
JOHN FLETCHER, AND JOSEPH BENSON**

by

**Laurence W. Wood**

“The full baptism of Christ...has two branches, the baptism of water,  
and the baptism of the Spirit.”<sup>1</sup>

—John Fletcher

“I felt much satisfaction in this ordinance [of confirmation]; to me it was very  
solemn, and the whole was well conducted....I have lived nearly forty years  
since; and upon this point my sentiments are not changed.”<sup>2</sup>

—Adam Clarke

John Fletcher once asked: “What is new in my explanation . . . that we must be born again of water and of the Spirit?”<sup>3</sup> Fletcher of course denied anything was “new” in his theology, but his answer is important because he became the third leader of Methodism, along with John and Charles Wesley, and his writings profoundly shaped Methodist doctrine. John and Charles hoped that he would become John’s successor. Like John and Charles Wesley, John Fletcher was an “Evangelical High Churchman”<sup>4</sup> who honored the liturgical practices and polity of the Church of England, as well as its doctrines.

### **The Meaning of Being Born Again**

To understand what it means to be born again requires us to understand how this term was used in original Methodism. John Wesley at first

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<sup>1</sup>John Fletcher, *The Last Check*, in *The Works of the Rev. John Fletcher* (London: Richard Edwards, 1807), 6:182.

<sup>2</sup>Adam Clarke and J. B. B. Clarke, *An Account of the Religious and Literary Life of Adam Clarke* (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1837) 1:146.

<sup>3</sup>Fletcher, *An Essay on the Doctrine of the New Birth*, *The Asbury Theological Journal*. 50.1 (Spring, 1998): 35.

<sup>4</sup>George Lawton, *Shropshire Saint* (London: The Epworth Press, 1960), 28.

linked the new birth to Christian perfection. His sermon on “The Circumcision of Heart (written in 1733) identified Christian perfection with the new birth,<sup>5</sup> and his first standard sermon, “Salvation by Faith” (1738) speaks of justification and being “born again of the Spirit” in the larger Anglo-Catholic sense of being saved from “actual” and “original” sin.<sup>6</sup> In his sermon on “Christian Perfection” (1741) he made a distinction between “babes in Christ” as being “born again in the lowest sense” as distinguished from “perfect men.”<sup>7</sup> He referred to those who are born again in the lowest sense” as being “justified.”<sup>8</sup> He eventually linked the new birth to the beginning moment of the Christian life as distinct from full sanctification, as described in his sermon, “The New Birth” (1743).<sup>9</sup> This idea of the new birth as occurring at the moment of justifying faith became normative in Methodism. Wesley and Methodism thus moved away from the Anglo/Catholic definition of being born again and justified in the larger sense to the more restricted Protestant notion.

On the other hand, Charles Wesley’s identified the new birth with Christian perfection. His view is expressed in this verse:

While one evil thought remains  
I am not born of God.<sup>10</sup>

So the two brothers held to differing views on the meaning of the new birth. J. Ernest Rattenbury<sup>11</sup> and John Tyson<sup>12</sup> have pointed out that Charles consistently used the concept of being born again with full sanctification. As we shall see, Charles’s larger definition of the new birth corresponds more closely with the new baptismal liturgy of the United Methodist Church that “we are incorporated into God’s mighty acts of salvation and given new birth through water and the Spirit.” Although John Wesley linked his doctrine of justification to Christian baptism, he

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<sup>5</sup>John Wesley, Sermon 17, “Circumcision of Heart,” § 1, in *Sermons I*, ed. Albert C. Outler, vol. 1 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976– ), 406.

<sup>6</sup>John Wesley, Sermon 17, “Circumcision of Heart,” § 2, in *Works*, 1:124.

<sup>7</sup>John Wesley, Sermon 40, “Christian Perfection,” § 2, in *Works*, 2:105.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.* §2, 106.

<sup>9</sup>Wesley, Sermon 45, “The New Birth,” *Works*, 2:187.

<sup>10</sup>Cited by J. Ernest Rattenbury, *The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley’s Hymns* (London: Epworth Press, 1941), 261.

<sup>11</sup>J. Ernest Rattenbury, 260-264.

<sup>12</sup>John Tyson, *Charles Wesley on Sanctification* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1986), 214-225.

never adequately showed how his doctrine of perfection was connected to the life of the Church sacramentally. Consequently, it tended to be marginalized as optional rather than an integral part of what it means for a believer to be a member of Christ's Church. It was sometimes interpreted by critics as an elitist notion. Now with the new baptismal liturgy that dilemma has been resolved by the addition of the laying on of hands symbolizing the sanctifying graces and gifts of the Spirit.

### The New Baptismal Liturgy

It has sometimes been said that confirmation is a rite in search of a theology because there has been confusion on the exact meaning of it. The Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches sought to resolve this confusion with its report on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* in 1982, known as "the Lima Text" because the conference was held in Lima, Peru. This report showed a convergence of belief among all of its participating denominations that in "God's work of salvation, the paschal mystery of Christ's death and resurrection is inseparably linked with the pentecostal gift of the Holy Spirit. . . . Baptism in its full meaning signifies and effects both."<sup>13</sup>

This duality of Easter and Pentecost represents the two decisive moments in salvation history without separating them into a dualism. Christian initiation thus entails forgiveness of sins and regeneration through Jesus' death/resurrection on the one hand, and the baptism or filling with the Spirit to strengthen, empower, and sanctify the believer to be faithful servants of Christ, on the other hand. So Easter and Pentecost are the two events in salvation history that are reenacted in the sacrament of Christian baptism and are to be appropriated evangelically through personal decisions of faith.

The reason for this development was new information emerging from patristic studies showing that the laying on of hands signifying Pentecost had been left out of the baptismal liturgy in the Western Church in the 5th century and was postponed for a later time when the bishop could be present. The *Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus* (dating back to 215 A.D.) was one of the reconstructed documents that had a major influence in this revision.<sup>14</sup> This document showed that catechumens were baptized

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<sup>13</sup>*Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, 4-6. Cf. Gerard Austin, *Anointing with the Spirit, The Rite of Confirmation* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1985), 84.

<sup>14</sup>Frank C. Senn, *Christian liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1997), 93; Cf. *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St.*

in the river and then subsequently went up to the church where hands were laid on them for the bestowal of the Spirit, thus indicating that water baptism and fullness of Spirit were distinct from each other with a special meaning of their own, even as Easter and Pentecost were distinct events in the history of salvation with a distinctive meaning of their own.<sup>15</sup> The New Testament evidence for this practice was the example of the Samaritans in Acts 8:14-16, and the Ephesians in Acts 19:1-6 and Hebrews 6:2.

After baptism was split up into two parts in the 5th century, the Pentecost bestowal of the Catholic liturgist thinks it should have been called the rite of "Sanctification" because the laying of hands signifies to be sealed and imprinted with God-likeness which entails more than just being strengthened.<sup>16</sup> Now by universal agreement in the modern ecumenical renewal movement, baptism as Christian initiation into the church entails baptism with water (Easter) and the laying on of hands (Pentecost).<sup>17</sup>

### **John Wesley and Confirmation**

The Faith and Order Commission requested that participating churches respond to the Lima Text. The response of the United Methodist bishops was that they were uncertain about confirmation because they had no rite of confirmation from the beginning of Methodist history and only recently had it become a part of their liturgy but without clear meaning.<sup>18</sup> The bishops noted with regret that its baptismal liturgy made no mention "of the giving of the Holy Spirit in baptism, [or] confirmation."<sup>19</sup>

That is a remarkable admission from the bishops of a church with deep roots in High Anglican theology. Of course, Wesley is the reason for this omission because he did not see the relevance of it, or perhaps he did not agree with its theology. On the day that John Wesley may have been

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*Hippolytus of Rome, Bishop and Martyr*, edited Gregory Dix and reissued with corrections, preface and bibliography by Henry Chadwick (London: S.P.C.K., 1968). Cf. Gregory Dix, *The Theology of Confirmation in Relation to Baptism* (Westminster [London]: Dacre Press, 1946).

<sup>15</sup>Senn, 93-94.

<sup>16</sup>Gregory Dix, *The Theology of Confirmation in Relation to Baptism* (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1946), 25.

<sup>17</sup>Cf. Austin, *Anointing with the Spirit*, 92.

<sup>18</sup>*Churches Respond to BEM: Official Response to the "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" Text*, ed. Max Thurian, 6 vols. (Geneva: W.C.C., 1986-88), 2:182; cf. Wainwright, *Methodists in Dialog* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1995), 210ff.

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

confirmed there were over 800 persons who showed up for the bishop to confirm—many of whom just showed up without proper preparation and many of these had been confirmed multiple times previously.<sup>20</sup> So the rite was probably a meaningless one for him. One of the irregularities of his father, Samuel Wesley, as the rector of Epworth was to serve his son John Holy Communion when he was eight years old in violation of the Book of Common Prayer which required a child to be confirmed before receiving Communion.<sup>21</sup>

It can be assumed that John's disregard for confirmation grows out of his father's irregularity, and it is possible that his father's irregularity was one of the lingering influences of a discarded Puritan heritage. John Calvin had spoken with great disdain against the rite of confirmation with the laying on of hands, which he called "rotten and filthy anointing."<sup>22</sup> Puritans normally adopted Calvin's negative attitude.

Is Wesley's dismissal of this rite another one of his inconsistencies? In his treatise on Christian perfection, Fletcher said he was more exact in defining Christian perfection in terms of a "sanctifying *baptism* [of *out-pouring*] of the Spirit,"<sup>23</sup> than John Wesley, and he once said to his future wife that he preferred to "distinguish more exactly [than John Wesley] between the believer baptized with the Pentecostal power of the Holy Ghost, and the believer who, like the Apostles after our Lord's ascension, is not yet filled with that power."<sup>24</sup> He also said to the Countess of Huntingdon when John Wesley was "altogether consistent" that his doctrine of perfection corresponds to what is termed "the baptism with the Spirit."<sup>25</sup> Fletcher also once said to Charles Wesley: "The difference [between your brother and me] consists (if there is any) in my thinking, that those who were . . . baptized and sealed with the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost . . . were in the state of christian perfection. . . . As contradistinguished from the faith of ~~the~~ babes, or carnal believers . . . which the apostles had

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<sup>20</sup>Bernard G. Holland, *Baptism in Early Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 1970), 20.

<sup>21</sup>Holland, 21.

<sup>22</sup>John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 2:211.

<sup>23</sup>*Last Check*, in *Works*, 6:384.

<sup>24</sup>Fletcher's letter to Mary Bosanquet, March 7, 1778, cited by Luke Tyerman, *Wesley's Designated Successor* (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1883), 411-412.

<sup>25</sup>A letter published in Tyerman, *Wesley's Designated Successor*, 182-183.

before the day of pentecost.”<sup>26</sup> Because Fletcher believed John Wesley was inconsistent in connecting Pentecost and Christian perfection, his intention was to make John Wesley’s theology consistent at this point.

Wesley publicly noted in a reply to his Anglican critics that he promoted confirmation, along with other Church practices, with “scrupulous exactness” as a loyal priest of the Church of England.<sup>27</sup> Considering that the rite of confirmation was “a necessary qualification for participating in Holy Communion,” it would have been irregular for Wesley to ignore his Church’s teaching on the importance of this ordinance.<sup>28</sup> Even though he said he complied with Anglican teaching on confirmation, it is apparent that he did not, because he regularly served Holy Communion to those who had not been confirmed.<sup>29</sup>

### The Meaning of Confirmation in Wesley’s Day

The liturgy of Christian initiation, particularly the rite of confirmation, became a matter of considerable interest within the Anglican Church toward the end of the nineteenth century and first part of the 20th century before it became an issue in the larger ecumenical movement in the 1950’s. In 1891, A. J. Mason wrote a book on *The Relation of Confirmation to Baptism*.<sup>30</sup> Then, in 1921, he published *The Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*. These homilies were written around 380 A.D., and they defined the seal of the Spirit as a subsequent moment beyond water baptism. It is not known for sure who Macarius was, but Patristic scholars have shown he was not the Egyptian desert Father, but rather he lived in and around Syria and had a close friendship with the greatest of the early church fathers, Gregory of Nyssa.<sup>31</sup> Mason called attention to the non-sacramental nature of the preaching of pseudo-

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<sup>26</sup>“Unexampled Labours,” *Letters of the Revd John Fletcher to leaders in the Evangelical Revival*, ed., with an introduction by Peter Forsaith, with additional notes by Kenneth Loyer (London: Epworth, 2008), 320.

<sup>27</sup>John Wesley, “An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion,” in *The Appeals to Men of Reason and Religion and Certain Related Open Letters*, ed. Gerald R. Cragg, vol. 11 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976- ), 79.

<sup>28</sup>Frank Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970), 157.

<sup>29</sup>Holland, 28.

<sup>30</sup>Dix, *The Theology of Confirmation in Relation to Baptism*, 8.

<sup>31</sup>Cf. David Bundy, “Christian Virtue: John Wesley and the Alexandrian Tradition,” *The Wesleyan Theological Journal* 26 (No. 1, Spring 1991), 19, 139, 149.

Macarius, and he pointed out that his preaching was not a call to membership in the organizational structure of the church or to a participation in its sacraments and ordinances. Rather, he called his hearers to receive in a personal way “the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost.”<sup>32</sup> These homilies were important, however, in the Anglican liturgical movement because it indicated that pseudo-Macarius appealed to his fellow monks to appropriate the meaning of confirmation in a personalized way.

These homilies were translated into English in 1721 under the title of *Primitive Morality, or The Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*. John Wesley translated some of these homilies,<sup>33</sup> and John Fletcher drew heavily from them and quoted them as supporting Wesley’s concept of Christian perfection.<sup>34</sup> Methodist preachers in the nineteenth century referred to pseudo-Macarius as an early source of Methodist belief in freedom from sin through the baptism with the Spirit.<sup>35</sup> Even a causal reading of these homilies will show why the early Methodists thought of pseudo-Macarius in this way because he equated “perfection,” “sanctifying grace,” and “circumcision of heart” with “the baptism of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>36</sup>

Mason called the homilies of Pseudo-Macarius “a companion volume to the *Imitation of Christ*.”<sup>37</sup> We know that this classic by Thomas à Kempis greatly inspired Wesley, but so did the *Fifty Homilies* of Pseudo-Macarius, although we do not know to what extent. However, we know that John Fletcher drew heavily from Wesley’s translated version.<sup>38</sup> Responding to some of his critics who accused Wesley and Fletcher of creating the doctrine of entire sanctification, Fletcher writes: “From the

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., xxii-xxiii.

<sup>33</sup>*Pseudo-Macarius, The Fifty Spiritual Homilies and the Great Letter*, trans, edited, and with an introduction by George A. Maloney, S. J. (New York; Paulist Press, 1992), 24. Maloney identified the author of this early English translation as Thomas Haywood, and Ted A. Campbell has pointed out that Wesley’s translation was based on this work. Ted A. Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1991), 66-67.

<sup>34</sup>John Fletcher, *An Essay on the Doctrine of the New Birth*, 42.

<sup>35</sup>Cf. George Peck, *The Scripture Doctrine of Christian Perfection* (New York; Carlton & Phillips, 1854), 68.

<sup>36</sup>Pseudo-Macarius, *The Fifty Spiritual Homilies and the Great Letter*, Homily 47, ed George A. Maloney, 232.

<sup>37</sup>A. J. Mason, “Introduction,” *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian* (London: SPCK, 1921), xlii.

<sup>38</sup>Ted A. Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity* Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1991), 66-67.

preceding extract [of these homilies] I conclude, that, if Macarius, who lived near 1300 years ago, so clear preached the baptism and dispensation of the Holy Spirit, Mr. John Wesley and I cannot reasonably be charged with novelty for doing the same thing.”<sup>39</sup>

However, pseudo-Macarius’ preaching on the baptism with the Spirit, so typical of John Fletcher, was not typical of John Wesley. The text for John Wesley’s sermon on “Scriptural Christianity” is Acts 4:31 (“And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost”). This text is one of the exegetical foundations for the rite of confirmation, and Wesley highlights the whole fruit and graces of the Spirit issuing in a life “full of love” without a word of reference to confirmation. Could it be argued that Wesley wanted to stress the inner reality of the fruit of the Spirit and sanctifying grace in a personalized manner and hence made no mention of confirmation, just as Mason says was true of pseudo-Macarius?

In addressing the question of how John Wesley understood the rite of confirmation, we have only one explanation in his writings, and that one instance objection to confirmation, but he disagreed with the Roman Catholic sacerdotalism associated with it. Otherwise, he understood confirmation to symbolize the meaning of full sanctification.<sup>40</sup>

In the prayer of confirmation from the Roman Catholic catechism cited by Wesley, the connection is made between a personal Pentecost-like experience and full sanctification: “Pour out [the language of Pentecost] the fullness of sanctification.”<sup>41</sup> This Roman Catholic interpretation corresponded with the theological interpretation of confirmation as found in the Church of England. The Anglican ritual, which was revised in 1662 and used in Wesley’s day, included this prayer of confirmation: “Confirm and settle the godly Resolutions They have now made. Sanctify Them throughout that They may become the Temples of the Holy Ghost.”<sup>42</sup>

One of the traditional biblical passages upon which the rite of confirmation is based is Acts 19:1: “Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?” (KJV). Wesley here used the same translation as the King James

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<sup>39</sup>Fletcher, *The Doctrine of the New Birth*, 42.

<sup>40</sup>*Works* (Jackson), 10:117, “A Roman Catechism, Faithfully Drawn Out of the Allowed Writings of the Church of Rome, With a Reply Thereto.”

<sup>41</sup>Wesley, *Works* (Jackson) 10:116-117, “A Roman Catechism.” Cf. James Parker, *An Introduction to the History of the Successive Revisions of the Book of Common Prayer* (Oxford: Parker and Co., 1877), cclx.

<sup>42</sup>Peter J. Jagger, *Christian Initiation 1582-1969, Rites of Baptism and Confirmation Since the Reformation Period* (London: SPCK, 1970), 32.

Version in his *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*, and he gave the reception of the Spirit the same meaning as the rite of confirmation—"the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, as well as His sanctifying graces."<sup>43</sup> Fletcher interpreted Wesley to mean that the Ephesian disciples were fully sanctified through the bestowal of the Spirit.<sup>44</sup> In a parallel passage in Acts 8:15 regarding the Samaritans (which is also used as a basis for confirmation), Fletcher believed that Wesley's *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament* interpreted their special reception of the Spirit as their full sanctification.<sup>45</sup>

The logic of Fletcher's view naturally follows from the history of confirmation in the Church of England, although it may not reflect Wesley's actual intent. This can be seen in the prevailing view of confirmation in Wesley's day defended by Jeremy Taylor (1613-67) against the non-conforming clergy (the dissenters). Wesley said in his *Plain Account of Christian Perfection* that he was greatly influenced by Jeremy Taylor's book, *Holy Living and Holy Dying*, as being one of the primary influences that launched him on his journey toward Christian perfection. Taylor also wrote another treatise that highlighted the importance of "sanctification and power,"<sup>46</sup> entitled *A Discourse of Confirmation*. It was based on Paul's question to the Ephesian believers in Acts 19:2, "Have you received the Holy Ghost since you believed?"<sup>47</sup> This work provides important background for Methodists whose theological heritage is in the Church of England, especially since Wesley's theology is shaped by the High Anglican tradition as opposed to the Puritan, Low Church Anglican tradition.

In defending the rite of confirmation, he pointed out the distinction between water baptism and "the baptism with the Spirit" through a comprehensive treatment of the theology of the Early Church Fathers.<sup>48</sup> We do not know if Wesley read this essay, but it is easy to discern the similarity between Taylor's exposition of confirmation and Wesley's idea of Christian perfection, and particularly with Fletcher's emphasis on Pentecost. Taylor does not limit the appropriation of "perfection" to the imposition of hands in the rite of confirmation. He writes: "The grace of Christ is not tied to the sacraments," particularly mentioning the ordinance of confirmation.<sup>49</sup> The decisive thing is the "inward unction."<sup>50</sup> If one substi-

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<sup>43</sup>Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (London: The Epworth Press, 1958; originally published January 4, 1754), 471.

<sup>44</sup>Fletcher, *The Doctrine of the New Birth*, 54.

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

<sup>46</sup>Jeremy Taylor, "A Discourse of Confirmation," *The Whole Works of the Right Reverend Jeremy Taylor* (London: Longman, 1849), 5:636, 633.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 5:609-669.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 5:619ff.

tuted “full sanctification” in place of the term, confirmation, one would have almost thought that John Fletcher wrote this essay. For it is saturated with Pentecostal language as descriptive of “perfective” and “sanctifying” grace,<sup>51</sup> “perfection,”<sup>52</sup> “power from on high,”<sup>53</sup> “sanctification and power,”<sup>54</sup> “divine unction,”<sup>55</sup> “His holy comforts,”<sup>56</sup> “effusion of the Spirit,”<sup>57</sup> “descent of the Holy Ghost,”<sup>58</sup> “seal of the Spirit,”<sup>59</sup> “the gift of the Spirit,”<sup>60</sup> and he repeatedly used the phrase, “baptism of the Holy Ghost,”<sup>61</sup> to speak of the sanctification of believers subsequent to their baptism with water.<sup>62</sup>

Even if Wesley and Fletcher did not read this essay by Taylor, it shows that the concept of perfection permeated the intellectual background of Anglican liturgy and theology. Taylor was born approximately fifty years after the martyrdom of the English Reformers, Thomas Cranmer, Nicholas Ridley, and Hugh Latimer, who were executed by “Bloody Mary.” Taylor was an apologist for their views that were being threatened by the influx of Calvinist theology into Anglicanism during the reign of Queen Elizabeth under the rising influence of Puritanism. Representing the traditional Anglican viewpoint, he often found himself in dispute with Presbyterians. In the midst of this conflict between the non-conforming party and the traditional Anglican party, Taylor wrote this essay on confirmation to defend its validity as a legitimate rite.<sup>63</sup> He represented the best in spiritual leadership and scholarship among the “High Anglicans” during this time of ferment.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 5:654.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 5:634, 652, 659, 660.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 5:616, 642.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 5:616, 642.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 5:655.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 5:636.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 5:622, 652.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 5:659.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 5:635.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 5:622.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 5:638, 656, 658.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 5:624, 633.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 5:657.

<sup>63</sup>Cf. Hugh Ross Williamson, *Jeremy Taylor* (Folcroft, Pa.: Folcroft Library Editions, 1973), 5:609-614.

<sup>64</sup>Cf. Harry Boone Porter, *Jeremy Taylor, Liturgist* (London: S.P.C.K., 1979), 7-23; *The Whole Works of the Right Reverend Jeremy Taylor*. 1:xciii, “The Life of Jeremy Taylor.”

Interestingly enough, when the Act of Uniformity (1622) required all ministers in the Church of England to use the *Book of Common Prayer*, the non-conforming ministers were removed from their churches, including John Wesley's own great grandfather, who was a Puritan<sup>65</sup> (though Wesley's father and mother rejected Puritanism and became traditional Anglicans). The irony of this development is that Jeremy Taylor represented the partisan point of view which led to the ouster of John Wesley's own great grandfather from the Church of England, and yet Taylor's writings became a major inspiration in shaping Wesley's pursuit of holiness and in giving him a sense of spiritual direction. But John Wesley by his actions and irregular practices sided with his Puritan ancestors on the matter of confirmation.

### John Wesley Disregarded Fletcher's Recommendation on Confirmation

John Fletcher linked confirmation directly to John Wesley's idea of perfection. He said: "It was a custom of the Apostles and elders in the primitive Church, adopted by our own church [of England], to pray that young Believers" might be filled with the Spirit through the laying on of hands.<sup>66</sup> Fletcher referred to "the *laying on of hands* on the believers, who apply for confirmation: A solemn gesture, which Peter, John, and Paul used, when they confirmed the believers of Samaria and Ephesus, who, tho' they had been baptized, had not yet received the abundant measure of the Spirit, which was bestowed on the disciples at the day of Pentecost." Fletcher draws from the homilies of the Church of England to argue that the purpose of confirmation was to sanctify baptized believers "in his sudden, Pentecostal way."<sup>67</sup>

In a letter to Wesley (August 1, 1775), Fletcher offered some proposals suggesting ways in which Methodism could function as a "daughter-church" within the Church of England. Three key proposals show his commitment to the liturgical and sacramental nature of the Church of England. First, Fletcher proposed that John Wesley modify the thirty nine articles of the Church of England "rectified according to the purity of the gospel." Second, he proposed that John make "some needful alterations in the liturgy."<sup>68</sup> Interestingly enough, John carried out both of those proposals when he authorized the founding of the Methodist Episcopal

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<sup>65</sup>Cf. *Wesley's Standard Sermons*, ed. Edward H. Sugden (London: Epworth Press, 1961), 1:88.

<sup>66</sup>Fletcher, *The Doctrine of the New Birth*, 60.

<sup>67</sup>Fletcher, *The Doctrine of the New Birth*, 54.

<sup>68</sup>*Unexampled Labours*, 327.

Church in America by altering the Articles of Religion from thirty six to twenty five articles and by modifying the Book of Common Prayer into *The Sunday Service* in 1784.

Third, Fletcher proposed that Wesley seek permission from the archbishop to perform confirmation upon Methodists,<sup>69</sup> and “that the important office of confirmation shall be performed with the utmost solemnity by Mr. Wesley . . . and that none shall be admitted to the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper but such as have been confirmed or are ready so to be confirmed.”<sup>70</sup> John Wesley disregarded this proposal, and the consequence was that American Methodism was given an incomplete liturgy of Christian initiation because Pentecost was omitted.

Would the archbishop have granted such a request for Methodism to function as a daughter-church within the Church of England, and is it possible that he would have granted Wesley the authority to confirm Methodists? Fletcher obviously thought so, and perhaps Fletcher had good reasons to think so. At least we know that at one point King George offered Fletcher “a preferment” in the church,<sup>71</sup> which likely meant he would have become a bishop. In some political correspondence there are possible hints that Fletcher could have been appointed a bishop in New England,<sup>72</sup> although Fletcher turned down any suggestions of “preferment” in the church, just as he turned down John Wesley’s repeated offers to be his successor.

Not only was confirmation an important means of grace in Fletcher’s theology, it had personally meant much to his wife, Mary Bosanquet Fletcher, who had been confirmed at St. Paul’s Cathedral, where Susannah Wesley herself had been confirmed. At the age of thirteen, Mary Fletcher reported confirmation to be “a very rousing ordinance” for her. She noted that “for some months after, every time I approached the Lord’s Table, I had a very peculiar sense of his presence.”<sup>73</sup> Adam Clarke defended and promoted the rite of confirmation as signifying a “perpetual covenant to give themselves wholly to God, that they may have a thorough “death unto sin” (=entire sanctification).<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 328.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>*The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, ed. John Telford (London: Epworth Press, 1931). 6:197; see Telford’s comments.

<sup>72</sup>Peter S. Forsaith, “The Long Fletcher Incumbency,” *Religion, Gender, and Industry* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 219-221.

<sup>73</sup>Henry Moore, *Life of Mary Fletcher* (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1817), 19.

<sup>74</sup>*Life of Adam Clarke* (autobiography), 3:118.

### **Early American Methodism and Confirmation**

Instead of seeking to find a way for Methodism to stay within the Church of England as Fletcher had proposed, John Wesley engaged in another one of his irregular ecclesiastical actions by holding in secret an ordination service for Thomas Coke to go to America to start a new denomination, the Methodist Episcopal Church. With the gathering clouds of a revolutionary war hanging over American Methodists in 1784 and with the Episcopal clergy returning to England, John Wesley believed he had no other option than to authorize the formation of the American Methodists into a new denomination. They convened their first General Conference under the leadership of Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury with directions from John Wesley on how to worship and what to believe. John Wesley sent an amended version of the Anglican Book of Common Prayer with Thomas Coke, which he called *The Sunday Service*, as their book of liturgical worship. John Wesley also sent an amended version of the Anglican Articles of Religion, along with the Large Minutes which contained instructions on what constituted normative Methodist belief. As noted above, Fletcher had recommended both of these actions to John Wesley in 1775, but the laying on of hands in confirmation never became a part of Methodist liturgy until over one hundred and fifty years after its beginning when liturgical reforms recommended by the Faith and Order Commission made their way into the liturgy of the United Methodist Church in 1976.

### **The New Baptism Liturgy in the United Methodist Church**

These liturgical reforms had thus made their way into the liturgy of the United Methodist Church even before the Lima Conference had produced its report entitled *A Service of Baptism, Confirmation, and Renewal* in 1982. The United Methodist baptism liturgy came to include the acts of water baptism and the laying on of hands. After the application of water, the minister lays his hands on the head of the person and says: "The power of the Holy Spirit work within you, that being born through water and the Spirit you may be a faithful witness of Jesus Christ. Amen." This reform later appeared in *The United Methodist Hymnal* in 1989, and the *United Methodist Book of Worship* in 1992.

The 1996 General Conference of the United Methodist Church officially adopted the report of the Baptism Study Commission which was entitled, "By Water and the Spirit—A United Methodist Understanding of Baptism." One of the goals embodied in this document was to restore "the

Wesleyan blend of sacramental and evangelical aspects” of Christian baptism that was typical of John Wesley’s Anglican heritage. Another goal was to restore the laying on of hands in Christian baptism that Wesley discarded.

The United Methodist Church also retained a special service which it calls confirmation. It is a service that entails the first public profession of faith of those who were baptized as infants who have reached the age of accountability where they are able to make a public and personal profession of faith. Prior to this service of confirmation there is to be a special time of preparation for developing a self-understanding of the doctrines of the Christian faith and spiritual disciplines necessary for the life of discipleship. Such persons are already members of the church as a result of having been baptized as infants. “Confirmation is a dynamic action of the Holy Spirit that can be repeated. In confirmation the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is invoked to provide the one being confirmed with the power to live in the faith that he or she has professed. The basic meaning of confirmation is strengthening and making firm in Christian faith and life. The ritual action in confirmation is the laying on of hands as the sign of God’s continuing gift of the grace of Pentecost.”

This idea of future personal Pentecosts and repeated anointings and the laying on of hands for increasing one’s commitment to a faithful life of holiness corresponds with Fletcher’s idea of “fresh baptisms,” “daily baptisms,” and “fuller baptisms” of the Spirit of Pentecost as a means of coming to love God abundantly and more perfectly. However, this next section will illustrate some problems associated with an emphasis on the work of the Spirit when it is not properly embedded in a holistic understanding of Christian initiation, especially in reference to Christian baptism.

### **A Critique of Fletcher Theology of Pentecost by Mary Bosanquet and Joseph Benson**

In the Fletcher archival collection at the John Rylands Library, I discovered three manuscripts buried in a box. The main manuscript was entitled, “The Doctrine of the New Birth, as it is stated in these sheets, is directly or indirectly maintained by the Most Spiritual Divines, especially in their Sacred Poems.” Two other sections, “Second Part Containing Answers to the Objections Made to This Essay” and “The Dispensation of the Father,” were added to it. These connected manuscripts circulated among some of the key leaders among Methodism, including Mary Bosanquet, Joseph Benson, and Thomas Coke. They were written between

1776 and 1777.<sup>75</sup> It will be necessary to review these materials, along with recent assessments of their content, in order to evaluate the relevance of Fletcher's theology of Pentecost for the new baptismal liturgy.

The theme of the first essay was the distinction between being "born of water" and being "born of the Spirit." He defined "to be born again of water and of the Spirit" to be "baptized with water and with the Holy Ghost, or being renewed to repentance and love according to the two gospel-dispensations, which are sealed by a baptism of water, and a baptism of fire?"<sup>76</sup> In a letter to Mary Bosanquet, he explained that his concept of the new birth entailed "the doctrine of Christian perfection" as "the *fullness of . . . love . . . given to the Christian believers . . . since the Day of Pentecost.*"<sup>77</sup> As noted above, like Charles Wesley, Fletcher defined the new birth as Christian perfection instead of justifying faith.

Fletcher's essay on the new birth gave special attention to the role of confirmation because he believed this rite preserved in its liturgy the importance of believers being filled with the Holy Spirit. He cites the liturgy to show that after adults have been born again through the administration of water-baptism, then the bishop prays: "*Give thy Holy Spirit to these (regenerate) persons, that they may continue [as] thy servants.*"<sup>78</sup> Fletcher cites from the Edwardian Homily on Whitsunday, Part I, to show that the purpose of confirmation is to sanctify believers: "It is the office of the Holy Ghost to sanctify. Neither does he think it sufficient inwardly to work for the new birth in man unless he also dwell and abound in him. O what comfort is this to the heart of as true' (*i.e. truly confirmed*) 'Christian to think, that the Holy Ghost dwelleth in him."<sup>79</sup>

Mary Bosanquet had access to this manuscript on the new birth while Fletcher was visiting Switzerland. She gave it to Joseph Benson for his review, and Benson sent his critique back to her (see the attached Appendix containing Benson's letter). This correspondence took place three years before Mary Bosanquet and John Fletcher were married. Mary Bosanquet and Joseph Benson were two of the dearest friends that Fletcher had, and they spoke from their hearts to each other about their concern.

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<sup>75</sup>*The Asbury Theological Journal*. 50.1 (Spring, 1998):35-56, 57-64. For the circulation of this essay, see L. Wood, *The Meaning of Pentecost In Early Methodism* (Lanham, Maryland, Scarecrow Press, 2002), 228-230.

<sup>76</sup>Fletcher, "The Doctrine of the New Birth," 36.

<sup>77</sup>Cited by Tyerman, *Wesley's Designated Successor*, 411-412.

<sup>78</sup>"The Doctrine of the New Birth," 54.

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*

Benson began his lengthy letter to Mary Bosanquet affirming his agreement with Fletcher's language of "the baptism—the gift—the fullness—the indwelling—of the Spirit." He observed: "Now who of us will speak a word against this? Who of us will not, rather as we have ability & opportunity bear our testimony to it? About this there is then can be no disputation." Benson said the problem with this essay was not the "invaluable blessing" associated with the fullness of the Spirit, but "the manner in which he has represented" it.

First, Benson did not agree with Fletcher's "new" idea that anyone "to whom the gospel is clearly preach'd & its greatest blessing the fullness of the Spirit offer[e]d, may still be under the inferior dispensations of divine grace." Benson considered this generous assessment to be a "palpable mistake" and could "produce worse effects!!" Rather, Benson says: "Our dispensation calls us to come up higher than those who lived under former dispensations could, & we cannot neglect so to do & be guiltless. We cannot rest in the low at[tainm[ent]s of a Jew much less in the lower grace of the Heathen & yet be (as he says) accepted, or the children of God according to our dispensation."

Benson also worried that Fletcher's language of the dispensation of the Father might encourage Jews and heathens to be satisfied with their pre-Christian state of grace because Fletcher affirmed that they were accepted of God. Fletcher had written in the manuscript: "To be deficient in orthodoxy is bad: but is it better to be deficient in charity?"<sup>80</sup> Fletcher had offered a vigorous defense of Gentiles and Jews as well as Deists, Socinians, and Unitarians as being accepted of God despite the fact that they were living in the lower dispensation of the Father and hence were accepted of God although they were deficient in orthodoxy.<sup>81</sup> Benson worried about the implications of this idea: "I fear what he says of the dispensation of the Father<sup>82</sup> & of being accepted accord[in]g to that disp.[ensation] if we only fear God and work right[eousness] will have a tendency to make many rest without faith working by love w[hi]ch only avaieth in Ch[ris]t. Jes.[us]." This too generous assessment would "perplex the mind and "to produce worse effects!!"

Benson's second concern was Fletcher might be expecting too much of those who had been filled with the Spirit. If Fletcher lowered the bar

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<sup>80</sup>"The Language of the Father's Dispensation," 73.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>82</sup>See Fletcher, "The Language of the Dispensation of the Father," *The Asbury Theological Journal*, 50.1 (Spring, 1998).

too much for those in the lower dispensation of the Father, he raised it too high for those in the dispensation of the Spirit. Those who had heard the gospel preached and had been offered an opportunity to experience the fullness of the Spirit but rejected it, Benson said they should be considered “reprobates.” On the other hand, Benson worried that Fletcher raised the level of expectation much too high for those seeking to enter the dispensation of the Spirit by leading people possibly to think that “those miraculous gifts bestowed so plentifully on the day of Pentecost” would be repeated today.

Reflecting back on his days with Fletcher at Trevecca College, Benson said to Mary Bosanquet: “I am led to acknowledge this objection from experience. I know the time when my expectations were too high and extraordinary I looked for greater things than humanity will admit and things more out of the common way than seems consistent with the free and proper experience of our rational faculties.” When these expectations were not met, Benson said for a time he doubted his Christian experience, and even questioned whether or not there was a God.<sup>83</sup>

Benson mentioned to her in his concluding comments that he was discussing other matters with Fletcher in their letters of correspondence and hence requested her to send a transcription of his letter to Fletcher so he could see their critique. Benson and Fletcher remained intimate friends throughout Fletcher’s life, and Fletcher relied upon Benson’s critical suggestions.<sup>84</sup> As a follow up to this letter, Mary Bosanquet cared enough about Fletcher to confront him with their concern about raising too high expectations about being baptized with the Spirit, suggesting that he should develop a “*less plan* of the doctrine of the New Birth [=Christian perfection].”<sup>85</sup> She also diplomatically cautioned him about being perceived as being over-run with fanatical “*enthusiasm*.”

Fletcher responded to this concern in a forceful manner in his *Portrait of St. Paul*, which he was in the process of writing at the same time. He dismissed the idea that being “the temple of the Holy Spirit” entailed any miraculous expectations, except the miracle of Christ’s love filling the heart.<sup>86</sup> Fletcher said “the *fanatic* conceives himself to be animated by the

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<sup>83</sup>Cf. also similar comments in Randy L. Maddox and J. Russell Frazier, “Joseph Benson’s Initial Letter to John Wesley Concerning Spirit Baptism and Christian Perfection,” *The Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 48 (Number 2, Fall 2013): 72.

<sup>84</sup>Benson, *The Life of the Rev. John William de la Flechere*, in *Works*, 1:205.

<sup>85</sup>Mary Bosanquet’s letter to John Fletcher, August 30, 1778, cited in L. Wood, *The Meaning of Pentecost*, 229.

<sup>86</sup>*Portrait of St. Paul*, in *Works*, 8:295, 304-305.

Spirit of God, when his body is agitated by a rapid motion of the animal spirits, excited by the sallies of an over-heated imagination, and augmented by hysterical or by hypochondriacal vapors." Fletcher further downplayed the expectation of miraculous phenomena:

No mention is made of the miracles of Andronicus, Junia, and Barnabas, who were real Apostles: nor any miracles attributed to Titus or Timothy, though they were undoubted successors of the Apostles. Further; it is expressly said, that John the Baptist, though he was greater than the Prophets, did no miracle. John x. 41. On the other hand, some miraculous gifts were common in the church of Corinth, even among those, who were neither Apostles nor Evangelists: and these gifts were so far from being essential to apostolic zeal, that many unworthy brethren and many false Apostles, as well as the traitor Judas, were endued with them. This we are taught, in the most express terms, by our Lord himself. Matt.vii; 22.<sup>87</sup>

Fletcher's equation of being "born of the Spirit" with perfection was also incorporated into his Portrait of St. Paul,<sup>88</sup> but this essay on the new birth was not published.

After Fletcher's untimely death, Benson *The Christian Observer*, which had said that Fletcher "exceeded the boundaries" with "his expectations and expressions, relative to the gift of the Holy Spirit." Benson responded, saying, "I must be allowed to dwell a little upon" this subject of great importance for "this is a point which I can speak upon with *assurance*, having very frequently conversed and corresponded with Mr. Fletcher upon it, so that I knew his views thereon perfectly." Benson explained that Fletcher "expected another Pentecost," but not in their sense. He did not "*expect cloven or distinct tongues of fire* to rest upon him, or the *gift of tongues*, or that of *prophecy* so called, or of *healing*." He did not "expect to be enabled to raise the dead," and "he looked for nothing of this kind. He expected only those ordinary operations and graces of the Spirit in a full and mature state, which the Holy Scriptures declares to be essential to the character of a true and perfect Christian." Benson explained that Fletcher "expected to be stamped with that divine image of God . . . ; to be *sanctified wholly*," and that Fletcher did come to "experience the fulness of the Spirit which he looked for."<sup>89</sup> This defense of

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 8:302.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 8:243, 275.

<sup>89</sup>Benson, *The Life of the Rev. John William de la Flechere*, in *Works*, 8:435-436.

Fletcher's theology of Pentecost verifies Benson's unqualified endorsement without abatement.

Benson's biography, however, ignored Fletcher's High Church worshipping context that utilized its liturgy. And he ignored Fletcher's idea about the "important office of Confirmation," noted above. It is thus understandable that Fletcher's writings were vulnerable to misleading readers into individualistic notions of sanctifying grace and expectations of supernatural phenomena because of the heavy emphasis on a personal baptism with the Spirit without developing an adequate ecclesiology in his writings. Fletcher's writings were largely evangelical and revivalist, although he referenced the Book of Common Prayer and the Edwardian Homilies as support for his evangelical message. Henry Moore's report of a sample of Fletcher's evangelistic preaching shows that he used liturgical sources in his sermons,<sup>90</sup> thus potentially protecting them from a privatization of the sanctified life. Fletcher, like Wesley, also made effective use of the Eucharist as a means of converting grace. There is plenty of high praise for Fletcher's effectiveness as a preacher, but we have no records showing Fletcher's preaching resulted in fanatical responses, probably because of his High Anglican worshipping context.

Let me offer my own critique of Fletcher at this point. Fletcher virtually made a literal equation of Christian perfection and the baptism with the Spirit in his writings, even saying that he worried that he might die only a disciple of John the Baptist and that he was still waiting for Pentecost.<sup>91</sup> This in principle contradicted his High Church view of the sacrament of baptism through which believers are initiated into the community life of the Church. In other words, his writings did not show how to integrate Christian initiation through the sacrament of baptism with an evangelical experience, although his actual practice as the vicar of Madeley might have done so. Although believers might be *experientially* categorized in a *metaphorical* sense as pre-Pentecostal believers, I think it is important to emphasize they nonetheless are initiated into Christ's Church as full members through the sacrament of Holy Baptism and are worthy participants in Holy Communion. All Christians are born of water and of the Spirit in Christian baptism, and the promise and potential of salvation through Easter and Pentecost are already theirs and hence there is no pre-Pentecostal believer in a literal sense. The actualizing of God's sanctifying grace is deepened and enriched through further Pente-

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<sup>90</sup>Moore, *Life of Mary Fletcher*, 146n.

<sup>91</sup>"*Unexampled, Labours*," 288, 317.

cost infillings of the Spirit as happened also in the life of the disciples (Acts 4:31). It is probably true that many believers do not actualize the promise and potential of the Spirit's fullness in their daily lives and may live like the pre-Pentecostal disciples of the earthly Jesus in weakness, uncertainty, jealousy and fear. Preaching on the theme of the "sanctification and power" of Pentecost (as Jeremy Taylor termed the meaning of the rite of confirmation) can become a means of encouraging believers to personalize and actualize the full potential of Pentecost already granted to them sacramentally in baptism.

When Fletcher's theology of Pentecost was translated into American Methodism, it lacked his High Church worship liturgy. American Methodism also did not make much use of Wesley's *Sunday Service*, and to complicate things further Wesley deleted the rite of confirmation from the *Sunday Service*. The consequence is that the emphasis on entire sanctification tended to become individualistic from the outset and disconnected from an adequate ecclesiology, and it virtually succumbed to absolutizing the crisis moment of full sanctification by the end of the nineteenth century in the Wesleyan Holiness movement often with devastating results when one's excessive expectations were not met.

The United Methodist Baptismal Study Committee Report wanted to see the balance of the sacramental and evangelical emphases restored in the United Methodist Church because it had largely been lost since the time of John Wesley due to the untrained lay leadership of its preachers. However, it should not be forgotten that one of the reasons why Methodism became the largest Protestant denomination in America in the nineteenth century was because it was a revival movement calling the masses of people to justifying and full sanctifying grace. Francis Asbury believed that the camp meeting movement was a major source for the growth of the Methodist Episcopal Church, which he called "our harvest seasons."<sup>92</sup> It is also true that United Methodism has lost many members in the last century because of its weakened emphasis on evangelical and renewal experience. A balance between the sacramental and the evangelical is thus needed in order to have an adequate ecclesiology. Even if Fletcher was not successful in accomplishing this balance, his theology of the Spirit and his High Anglican theology of the sacraments can serve as a helpful model for uniting the two so long disjoined—being initiated into the Church through the sacrament of baptism and an evangelical experience of the

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<sup>92</sup>Henry Boehm, *Reminiscences, Historical and Biographical* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1866), 147.

larger meaning of the new birth as envisioned by Charles Wesley and Fletcher that includes full sanctifying grace.

### **Some Concluding Observations and Comments**

What is the biblical source for linking Pentecost and perfection? Fletcher highlighted that the day of Pentecost was the fulfillment of God's promise of a restored kingdom first announced by Moses who prophesied the Israelites would be driven from the land of Canaan because of a failure to worship only God, but Moses also prophesied that the day would come when the Lord would circumcise their hearts enabling them to love God with all their hearts, mind, and soul so that the Israelites would never be driven from the land of Canaan again (Deut. 30:6). This theme of restoration associated with the outpouring of the Spirit and the cleansing of the heart in sanctification was picked up by the prophets (Ezek. 36:24-28; Jer. 4:4; Joel 2:28; 3:17), and Peter declared this promise of a restored kingdom is what transpired on the day of Pentecost. Peter further explained to the Jerusalem Council that on the day of Pentecost their hearts had been circumcised by faith (Acts 15:8-9), recalling what Moses predicted would happen when the kingdom was to be restored; namely, that were now able to love God with all their hearts, minds, and souls as foretold by Moses. This corresponds with Paul's description of what happened on the day of Pentecost, when he said: "God's love has been poured out [=Pentecost language] in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who has been given [=Pentecost language] to us (Rom. 5:5). The phenomena of Pentecost were secondary evidences of the new kingdom as having already come, but the primary thing of being filled with the Spirit was the fruit of the Spirit, as John Wesley defined it in his sermon, "Scriptural Christianity."

This idea that Pentecost represented the sanctification of believers corresponds to Karl Barth's revised doctrine of the Holy Spirit after he had been an official observer of Vatican II (1962-65).<sup>93</sup> In his fourth volume of *Church Dogmatics*, entitled "The Baptism with the Holy Spirit," Karl Barth revised his earlier theology showing that in the book of Acts water baptism represented the beginning of the Christian life with the forgiveness of sins and regeneration, whereas the baptism with the Spirit represented the perfection and sanctification of the Christian life that is progressively realized through repeated baptisms of the Spirit until it is

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<sup>93</sup>*Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley, T. F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1969, 4.4: viii.

realized finally in heaven.<sup>94</sup> Barth, as a reformed theologian, argued that John Calvin got the significance of confirmation wrong.<sup>95</sup>

Wolfhart Pannenberg was a participant in the ecumenical/liturgical renewal movement and believed that Luther would have revised his negative attitude about the rite of confirmation bestowing the gift of the Spirit subsequent to baptism with water if he had access to the new patristic information.<sup>96</sup>

Contemporary Wesley scholars are divided in their view whether or not John Wesley was right to dismiss the rite of confirmation or whether John Fletcher had the better view. Among the Reformed scholars, Karl Barth believed that John Calvin was mistaken. Among Lutherans, Wolfhart Pannenberg believed that Luther was mistaken. Among Wesley scholars, I maintain that John Wesley was mistaken and Fletcher got it right, and I see the new baptismal liturgy as validating Fletcher's explanation that "the full baptism of Christ . . . has two branches, the baptism of water, and the baptism of the Spirit."

I was officially asked to give my input to the United Methodist Baptismal Study Committee when they were in the process of developing this new liturgy. Much of what I have included here in this paper was part of my response, and I believe it is consistent with the report on the new baptismal liturgy. I especially urged that the laying on of hands be allowed in repeated acts of deepening and renewed commitment because the original day of Pentecost was repeated subsequently in the book of Acts even for the disciples as in Acts 4:31. Of course, Easter was not repeatable.

I should also mention that Bishop Ole Borgen was the one who had asked the committee to get my input. His book, *John Wesley on the Sacraments: A Theological Study* (Abingdon Press, 1972), is a classic study of John Wesley's view of the sacrament, but he was not happy with my recommendations. Although Bishop Borgen agreed with Fletcher's theology on the baptism with the Spirit, he did not approve of the rite of confirmation. I think Fletcher would agree with the officially approved Report of the Baptism Study Committee, "By Water and the Spirit: A United Methodist Understanding of Baptism." Whether or not John Wesley would have been pleased, considering the new information from patristic stud-

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<sup>94</sup>*Church Dogmatics*, 4:4, 30, 34, 38, 41-46. Cf Laurence Wood, *Pentecostal Grace*, 52-56, for a discussion on Barth's view of the salvific significance of Easter and Pentecost.

<sup>95</sup>*Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>96</sup>Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 3:269.

ies is a different question for another time, but Bishop Borgen did not think so.

Let's come back to Fletcher's question, "What is new in my explanation . . . that we must be born again of water and of the Spirit?" Fletcher believed there was nothing basically new in his concept of the distinction between being born again of water and of the Spirit, but there were new nuances in his answer to this question. First, Wesley's doctrine of justifying faith corresponded with being born again of water and his doctrine of sanctifying grace corresponded with being born of the Spirit. What was also new was Fletcher's linking the rite of confirmation to Wesley's doctrine of perfection, thus showing its connection to Christian baptism and its essential meaning for being a member of the body of Christ. Fletcher allowed that both being born of water and of the Spirit could occur in the same moment as when the three thousand converts on the day of Pentecost were baptized with water and baptized with the Spirit: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

The new baptismal liturgy provides a theological and pastoral opportunity to connect the sacrament of baptism with an evangelical soteriology. The new birth that happens in the sacrament of holy baptism is evangelically made real in personal acts of faith through repentance and personally appropriating the fullness of the Spirit as a lifelong process punctuated with many crisis moments or "daily baptisms" as Fletcher put.

APPENDIX

**Joseph Benson's letter to Mary Bosanquet**

(most likely written in early 1778)

Transcribed by James Boetcher

Verified with Suggestions by Randy L. Maddox

Laurence W. Wood obtained a copy of Joseph Benson's letter to Mary Bosanquet through the gracious help of Joshua Rowley, Research Services, and the location of this letter is to be found at Duke University (Durham, North Carolina), David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Frank Baker Collection of Wesleyana, Box CO 1. This letter was first located by Russell Frazier and has been transcribed by James Boetcher and verified with suggestions from Randy L. Maddox. This transcription has retained Benson's spelling, capitalization and abbreviations. Words that Benson hyphenated because he ended the line with only part of the word and continued the word at the beginning of the next line have been reunited. Additions, added for clarity, are enclosed in [brackets]. Strikeouts are included.

At the end of this letter, on page three, Benson writes: "This was seven years ago just after I had left Oxford and begun to travel as a pastor." Thus, this letter may be dated as having been written seven years after Benson left Oxford, sometime between June 17, 1770, and April 1771. Cf. *The Life of the Rev. Joseph Benson, Abridged from Authentic Sources* (by a Friend of Sabbath Schools, published by J. Emory and B. Waugh, for the Methodist Episcopal Church, at the Conference Office, 4 Crosby St., J. Collard, printer, 1832, 16-19). Benson also mentioned earlier in a letter of December 4, 1777 that he was at Oxford six years ago, and in this letter to Mary Bosanquet he said it was seven years ago when he was at Oxford. The date of this letter is thus early in 1778. Cf. James MacDonald, *Memoirs of the Rev. Joseph Benson* (New York: Bangs and T. Mason, for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1823), 52.

The object Mr. Fl[etcher] has in view throughout the whole piece is the baptism—the gift—the fullness—the indwelling—of the Spiri—to set up and establish the kingdom of God in our hearts righteousness, peace & joy in the Holy Ghost, & this to render us Christians indeed professing the privileges of our glorious dispensation. Now who of us will ~~contradict~~ speak a word ag[ains]t this? Who of us will not, rather as we have ability & opportunity bear our testimony to it? About this there is then can be no disputation. ~~We shall I trust~~ But the thing disputed is ~~partly light in~~ ~~which~~ the manner in w[hi]ch he has represented His invaluable blessing

& ~~the doctrine of~~ the dispensations of divine grace on w[hi]ch he builds his doctrine concerning it—this I am satisfied will be deem'd not only new but also unscriptural by most of the serious people in the nation; nor will all he has said or can say (& his fertile imagination is never at a loss for arguments & illustrations) be able to establish it. For the whole Fabrick is built on this plain palpable mistake, that we to whom the gospel is clearly preach'd & its greatest blessing the fullness of the Spirit offer[e]d, may still be under the inferior dispensations of divine grace [-] viz[.], that to the Jews or even that to the Heathens: but this is & must be false, for to whom much is given, of them much is required. Our dispensation calls us to come up higher than those who lived under former dispensations could, & we cannot neglect so to do & be guiltless. We cannot rest in the low at[t]ainm[ent]s of a Jew much less in the lower grace of the Heathen & yet be (as he says) “accepted, or the children of God according to our dispensation[.]”

Our dispensation is the luminous dispensation of the gospel & accord[in]g to this they & they only are the sons of God who are led by the spirit of God, & who have the Sp[irit] of the Lord Jes[us] in their hearts crying Abba Father—As for others who have not the Spirit of Ch[ris]t they are none of his, but in the flesh ~~are carnal~~ carnally minded & dead, having not [the] life of God in them nor an earnest of life everlasting [,] Rom. 8, 1-12[.] They are as the apostle testifies[,] 2 Cor. 13.5[.] adokimoi, reprobates, rejected.—

There is another thing I must mention. I am affraid (sic.) if these papers are published in their present form, they will not only have a tendency to puz[z]le or perplex the minds of those who have been ~~taught~~ accustomed to hear (from the pulpit or the press) ~~to~~ a different kind of language, but also to produce worse effects!! I fear what he says of the dispensation of the Father & of being accepted accord[in]g to that disp[ensation] if we only fear God and work right[eousness] will have a tendency to make many rest without faith working by love w[hi]ch only availeth in Ch[ris]t. Jes[us], & without ~~the Ch[ris]t revealed in us with~~ ~~whosoever hath not~~ ~~hath not~~ ~~life new birth without w[hi]ch we cannot~~ ~~enter into the kingdom of heaven.~~ ~~And what he advances concerning~~ ~~and~~ that faith in the Son with whosoever hath not is condemned already[.] The wrath of God abideth on him. And also what he advances concerning acceptance in the dispensation of the Law – will induce the carnal Laodicean to rest in a dead faith without ~~the~~ being born of the Spirit, without w[hi]ch we cannot enter the kingdom, & without Ch[ris]t in us the hope of glory w[hi]ch blessing whosoever hath not[,], hath not life – I fear 2.dly [secondly,] that what he ~~says of~~ urges concern[in]g the baptism of the Spirit, (being exprest in very strong and figurative language &

many of those scriptures he quotes relating chiefly[,] or if not solely[,] to those miraculous gifts bestow'd so plentiful[l]y on the day of Pent[e]cost, will tend to raise the expectation of earnest faithful souls too high & of consequence when after long striving their expectations are not answer'd ~~it~~ will strip them of all their confidence[,] plunge them into doubts or dispondency if not into infidelity or sin—I am led to make this objection from experience. I know the time when my expectations were too high & extraordinary I looked for greater things than humanity will admit & things more out of the common way than seems consistent with the free & proper exercise of our rational faculties. And what was the consequence? Why first I was exceed[.in]g eager & diligent in the pursuit of these things. I watch'd. I pray'd. I fasted, I strove. I wrestled, I did comparatively nothing else for near a year. During this time the Lord indeed frequently drew very near, refresh'd & comforted my soul and gave me many blessed tokens of his presence in public & private, but expecting some far beyond all this I put the blessing from me thro'[ugh] unbelief; till ~~??~~ [lacuna] being fairly tired out & supposing my prayers were not heard I was even tempted to doubt the being of a God: & when I had (thro[ugh] divine help) fairly vanquished this temptation, so that I have never been assaulted by it since, still I continued in dejection & unbelief, thinking I was not born of God, had not rec'[eiv]d the holy Ghost—till at last those words, while at prayer one day, “I am the way the truth & the life[“] being applied to my mind afforded me relief and encouraged me to casted myself on the Lord Jes.[us] as being my wisdom [and] righteous[ness.] I no sooner did this than I found deliverance, & peace & joy (attended with love & obedience) spring up in my soul. This was seven years ago just after I had left Oxford & begun to travel as a p[asto]r. I ought now to have gone on from faith to faith & from liberty to liberty, but ~~partly~~ chiefly thro'[ugh] evil reasoning [(] and a belief ~~I ag[ain]~~ of just this doctrine that if I had not rec[eiv]d the holy Gh[os]t [then I] was not born ag[ain,] was one source). I again lost<sup>97</sup> ground & for the 4 ~~or 5~~ ~~las~~ succeeding years was indeed often comforted & but often distress'd, often delivered, but often also enthralld. Ab[ou]t 3 years ago I ~~got~~ was brought more into the way of faith & went on much more comfortably, and ab[ou]t 2 years or a year & half ago the Lord established me ~~more~~ ~~ri~~ in this way & I now generally ~~find~~ possess an abiding conviction I am justified from all things & find the fruit of this to be a peace that passeth all understand[ing] & a love that casteth out fear. I bless God I run the way of his command[men]ts with delight, experience his service to be perfect freedom & rejoice in the hope of the glory of God & at times with joy unspeakable & full of glory. I look indeed to be more filled with faith & the holy Ghost,

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<sup>97</sup>Benson underlines “lost” five times.

to be filled even with all the fullness of God, that as Ch.[rist] was I may be made in this world: but I am not anxious, and yet if I ~~thought~~ I was not born again I may have cause to be anxious, ~~much less I am ... from ... things that I have nothing that I want now of God have not receiv[ed]. That ... hold[in]g fast the begin[in]g of confidence firm unto the end I ...~~ ab[ou]t the accomplishm[en]t of these exceed[in]g great & precious promises, persuaded faithful is he that he that hath call'd me who also will do it, will supply my every want accord[in]g to the riches of his glory in Chr[ist] Jes[us], will sanctify me wholly body, soul[,] & spirit[,] & preserve me blameless to his heavenly kingdom.—There are several other observations w[h]i[c]h I could have made as I went along: & w[h]i[c]h if I could get an opportunity of reading the ma[nu]sc[ri]pt with Mr. Fl[etcher] I w[oul]d like to make to him—but being strai[gh]t[en]ed for time now & having already ~~tired out your patience~~ exceeded the bounds of a letter I hasten to

subscribe myself

dear Madam

If you think proper to transmit     Your very obedient ser[van]t  
 this with the manuscript to Mr. Fl[etcher]     in the Lord  
 you are at liberty to do it as I                     Jos.[eph] Benson  
 have not time to transcribe it & have other  
 things I wish to write to him ab[ou]t .....

### Interpreting This Letter: Benson Affirms Fletcher's Use of Spirit Baptism

Russell Frazier mistakenly thinks that this letter by Benson was intended as a critique of Fletcher's definition of the baptism of the Spirit signifying Christian perfection.<sup>98</sup> Rather, Benson said he was worried about the "new" idea in the most recent, unpublished essay by Fletcher, "The Language of the Father's Dispensation" (which has now been published).<sup>99</sup> The "new" idea, he explained, which will be disputed is that those to whom *the gospel has now been preached and the fullness of the Spirit has now been offered* can still be accepted as children of God even if they do not accept this message and hence they can be treated as if they were in the pre-Christian dispensation of the Father as Gentiles and Jews. Benson, however, disagreed saying this was a "plain palpable mistake" and such persons should be considered "reprobates, rejected."

<sup>98</sup>J. Russell Frazier, *True Christianity* Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 189-191.

<sup>99</sup>See Fletcher, "The Language of the Dispensation of the Father," *The Asbury Theological Journal*, 50.1 (Spring, 1998).

Fletcher's idea of the baptism with the Spirit was not something recent and "new," but had characterized his preaching and writing since 1770—a belief that Benson shared. Fletcher's *Last Check* highlighting the baptism with the Spirit had already been published three years earlier with Wesley's high commendation, noting also that he did not perceive there to be any difference between them after Fletcher's incorporated his editorial changes about "receiving the Spirit."<sup>100</sup> So there was nothing "new" about Fletcher's use of the baptism with the Spirit. Benson also said in the opening sentence of this letter that he agreed with Fletcher's use of the baptism with the Spirit with "no disputation," and he said no one would want to speak against it. There is nothing in this letter to suggest that Benson rejected Fletcher's theology of the baptism with the Spirit, although he did worry that Fletcher (1) allowed that those who had rejected the gospel were not "reprobates" and (2) implied that miraculous phenomena of Pentecost could be repeated as a normative expectation.

Frazier also mistakenly reported that Benson discontinued his use of the language of the baptism and fullness of the Spirit.<sup>101</sup> On the contrary, Benson continued to use fullness and baptism of the Spirit for perfection in his subsequent writings without interruption. We know Benson had not changed his mind from the time he was at Trevecca with Fletcher because he said so. One year before Benson wrote this letter to Mary Bosanquet, he observed on December 4, 1777: "About six years ago, when at Oxford [=time with Fletcher at Trevecca], my convictions, desires, were the same that they are now; and then, as now, I longed for the baptism of the Holy Ghost."<sup>102</sup>

The recent publication of the documents by Randy Maddox and Russell Frazier showing what Benson understood by "the baptism of the Spirit" still thus represented his current views in 1777.<sup>103</sup> And there is no indication in this letter to Mary Bosanquet in 1778 that Benson had changed his mind; rather, he was only objecting to something "new" that had just been developed in Fletcher's essay on "The Language of the Father's Dispensation."

A few other sample selections from his writings will show that Benson had not changed his mind. In a letter May 21, 1776, Benson said:

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<sup>100</sup>Telford, *Letters*, 6:174-175, (to John Fletcher, August 18, 1775).

<sup>101</sup>*Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>102</sup>*Memoirs of the Rev. Joseph Benson*, 52.

<sup>103</sup>Randy L. Maddox and J. Russell Frazier, "Joseph Benson's Initial Letter to John Wesley Concerning Spirit Baptism and Christian Perfection," *The Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 48 (Number 2, Fall 2013): 72.

“But, the principal thing to be thought, talked, and wrote about, is the *baptism of the Spirit, or the inward kingdom of God*. Oh! my friend, this is but little known among us!”<sup>104</sup> In a letter to his bride-to-be (Sarah Thompson) on August 11, 1779, Benson advised her as a Christian believer to “tarry” and “wait” upon the Lord who will “baptize you with the Spirit.”<sup>105</sup> In October, 1781, John Wesley published a five-page essay by Joseph Benson in the *Arminian Magazine* on “Thoughts on Perfection” in which Benson connected the baptism with the Holy Spirit and Christian perfection: “Allowing, what (I think) neither Reason nor Scripture forbids us to allow, that God *may*, and that he often *does, instantaneously* so baptize a soul with the Holy Ghost, and with fire, as to purify it from all dross, and refine it like gold, so that it is *renewed in love, in pure and perfect love*, as it never was before.”<sup>106</sup> Here Benson expresses his agreement with Fletcher. It cannot be maintained Wesley was assuming here the idea that the baptism of the Spirit included both justifying and full sanctifying grace happening at the same moment because Wesley said he never knew a single instance where the two moments ever happened together.<sup>107</sup> This is an affirmation that entire sanctification is accomplished through the baptism with the Spirit distinct from justifying faith, and this is altogether consistent with Fletcher’s *Last Check*. If Benson had changed his mind, he certainly would not have employed this unambiguous baptism language without qualification for speaking of perfection. It would also appear that if Wesley rejected Fletcher’s understanding of the baptism with the Spirit, he would not have published it.

One year later after Wesley published Benson’s essay “On Christian Perfection,” Benson published *Two Sermons on Sanctification* in 1782, where he intentionally equates the fullness of the Spirit with perfection. Benson writes: “So that, in order to our, *full, perfect, and entire* Sanctification, we must *be filled with the Spirit*.”<sup>108</sup> This emphasis on the work of the

<sup>104</sup>Published in Tyerman, *Wesley’s Designated Successor*, 358.

<sup>105</sup>*A Methodist Courtship, Love Letters of Joseph Benson & Sarah Thompson 1779-1780*, ed. Margaret M. Jemison (Atlanta: The Library, Emory University, 1945), 12.

<sup>106</sup>Benson, “Thoughts on Perfection,” *The Arminian Magazine* 4 (October 1781): 553.

<sup>107</sup>John Wesley, “Preface,” *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1740), *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II*, eds. Paul Wesley Chilcote and Kenneth J. Collins, vol. 13 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013), 46. Cf. John Wesley, Sermon 83, § 12 “On Patience” in *Works* 3:178.

<sup>108</sup>Benson, *Two Sermons on Sanctification* (Leeds, 1782), 29.

Spirit is prominent throughout Benson's sermons on sanctification. He writes: "He hath invited us to come . . . for the fullness of that Spirit which is the one source of our sanctification."<sup>109</sup> It is well documented that Benson continued throughout his life to speak of being filled with the Spirit and being baptized with the Spirit in reference to perfection in his sermons and writings.<sup>110</sup> In 1804, he vigorously defended Fletcher's idea of the "fullness of the Spirit" and the connection between Pentecost and perfection, saying that Fletcher "expected a Pentecost" that entailed the idea of being "sanctified wholly."<sup>111</sup> Benson was thus still affirming Fletcher's theology of Pentecost fifteen years after his death.

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<sup>109</sup>Ibid., 36.

<sup>110</sup>L. Wood, *Meaning of Pentecost in Early Methodism*, 248-253.

<sup>111</sup>Benson, *The Life of the Rev. John William de la Flechere*, in *Works*, 8:435-436.

# THE SACRAMENTAL LIFE: TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED CHRISTIAN VISION

by

Major Dean Smith

## Introduction

We live in a world and an age that has largely been divested of the sacred. With the rise of science and technology human kind has found itself in less and less need of a God “out there.” Even for the faithful living against the grain, religion has largely been marginalised and privatised with many Christians living their lives between two worlds, the sacred and the secular, the world of the body and the world of the spirit.

Western theological discourse seems to be stuck supporting a destructive binary logic that sets God over against the world and the material over against the spiritual. I, like a growing number of Christians, am caught on the horns of a dilemma; on the one hand wanting to reject a reductive materialism, but to do so find ourselves reinforcing its binary opposite—a supernaturalism that has little currency in a 21<sup>st</sup> century scientific western world. This has left us at odds with the very reality that does have currency in the 21<sup>st</sup> century scientific western world—the material world and our lived life in a physical universe.

This is none more evident than in my own tradition where the doctrine of holiness is emphasised and explicated in terms of the ongoing sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit within the believer’s life. The problem is not with the doctrine as such but with the metaphysical framework of supernaturalism that informs the traditional language of “spirit.” This has only served to reinforce the God-world, spirit-matter and/or soul-body dualism that has characterised much of western theology.

Now while it is certainly not my intention to jettison the language of spirit from a discourse on holiness, a criticism that no doubt will be levelled at me, I do want to disrupt the traditional discourse around holiness by exploring the implications of an alternative and complimentary model informing our understanding of the same. What is the traditional way of understanding that I wish to disrupt? Teilhard spells it out much more clearly than I could in the following quote:

Speaking in general terms we may say that until quite recent times, and in the West, mysticism has never doubted but that God must be looked for only “in heaven,” that is to say in more or less direct and profound discontinuity with “here below.” To be spiritualised = to be de-materialised. Such was (and such, in a static Cosmos, had to be) the basic equation that expresses Holiness.<sup>1</sup>

My hope is to provide an expanded vision of the holy life rather than a restricted one. If holiness is to regain the ability to capture the imagination and intellect of western Christians then the model informing our practice needs to take the material world seriously and the substantial dualism of a model that pits body against spirit needs to be overcome/transcended.

In recent times there have been creative and productive attempts at rethinking significant theological issues. Joel Green has presented his Kaleidoscopic view of the atonement as a way of broadening the debate beyond any one single model of the atonement. Sallie McFague and other feminist writers have encouraged Christians to move beyond the traditional theological patterns of thinking and speaking about God in the hope that we might break free of the dominant paternalism tied to traditional theological models. In turning to the topic of holiness I too hope to encourage Evangelical Christians to break free of the well worn theological paths in the hope that revisiting alternative ways of thinking about holiness might breathe new life into Christian faith and practice.

I might best describe the position taken in this paper as a Christocentric approach to holiness rather than a Spirit-centred one. Now one should not read this as an attempt on my part to replace the later with the former. Rather, in a quite legitimate Wesleyan move I have taken seriously the Eastern orthodox emphasis on the Incarnation as a resource that will enrich our understanding of what it means to live the holy life.

In this paper I will seek to reorient the discussion on holiness around a more generalised sacramentality with particular reference to the evolutionary Christology of the type outlined by Karl Rahner and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. In this evolutionary model the divine is at the very centre of material reality and does not enter our reality from outside. Within this framework, awareness of the unfolding of the divine at the centre of life becomes the practical work of the Christian. Life itself takes on a sacramental quality. Holiness then is understood in terms of living

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<sup>1</sup>Teilhard De Chardin, *The Heart of Matter* (London: Collins, 1978), 45.

the sacramental life. Integration at the conceptual as well as the practical level becomes possible with profound implications for living our life in the world.

### A Pastoral Context

Just as Paul Tillich was critical of much of the theology of his day because it seemingly addressed the questions nobody was asking, we who call ourselves theologians need to be constantly on our guard lest the same criticism is levelled at us. This was a vital concern for the Catholic theologian Karl Rahner who believed that theology should develop in response to the questions people are asking. Pastoral theology especially has the task of bringing theology down to earth.<sup>2</sup>

I have to acknowledge at this point something of the autobiographical nature of this paper. It in fact represents a response to my existential questioning as a result of my experience of alienation throughout my life within the context of the church. My experience as a child and then as a teenager was one of living a fundamentally divided life. I lived my life between two realities—the world of church and family and the world of school and work. I valued the world that nurtured my “spiritual” needs and was completely ambivalent about the other areas of my life.

Quite early on in my Christian experience I recognised that the traditional language of holiness, of the infilling and sanctifying work of the spirit in my soul did not help to overcome my sense of alienation but rather actually reinforced it. At this stage in my experience I had no conceptual tools to deal with my cognitive and existential dissonance. This would come much later.

In his book *Small is Beautiful* E. F. Schumacher argues that much of our contemporary problems are related to the failure of metaphysics. These are the big ideas that guide our reasoning and our praxis. These are literally the ideas through which we think and by which we live. What I have come to be convinced of is that the problem needing to be addressed is the alienating metaphysics that has until recently informed my conceptual world, the lens through which I interpreted my life in the world.

It was in the deep world and life affirming sacramental theology of Karl Rahner and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin that I would eventually find a metaphysics and a language that was able, to a much greater degree than ever before, to overcome my alienation both conceptually and existen-

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<sup>2</sup>Robert Banks, *All the Business of Life: Bringing Theology Down to Earth* (Sydney: Albatross Books, 1987).

tially. This for me is a significant point given that my own tradition was not well-equipped to respond to my quest. The sacramental thinking in my own tradition had been a source of division and disagreement with the emphasis being on why we did not practice the sacraments rather than on developing an adequate sacramentality based on sound theological principles.

The question that has exercised me for some time now and the one that I am endeavouring to respond to is this: “Could it be that a recovery of a deep sacramental theology might help us in the Evangelical tradition to overcome the tendency we have to compartmentalise our lives and to challenge our commitment to an unhealthy binary system in which one binary symbol is emphasised at the expense of the other. For example, transcendence over against immanence, God over against the world, soul over against body and the divine over against the human in Christ. Macquarrie certainly thinks that the sacramental principle is one very important way of maintaining a balance.<sup>3</sup> Dare I suggest that a deep sacramental theology may aid in healing our alienation and help us in living out an integrated Christian vision? (Could a rethinking of our sacramental theology actually precipitate the rehabilitation of our doctrine of holiness?)

### **The Sacramental Life—Where to Begin?**

In a not particularly Evangelical move I will begin my explication of the sacramental life with the notion of our being part of a sacramental universe. John Macquarrie certainly follows this pattern in his *Guide to the Sacraments*.<sup>4</sup>

He begins his exposition of the Sacraments with a chapter entitled “A Sacramental Universe” and here he identifies that

perhaps the goal of all sacramentality and sacramental theology is to make the things of this world so transparent that in them and through them we know God’s presence and activity in our very midst, and so experience his grace.<sup>5</sup>

Genesis 1 first presents the credentials for the claim of a sacramental universe in its opening statement “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth. . . . And God saw that it was good.” Paul

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<sup>3</sup>John Macquarrie, *A Guide to the Sacraments*, (London: SCM Press, 1997), 4.

<sup>4</sup>John Macquarrie, *A Guide to the Sacraments*.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 1.

Collins refers to the universe as the primary sacrament of God<sup>6</sup> and Jurgen Moltmann speaks of the universe as destined to become the icon of God.<sup>7</sup> Such is the importance and sacramental status of the world that, according to Thomas Berry, without a beautiful world belief in God becomes less possible.<sup>8</sup>

To speak of the world as a sacrament counters all the views that at worst, treat the world as evil, and at best, treat it as an encumbrance to all things spiritual. The Psalms in particular witness to the fact that nature is a reliable source of God's revelation. While in the early part of the twentieth century Karl Barth's stress on the transcendence of God and his rejection of natural theology is to be understood as a corrective to the excesses of the liberal theologians' stress on the immanence of God, we find ourselves again in need of recovering the depth dimension or immanence of God in the world. Evangelicals in particular need to recover the notion of a sacramental universe.

### **Unpacking the Definition of the term *Sacrament***

Duns Scotus defined a sacrament as "a physical sign, instituted by God, which efficaciously signifies the grace of God, or the gracious action of God." The definition of sacrament as outlined in the Book of Common Prayer is this: "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given unto us, ordained by Christ himself, as a means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereof." According to these definitions a sacrament links the two worlds in which we have to live, or the dualities under which the one world keeps appearing.<sup>9</sup>

The sacrament links outward and inward, physical and spiritual. Macquarrie makes the important point that these dual aspects while distinguishable, and sometimes even at variance, are not separable.<sup>10</sup>

This is a particularly important point to consider given that in some Christian contexts, my own included, "sign" has often been interpreted as merely "a pointer to." When we interpret sacrament in this way the outward sign then becomes unnecessary to the mediation and experience of grace. However as Macquarrie emphasises, the sacrament is that which unites (links) the outward sign and inward grace. As we will see below

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<sup>6</sup>*Compass: God's Earth*, Television Program, ABC Television, Melbourne, 1998.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*

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

<sup>9</sup>John Macquarrie, *A Guide to the Sacraments*, 5.

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

this is particularly important if the Incarnation is to be central to a generalised sacramentality. According to Christian teaching the Incarnation provides us with the clearest model of sacramentality. It is in the humanity of Christ that we have the outward and visible sign of the inward divine life of grace. In Christ we have a profound sacramental reality.

Now the Church has always been careful to protect the real connection (union) between the humanity and the divinity of Christ, between the outward and visible sign and the inner divine reality. The technical term for this connection is the hypostatic union. What this means in the case of Christ is that the outward and visible sign (the humanity of Christ) not only stands for or points beyond itself to another (divine) reality, but it is united with or linked to that reality in such a way that it actually *is* the mediator of grace to the world.

Karl Rahner provides a beautiful analogy from everyday experience to explain the importance of a real connection between a sign (the outward manifestation) and that which is signified (the inward reality). Rahner offers the kiss or the handshake as examples of the outward signs of love. It would make very little sense for us to think of love without its physical or "outward" manifestations or signs. We show love (an inner disposition) by way of physical signs (outer manifestation). Psychologists have conclusively shown that without human touch infants simply do not develop properly and may even die. It would be no defence for a parent up on a charge of neglect to say that although they offered no physical signs to their child they nevertheless really loved them. It would also be a most unsatisfactory situation if one of the partners in a marriage were to suggest to their spouse that henceforth the marriage would be conducted on a purely "platonic" or "spiritual" plain without the diversions of physical signs. Here I am not just referring to the sexual union of husband and wife, but rather the entire range of physical signs of love and affection. Few would seriously consider this to be an acceptable course of action, yet it is sometimes imagined that when it comes to divine reality the outward sign is unnecessary for the mediation of this reality. It is only when we lose sight of the Incarnation as our model for sacramentality that we can fall into the trap of thinking that a real connection between the outward and visible sign of inward divine grace is not important. To do so, however, is to sever the connection between the human and divine in Christ and to call into question the very act of Incarnation itself.

In the debate over the sacraments there are those who do reject the notion of a real connection between the outward and visible sign and the inner grace that is signified in the Lord's Supper. This in fact was the posi-

tion of the Reformer Huldrych Zwingli who believed that sacraments were nothing more than memorials and so no real means of grace. He did not believe that the Real Presence of Christ was in the sacrament. The other Reformers rejected this view and retained the more traditional understanding of Christ being in some sense “really Present” in the act of communion. Those come close to the view of Zwingli who makes the claim that outward signs are no more than pointers to grace. Indeed this distinction has sometimes been emphasised to the point where one is encouraged to focus on some purely “inward” or “spiritual” experience of grace without the outward sign or symbol being necessary.

But Christians of an orthodox stripe simply cannot make such a claim without falling into the not so uncommon dualistic heresy of docetism. Docetism was an early belief that Jesus was purely spiritual in his manifestation and only appeared to be a real human being. Some Christians, and dare I here include my own tradition, have at times come close to this view when it is imagined that spirituality is some reality divorced from its historical and physical instantiation. This has for some become the rationale for not practicing the traditional sacramental rites. We can experience the inner grace, so the logic goes, without the need of any outward sign. Again, to reach such a conclusion is to lose sight of the Incarnation as the basis of our deep sacramental view. If we accept the truth of the Incarnation then we cannot but be a sacramental people in the very deep sense of the term. That is, grace is mediated through its outward manifestations or signs.

Within orthodox Christianity we get a glimpse of how certain physical signs can be mediators of grace. But what if our entire universe of signs was being directed toward a sacramental end? What if it were true that human endeavour could be seen to cooperate to complete the world in Christ Jesus? What if not only our passivities but also our activities could be seen as being part of the divinisation of the world?

### **The Organic Sacramentality of Karl Rahner and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin**

In the evolutionary Christology of Karl Rahner and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin the Incarnation is central to understanding a more generalised sacramentality in which Creation and Incarnation are seen as moments in the one process of the coming to be of the world in *Christo Jesu*. The term given to this process by Teilhard is Christogenesis. This understanding of Incarnation and creation is particularly significant given that during the 20<sup>th</sup> century a good many theologians were at best

ambivalent to the view that creation is in any sense a true sacrament. McKinlay highlights the fact that while Karl Barth affirmed baptism and Eucharist, he was sceptical of a generalised sacramentality.<sup>11</sup>

Consider the following quote from Barth:

And was it a wise action on the part of the church when it ceased to recognise in the incarnation . . . the one and only sacrament, fulfilled once and for all, by whose actuality it lives as the one form of the one body of its Head, as the earthly-historical form of the existence of Jesus Christ in the time between His ascension and return?<sup>12</sup>

By correlating Christology with an evolutionary worldview Rahner and Teilhard place the incarnation at the centre of God's creative impulse. Incarnation is then to be understood not as a unique supernatural event in the history of the world but is both precursor and goal of all creation—the divinisation of the world. With this approach the world takes on a much more important status. It is not just a stop on our journey to heaven; it is not a place to be escaped. Rather it is our home and with us is destined to become the icon of God.

Quite early in his reflections Teilhard settled on a term to describe the way he had come to see reality. He speaks of the *Divine Milieu* by which he means both the divine centre which animates and has the power to unite all things *and* an environment of transformation. "God reveals himself everywhere, beneath our groping efforts, as a *universal milieu*, only because he is the *ultimate point* upon which all realities converge."<sup>13</sup>

According to Ursula King, one can think of it (the divine milieu) as a field of divine energy that has one central focus—God—from which everything flows, is animated and is directed.<sup>14</sup>

King goes on to explain:

For Teilhard the idea of the "divine milieu" was particularly important in capturing the universal influence of Christ through God's incarnation in the world, in its matter, life and energy—an extended, cosmic understanding of the incarna-

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<sup>11</sup>Brian McKinlay, *The Meaning of Sacrament and its Links with Creation and Incarnation* <http://nottoomuch.com/essays/e2123.pdf>

<sup>12</sup>*Church Dogmatics: Vol IV, The Doctrine of Reconciliation—Part 2.* / Karl Barth. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958), 55.

<sup>13</sup>Teilhard De Chardin, *The Divine Milieu* (New York: Perennial, 2001), 85.

<sup>14</sup>Ursula King, *Spirit of Fire: The Life and Vision of Teilhard de Chardin* (New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 110.

tions that far transcended the historical limitations of time and place associated with the person of Jesus.<sup>15</sup>

Of course Teilhard was concerned about the pastoral implications of his mystic vision of the world as a divine milieu. Teilhard wanted to help Christians see that their action in the world can indeed be sanctified and that human endeavour is important in relation to God. He was unhappy with the traditional solutions to holiness and perfection that led people in the direction of seeking an escape from the material world and the denying of the importance of anything other than “spiritual” endeavours. In a divine milieu the divinisation of our activities and the divinisation of our passivities “represent a continuous process of transformation whereby we can find communion with God in the world.”<sup>16</sup>

Is it then possible to believe that our entire lived reality can be the site or locus of God’s overflowing grace. Paul refers to believers as being “in Christ”<sup>17</sup> and Peter speaks of our participation in the divine life.<sup>18</sup> Our embodied life “in Christ” is the sign of God’s grace by virtue of our union with Christ our living sacrament. We, as the corporate body of Christ, the church, and we, as members of that body, are the outward sign of the divine life and energies within us. We are a sacrament! The Real Presence of Christ is lived in and through us in both our activities and our passivities.

### **Participating in the Sacramental Life**

Now that I have outlined what I mean by “the sacramental life,” I now need to say something about what this looks like in practical terms. For my purposes I would like to explore the contours of the sacramental life under the following headings.

#### *Seeing*

Living the sacramental life is as much about learning to see rightly. While it may be true according to Rahner and Teilhard that the world is destined for completion in Christ, this truth alone is not a sufficient condition for living the sacramental life, or Life with a capital *L*. There needs to be a conscious participation in the divine reality at the corporate and individual level. Living the sacramental life does not happen automati-

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 113.

<sup>17</sup>Paul uses this phrase 27 times.

<sup>18</sup>2 Peter 1:4.

cally. As the Wesleyan scholar Randy Maddox has captured in the title of his book *Responsible Grace*, our relationship with God is to be thought of in terms of both grace and responsibility. In our ongoing experience of redemption there is God's part and there is our part. Our part is corporately and individually to appropriate the grace that informs our life. Without corporate and individual discipline the sacramental remains only at the level of potential and we live life with a small *l*. It is discipline that helps train our vision so that we can learn to "see" the sacramental reality before us. Our Life, our activities our multifarious being in the world can be truly sacramental but only to the degree that we learn to "see" things in a sacramental way. The poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning had learned to see things this way. She expressed it beautifully in the following lines:

Earth's crammed with heaven,  
And every common bush afire with God;  
But only he who sees takes off his shoes,  
The rest sit round and pluck blackberries.<sup>19</sup>

Consider the vision of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin:

Throughout my whole life, during every moment I have lived, the world has gradually been taking on light and fire for me, until it has come to envelop me in one mass of luminosity, glowing from within. . . . The purple flush of matter fading imperceptibly into the gold of spirit, to be lost finally in the incandescence of a personal universe. . . . This is what I have learnt from my contact with the earth—the diaphany of the divine at the heart of a glowing universe, the divine radiating from the depths of matter a-flame.<sup>20</sup>

This profound vision, this way of seeing must be cultivated and we must train ourselves and our people to see the presence of God in the world and in the people around us. I believe that the term "mindfulness" best captures the discipline by which we train our vision so that we can truly live and experience the sacramental life. I am well aware that this is a term traditionally used in Buddhist philosophy and practice; however I see no reason why as Christians we should not appropriate it for our own purposes. I could just as easily have used the term awareness. Whatever

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<sup>19</sup>Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, Book 7.

<sup>20</sup>Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Millieu*, xiii-xiv.

language we choose to use we certainly need to become more intentional, more mindful, as we train our vision as sacramental people.

Let me reiterate, we live the sacramental life when we come to *see* that everything we do is a potential sign of God's inward grace. Notice the way I have qualified the statement through the use of "potential." As stated earlier there is nothing automatic about the sacramental life and without intention much of what we do remains in the realm of possibility and does not live up to the idea of being sacramental in any real sense.

If the various outward signs, words and actions are the channels through which we access grace, intention must be the key. Without intention signs at best are dead signs. Without intention words are mere sounds, actions—activity without significance. Intention is what helps us to awaken openness to transcendence-in-immanence.

The sharing of a meal at the family table can be a true sacrament, a true "breaking of bread" or it can be simply individuals meeting their basest needs. Our work can be a sacrament if it is seen in the right way or else it becomes nothing more than an encumbrance to our more "spiritual" pursuits. It is important to realise that there is nothing automatic about living a sacramental life. Without intention there can only be for us an unrealised or impoverished existence.

### *Doing and Acting*

However, for the person trained to see their life as a sign of God's grace, there is no limit to what can become a sacrament and means of grace for us. As a faithful Anglican, Wesley encouraged his people to seek God's grace through the various outward signs, words, and actions that God had ordained as "ordinary" channels for conveying saving grace to humanity.<sup>21</sup> These included both corporate and individual practices including the Lord's Supper, corporate worship, prayer, communal support, mutual accountability, private exercises, and works of mercy. There is a certain pre-eminence given to traditional means of grace that have sustained the Church throughout the centuries, and this is only right and proper. However, there is nothing stopping us from moving beyond these traditional means to incorporate other outward signs, words, or actions.

If, as I have been arguing, our entire life can become the locus of God's gracious unfolding activity in our lives, I see no reason why, in addition to the traditional means of grace, we should exclude any practice

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<sup>21</sup>Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology*, (Nashville, Tennessee, Kingswood Books, 1994), 193.

as a possible means of grace. That is, if we have trained ourselves to see our actions in such a way. Given my rejection of our tendency to dualise, I pose the following question. What would it be like if not just our spiritual life but our entire bodied life was included in our sacramental vision and our “ordinary” actions became the means of grace?

Let me suggest a number of very, dare I refer to them as “ordinary” activities which may become sacramental when approached in the appropriate way. Take the common activity of walking. I have no doubt that Henry David Thoreau understood walking to be a sacramental activity. He wrote much about this activity and if you read his accounts you get the impression that he was very aware of informing grace as he went for his many long walks. I too can testify that I also find the act of walking a sacramental activity. Here is a quote from Thoreau about walking:

I think I cannot preserve my health and spirits, unless I spend four hours a day at least, –and it is commonly more than that,—sauntering through the woods and over the hills and fields, absolutely free from all worldly engagements. You may safely say, A penny for your thoughts, or a thousand pounds. When sometimes I am reminded that the mechanics and shopkeepers stay in their shops not only all the forenoon, but all the afternoon too, sitting with crossed legs, so many of them,—as if the legs were made to sit upon, and not to stand or walk upon,—I think that they deserve some credit for not having all committed suicide long ago.<sup>22</sup>

Consider the following list of everyday activities that may also become sacramental activities if seen in the right light:

Walking<sup>23</sup>  
Taking Tea  
Reading  
Gardening  
Driving  
Listening to Music  
Shopping  
Working

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<sup>22</sup>Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Other Writings* (New York: The Modern Library, 2000), 629.

<sup>23</sup>See the recently released book by retired Australian Anglican Priest Adam Ford, *The Art of Mindful Walking* (Sydney: Ivy Press Limited, 2011).

Making Love  
Sleeping<sup>24</sup>

*Being*

I represent a tradition of activists and so probably do not have difficulty conceiving of our actions as means of grace and therefore as having sacramental significance. However, we should also consider the possibility that being is also a means of grace and therefore has the potential to have great sacramental significance. Let it be said though that being is always qualified being. We are embodied beings so it is always being-with, or being-for, or even being-there for another. There may be no words spoken or any obvious actions performed. It may simply be the case that we are present for another person. You may have heard the story of the little girl who was expressing her fear of the dark to her father and her desire that he stay with her while she fell asleep. Don't be afraid, said the father to his little girl, God is with you. I know that, said the little girl, but I need someone with skin on. Most of us know that God is with us but like the little girl find comfort in the presence of someone "with skin on."

In the context of a discussion on the practices of the Church in the book *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition*, Nancey Murphy identifies witness as an enduring practice of the church and identifies the virtue of "presence" as being necessary for the practice of witness.<sup>25</sup> Our being present for the other can, I believe, be a means of grace. By being present for another, we can be the sacrament given for and on behalf of Christ who is living in and through us. Consider the following quote referred to in the book from James McClendon:

Presence is being one's self for someone else; it is refusing the temptation to withdraw mentally and emotionally, but it is also on occasion putting our own body's weight and shape, alongside the neighbour, the friend, the lover in need.

But is presence, even in this extended sense, really a virtue, or is it like left-handedness or curiosity, merely somebody's quality or distinguishing feature? Earlier in this chapter [of

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<sup>24</sup>See what Robert Banks has to say about our need for a theology of sleep in Robert Banks, *All the Business of Life: Bringing Theology Down to Earth* (Sydney: Albatross Books, 1987), 9-10, 72-73.

<sup>25</sup>Nancey Murphey, Brad J. Kallenberg & Mark Thiessen Nation (eds.), *Virtues & Practices in the Christian Tradition*, (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 36.

ethics] the black church was set forth as displaying the quality of presence. When black slaves had no other earthly resource, they knew how to be present to and for one another, and knew that Another was present for them as well. . . . To characterise this presence as a virtue is to say that it is a strength or skill, developed by training and practice, which is a substantive part of (the Christian) life. . . .<sup>26</sup>

## Conclusion

Might it be possible that by reorienting the discussion on holiness around a more generalised sacramentality, a new generation of Evangelical Christians unmoved by the traditional language of holiness, might find a new way of understanding and experiencing what the traditional notions of holiness have always set out to help the believer know and experience—a deeper communion with God. The deep sacramental theology of Karl Rahner and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin provide resources for understanding our sacramental reality and potential life in God. Our lives are tied to the unfolding life of Christ at the centre of the universe. In this vision the spiritual and material aspects of our life work together in the process of Christogenesis—the rise within us of the forces of communion leading to the completion of the world in Christ.

Within this framework, awareness of the unfolding of the divine at the centre of life becomes the practical work of the Christian. Life itself takes on a sacramental quality. Holiness then is understood in terms of living the sacramental life. Integration at the conceptual as well as the practical level becomes possible with profound implications for living our life in the world. Let me finish my paper with a quote from a homily given by Greek Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in 1997,

. . . everything that lives and breathes is sacred and beautiful in the eyes of God. The whole world is a sacrament. The entire created cosmos is a burning bush of God's uncreated energies. And humankind stands as a priest before the altar of creation, as microcosm and mediator. . . . All things are sacramental when seen in the light of God. Such is the true nature of things; or, as an Orthodox hymn describes it, "the truth of things," if only we have the eyes of faith to see it.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Bartholomew, *Homily of His All Holiness Bartholomew, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople at the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary dedication of the Saint Barbara Greek Orthodox Church, Santa Barbara, California, 8<sup>th</sup> November, 1997*. URL: <http://www.patriarchate.org/documents/st.barbara-anniversary>

### ***The Mass on the World***

*“Since once again, Lord—though this time not in the forests of the Aisne but in the steppes of Asia—I have neither bread, nor wine, nor altar, I will raise myself beyond these symbols, up to the pure majesty of the real itself; I, your priest, will make the whole earth my altar and on it will offer you all the labors and sufferings of the world.*

*“Over there, on the horizon, the sun has just touched with light the outermost fringe of the eastern sky. Once again, beneath this moving sheet of fire, the living surface of the earth wakes and trembles, and once again begins its fearful travail. I will place on my paten, O God, the harvest to be won by this renewal of labour. Into my chalice I shall pour all the sap which is to be pressed out this day from the earth’s fruits.*

*“My paten and my chalice are the depths of a soul laid widely open to all the forces which in a moment will rise up from every corner of the earth and converge upon the Spirit. Grant me the remembrance and the mystic presence of all those whom the light is now awakening to the new day.*

*“One by one, Lord, I see and I love all those whom you have given me to sustain and charm my life. One by one also I number all those who make up that other beloved family which has gradually surrounded me, its unity fashioned out of the most disparate elements, with affinities of the heart, of scientific research and of thought. And again one by one—more vaguely it is true, yet all-inclusively—I call before me the whole vast anonymous army of living humanity; those who surround me and support me though I do not know them; those who come, and those who go; above all, those who in office, laboratory and factory, through their vision of truth or despite their error, truly believe in the progress of earthly reality and who today will take up again their impassioned pursuit of the light.*

*“This restless multitude, confused or orderly, the immensity of which terrifies us; this ocean of humanity whose slow, monotonous wave-flows trouble the hearts even of those whose faith is most firm: it is to this deep that I thus desire all the fibres of my being should respond. All the things in the world to which this day will bring increase; all those that will diminish; all those too that will die: all of them, Lord, I try to gather into my arms, so as to hold them out to you in offering. This is the material of my sacrifice; the only material you desire.*

*“Once upon a time men took into your temple the first fruits of their harvests, the flower of their flocks. But the offering you really want, the offering you mysteriously need every day to appease your hunger, to slake your thirst is nothing less than the growth of the world borne ever onwards in the stream of universal becoming.*

*“Receive, O Lord, this all-embracing host which your whole creation, moved by your magnetism, offers you at this dawn of a new day.*

*“This bread, our toil, is of itself, I know, but an immense fragmentation; this wine, our pain, is no more, I know, than a draught that dissolves. Yet in the very depths of this formless mass you have implanted—and this I am sure of, for I sense it—a desire, irresistible, hallowing, which makes us cry out, believer and unbeliever alike:*

*“‘Lord, make us one.’”*

—Teilhard de Chardin, “Mass on the World”

# NEED TOIL NOT, NEITHER SPIN: LEVINAS AND THE WORK OF THE PEOPLE

by  
Craig Keen

There are a number of descriptors that could be used—however vainly—to situate Emmanuel Levinas where historians of ideas could get to and manage him. He is a Husserlian, a Heideggerian, a Kierkegaardian, a Cartesian, a Neoplatonist, an advocate of the Hebrew Scriptures, and a scholar of the Talmud. He is at the same time none of these things, not in any simple way. He is in fact a transgressor of boundaries, of identities—a philosopher who worked to subvert “philosophy,” a child of Lithuania who spent the greater part of his long life in Paris, a thinker and writer who gave himself to think and write while locked up during World War II in the Jewish section of a Nazi prisoner of war camp, a survivor whose father, father-in-law, and brothers were slaughtered in the Holocaust. His language is often theologically evocative. Appearing prominently, e.g., in his 1972 essay “Meaning and Sense,” are the terms: “diacony,” “liturgy,” “supplication,” “absolution,” and “the epiphany of the absolutely other.” As a theologian, it is hard for me to read those paragraphs as Levinas would have them read and as he himself insists “liturgy” in particular be considered, i.e., with “all meaning drawn from any positive religion . . . removed” (93).<sup>1</sup> And yet, Levinas asks that focus be narrowed in this way only momentarily. I will do my best to follow his lead, but what I want to do theologically with Levinas’s essay, is neither a narrowing nor an unfolding of its implications. Rather I work towards a juxtaposition that listens long and hard, pauses, and only then speaks. In the section numbered “1” immediately below, I listen intently. In the section numbered “2,” I speak. I pause throughout.

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<sup>1</sup> Parenthetical references in this essay are to Emmanuel Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” in *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, 33–64, trans. Alphonso Lingis, revised by Adriaan T. Peperzak and Simon Critchley; eds. Adriaan T. Peperzak, et al. (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996).

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An Odyssean spirit has possessed traditional Western philosophy, Levinas insists. It is a wandering spirit, certainly; it faces danger bravely; it is cunning and strong; it is virile and virtuous—but all its adventures are for the sake of going home, of resolving tension, of achieving equilibrium, of *exitus* for the sake of *reditus*, of departure from the *same* to the *other* in order to return to the *same*. “Philosophy is produced as a form in which the refusal of engagement in the other, the waiting preferred to action, indifference with regard to others, the universal allergy of the early infancy of philosophers is manifest. Philosophy’s itinerary remains that of Ulysses, whose adventure in the world was only a return to his native island—a complacency in the Same, an unrecognition of the other” (91; cf. 98). What Levinas proposes is an Abrahamic journey, one in which a philosopher leaves home never to return, in which the thinker is not the foundational Cartesian “I am” in the solitude of overheated winter quarters, but the unsettled “here I am” before the dispossessed on the mountain in Moriah.

Levinas thinks of us as needy, squirming at the least deprivation. We value what we encounter only and always in terms of its susceptibility to satisfy us: the more likely to fill us up, the more valuable. We approach the world as a storeroom of raw materials. We celebrate it not as it is, but as we can make it, “by working it.” We reduce “perception [he says] to the science which the possible transformation of the world justifies . . . [; we reduce] society to its economic structures . . . [so much so that] cultural meaning detached from this economic—technological and scientific—sense would have but the value of a symptom, the worth of an ornament suited to the needs of a game, an abusive and deceptive meaning, exterior to truth” (86–87). That is, in my neediness I encounter *what-I-am-not*—the other—always on the way to appropriating it, to making it *mine*, i.e., I encounter difference always on the way to indifference. There we all *begin*: “in an identical, a same, an ego.” To work differently—not to *end* “in an identical, a same, an ego”—would be to work *no less*, but also *otherwise than* the economists of appropriation, viz., “*freely* from the Same to the Other” (91).

Thus Levinas calls explicitly for a *radical work*, a concurrence of work and freedom, a “radical generosity”: “A work conceived radically, is a movement of the Same towards the Other which never returns to the Same” (91–92).<sup>2</sup> Such work is not loss, as if to move to the outside were to vanish

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<sup>2</sup>Levinas’s italicization.

in a void. It is more radical than either acquisition *or* nihilism, both of which make oneself one's "term and . . . goal." "As an orientation toward the other, . . . a work is possible only in patience, which, pushed to the limit, means for the agent to renounce being the contemporary of its outcome, to act without entering into the Promised Land." That is, free work is patience *before* and *through* and *beyond* the future in which I will die. It is not a being-towards-death or a "being for death" or a being-towards-immortality. It is "being-for-beyond-my-death," i.e., being-for-the-other, "a passage to the time of the other," aiming toward a "*time without me*."<sup>3</sup> The word Levinas uses for this radical work is "liturgy" (92).

The Greek word from which the English "liturgy" comes is *leitourgia*, "the work of the people." As he takes up the word, Levinas is not first thinking of its ordinary ecclesial usage. He is perhaps thinking of an older usage, one from which the ecclesial one was adapted, a word for an ancient practice by which persons gave their time in work not for themselves, but for the body of people among whom they lived and labored day to day, a people expected to outlive them. Liturgy is in this way a work without the expectation of remuneration.<sup>4</sup> Levinas, of course, whether or not this is his allusion, does not imagine that the ancients were any more altruistic than we are. He understands that any conventional practice—Jubilee in ancient Israel, say—is performed always irregularly and with mixed motives. And so, when he speaks of liturgy as "the exercise of a function which is not only totally gratuitous, but requires on the part of him who exercises it a putting out of funds at a loss" (92–93), he is not calling upon historians to take the stand in his defense. Liturgy is a technical term here, one of enormous scope in his work. Liturgy—and this is no small complement, given Levinas's understanding of "first philosophy"—"is ethics itself" (93). It is "without recompense" (100), "a total gratuity of action," "an action for a world to come, a going beyond one's epoch—a going beyond oneself which requires an epiphany of the other" (93).

This is no doubt a vision of a most unsatisfying way of life, of work and time, of thinking. We who chronically incline to the slaking of needs—of the people with whom we are attached and of ourselves—are

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<sup>3</sup>Levinas's italicization.

<sup>4</sup>Justo González, *Essential Theological Terms* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), s.v., "Liturgy" (101): "In the Hellenistic world, [liturgy] often referred to the days of labor that the residents of a state owed to the government—a sort of tax paid, not with money, but with labor in public works." Levinas is not thinking of this in terms of balancing books.

bewildered by the way Levinas seems to break with them. And he in fact does break with our needs and their circular trajectories. Need meeting is indifferent to the other, he thinks, *incurvatus in se*. “Even a sublime need, such as the need for salvation, is still a nostalgia, a longing to go back. Need is the return itself, the anxiety of the I for itself, egoism, the original form of identification. It is an assimilating of the world in view of self-coincidence, in view of happiness” (93–94). To be provoked by the other, to be roused and called out, “puts me into question, empties me of myself and empties me without end. . . .” The movement to the other “does not gratify my desire but hollows it out, and as it were nourishes me with new hungers, . . . increasing this hunger to infinity” (94).

My needs are not disturbed by an outgrowth, a drive, or an *élan* spilling forth from my depths; nor by a principle, a universal, or a law indelibly written on the lining of my mind. What will not leave me contentedly at home in my world (view), my ambitions, and myself is “a visitation and a coming,” Levinas writes, “an incision made in time that does not bleed.” It is, more particularly, “that one!” an “illeity”—“a face” (95–96, 102, 104)—that pierces my identity.<sup>5</sup> I stand or sit, everything situated rightly in my world. I talk, read, experiment, ponder—joyfully, anxiously, contentedly, or fearfully—and suddenly the one directly before me is no longer a more or less important operative in my milieu. She rather has broken into my world as “that one!” as a *face*, one before whom neither my world nor I may any longer simply *be*. A *face* troubles me, disrupts me. “Consciousness is called into question by a face. . . . A face confounds the intentionality that aims at it. . . . The I loses its sovereign self-coincidence, its identification.”<sup>6</sup> A face empties the I “of its imperialism and egoism, even the egoism of salvation.” The I certainly stands out in the “here” of this visitation, but as a deacon might, given not to reign, but to serve, longing “to burn with another fire than need” (97). It is torn outward with a “primordial straightforwardness,” “a ‘lack of time to turn around’ ” (98). The face has such prevenience in relation to my consciousness that at the time I would engage it I will have always come too late. Its “trace” is immemorial, undetectable, “utterly bygone, utterly past absent, withdrawn . . . beyond being” (103).

To open to such a face, Levinas maintains, is to open to God. *Face* is no *synonym* for *God*. A face is no *participant* in the divine being, *invested*

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<sup>5</sup>Note 80: The word *illeity* is “from *ille*, that one, *jene* (cf. *jenseits*)” (Adrian Peperzak). I think also of Kierkegaard’s “*hiin Enkelte*,” “that one.”

<sup>6</sup>Levinas cites Isaiah 53.

with some *cognizable* similarity to God, *representing* God in some way. A face is in no sense God or Godlike. Rather I am confronted by a face in the wake of the God who as the holy Yahweh departed before Moses whom Yahweh hid in the cleft of a rock. “To go toward [God] is not to follow this trace . . . ; it is to go toward the others who stand in the trace of illcity, situated beyond the calculations and reciprocities of economy and of the world. . . . For there is no end, no term. The desire of the absolutely other will not, like need, be extinguished in a happiness” (107).

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“The body of Christ” may be thought in at least three ways: (1) as the poor, starved, demeaned, and despised Galilean peasant wonder-worker and equivocal messiah—muscles, blood, skin, and bones—lynched above blood soaked ground as a revolutionary in the battlefield marketplace of Jerusalem and Rome; (2) as the wandering, working, eating, breathing gathering of bodies who—venturing with an uncertain rhythm toward the coming of God—see, hear, smell, touch, taste, and wait upon one another and everyone they happen to meet; and (3) the itinerant crusty brown dry or moist bread and dark red sweet or sour wine without the work of which there would be no good news for people like these. “The liturgy of the eucharist” is the concurrence of all three.

*Eucharist* is quite literally thanksgiving, gratitude, gratuity, grace. It is not to be imagined as contained matter, such as bread on a plate or wine in a cup, objects that could be fixed in a bare instant of space and time. It is a meal: to be eaten and drunk. That is, the eucharist is nothing without the liturgy in, with, and under which it occurs. It is work. It is the work of these people, an uncanny work that offers, gives, releases what might have been invested at a favorable rate. The liturgy of the eucharist is sheer intemperate abandon. That is, it is a cruciform doxological work, of expenditure *without* return. It is situated in the body of Jesus, a body that is indeed glorified, but with a glory “otherwise than being and beyond essence.” The *integrity* required in order for him or anyone or anything to *be* has been stripped from him. He is dis-in-tegrated—no-longer-un-touched; his skin shredded by scourging, his muscles punctured by thorns, spikes, and a spear, naked, on display, humiliated by the Empire with Jerusalem’s blessing, slain just outside Jerusalem’s gates, rightly counted among the despised and rejected, damned by God’s Holy Word, friendless, homeless, motherless, fatherless, shamed, asphyxiated, buried—finished. It is this wet mass of tissue with all his earthy history (the last paragraph of which it is) that is glorified, entangled with the earthy his-

tory of everyone he met and touched—and with it also the celebrants of the liturgy who by eating and drinking have entered into his glory, *paradoxa*, the glory of one whose life ends with all God's mutilated children.

Mutilated with us all, he touches and is touched by us all. No barrier, not even his skin, any longer stands between him and any other. To open to him is to fall into his flayed arms against his flayed breast, to mingle with what is no longer and surely never was his integrity and identity. He inhales the pungent breath of the destitute, mingles his dark blood and his accursed name with theirs. To open to him is to open to them, to "that one!" from whom he has not departed, whose face I meet when without returning to my safe home I meet the hungry, thirsty, strange, naked, sick, and imprisoned—i.e., as a tear that rends the dome of heaven and with it the whole of being. To eat this bread and drink this wine in the doxological work of these people is to love. It is not to assimilate the other, to appropriate her, to naturalize her, to adopt her, to find a place for her in my world. Indeed, as she breaks into my safe home, all things pass away, my world drops from under my feet, from above my head, and from every side. Behold, not the *same*, but a *new* creation!

The liturgy of the eucharist is work. Though certainly not without point, it *is* without profit, indeed without purpose. It is an apocalyptic work, the expenditure of assets at an unrecoverable, incalculable loss, a deed out into the fiery coming disclosure of a foreclosed world. It is a most unsatisfying economy. It neither balances the books nor the scales. It rather *gives*—to death, beyond death. It is a kenotic economy, a doxological thanksgiving *of* Jesus' body and blood broken and shed no less *with* than *for* his crucified neighbors whom he thereby loves as himself—with the whole sweep of his life that is gathered in this last moment. This is neither a monetized nor a debt economy. It has nothing to do with the paying of bills or the accumulation of property. It has nothing to do with getting, having, owning—of anything, not even of salvation. It is an economy of giving, forgiving, *chara*, *charis*—a eu-charistic economy of work and food, daylight and dark, city and wilderness, brother and sister, eunuch and stranger. It is a distribution of fish and bread, a hand placed on a plough; 32 coins paid in return for the head of a disruptive peasant, one coin taken from the mouth of a fish, the theft of a poor widow's last coin, an overturning of tables covered with coins; a Saturday gleaning at the edges of fields; a room in a Samaritan inn, no room in a Judean one; a face set on Jerusalem, then Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth; a borrowed tomb and the hospitable breaking of bread alongside a road to Emmaus.

There may not be a stranger suggestion than that there is a salvation in which identity, authenticity, and integrity perish—the way one uninformed by Agricultural Science might think a grain of wheat dies, when buried in the ground. And certainly much of the soteriology that has captivated the history especially of modern theology has been nostalgic, a series of arguments for the restoration of damaged goods. But if salvation is baptismal and eucharistic, if is a bodily entry into and feeding upon the Jesus of Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday, then whatever it is, it is not greater than he is, he who is the antitype of all the saved. And what is he (if we may play fast and loose with such an honored word as “is”)? He is *the saved one* in whom are all saved. What he is in his resurrection is what he was at the ninth hour on Good Friday and all day long on Holy Saturday, viz., a desecrated body. On Easter Sunday he is *not only* desecrated, *not only* crucified, *not only* despoiled, but he *is* those things—*those things glorified*. He lives, but not fragmentarily, as if new hours and years were to be added to his first three decades or so. His life came to an end on Good Friday. It is a bygone life. But it is a bygone life in which God—the living God—is pleased to dwell, in which the living God is glorified and with it and concurrently this body is glorified as well. That is, though when situated in fragmentary, chronic time—according to the flesh—this body is finished still on Easter Sunday and beyond; when situated in the infinite embrace of the New Jerusalem—according to the spirit—this body, though no less mutilated, no less dead, no less finished, is alive with a life that has no contrast in death, a life that does not compete with death, a life that does not have to get better, a life with every boundary transgressed from the outside. That is, this body is raised into *eternal* life. It has not had goods piled upon it anymore than it has been invested with more minutes. It rather has been *forgiven* . . . and as such it has been made the forgiveness of us all, the open door of entry into a life without scarcity, an abundant life to be judged neither by more and less nor by good and evil. This is a body that opens to everyone and to all. To gather in it, to die and rise with it, and to feast upon it is to open to everyone and to all. To face the people we meet and with them to eat and work and drink and to repeat without nostalgia the Yes! of God that resounds on creation’s eighth day when the Slain Lamb ascends the throne.

# POSTDENOMINATIONALS AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT: REFORMING DENOMINATIONS TOWARD SPACES OF COLLABORATION

by

Nell Becker Sweeden

Faced with denominations that are seemingly irrelevant and ineffective when it comes to global realities of poverty, hunger, lack of clean water, human trafficking, etc., many young Christians have exited and are exiting the structure of the denomination, not to mention the church and Christianity entirely.<sup>1</sup> While on the one hand, this may be an important exodus that has the potential to spark reform, post-denominationals question whether denominational leaders' hands are too tied by bureaucratic tape to allow for grassroots change. In fact, more than just 18-30 somethings, Christians of all ages are questioning the role of denominations when program-driven structures are located "far beyond the actual lives of the faithful."<sup>2</sup> Seen in terms of structural organizations, judiciaries, and, as many Christians have increasingly come to see them, as bearers of "institutionalism," denominations are rigidly irrelevant to day-to-day life. When Protestantism has moved "beyond establishment," is there a *constructive* way forward for the denomination?<sup>3</sup> Scholars such as Russell Richey, David Roozen, and James Nieman claim that in this postmod-

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<sup>1</sup>The unprecedented growth of young people self-identifying as religiously "none" is closely tied to other trends estimating that nearly one in five (or 18%) adults under 30 have left the religion of their upbringing and are now unaffiliated. See Pew Forum study on "Religion Among the Millennials" February 2010. (accessed May 30, 2013). See page 4 of full report. Also see, Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 126-127.

<sup>2</sup>James R. Nieman, "The Theological Work of Denominations," in *Church, Identity, and Change: Theological and Denominational in Unsettled Times*, ed. David A. Roozen and James R. Nieman, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 625.

<sup>3</sup>Roozen and Nieman, *Church, Identity, and Change*, 33-34. See Jackson W. Carroll and Wade Clark Roof, *Beyond Establishment: Protestant Identity in a Post-Protestant Age* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 343-344.

ern situation of American society, “expressive individualism, congregational localism, and pluralism’s potential for fragmentation” are among the challenges for denominations.<sup>4</sup>

Linked to education and the information explosion of the twenty-first century, U.S.-based younger post-denominationals, ages 18 to 30, have a growing awareness of global injustices and a strong desire to act. Though more research needs to be done before identifying the size and scope of a social conscious orientation—and the practices contained therein—one does not have to go far to recognize an expanding market niche that embraces a turn toward social responsibility. From TOMS shoes, to buying Red products, to Kiva, it has become clear that at least in consumer choices and investment opportunities there are outlets for young people’s social mindedness.<sup>5</sup> And yet, if one scratches below the surface of consumer-driven scripts, one can find a well of creativity—though it is not tied to denominations and sometimes not even a public face of Christianity. Courageous entrepreneurs, community organizers, and quiet Christians committed to action, postdenominationals have started ecclesial gatherings and conversations, non-profits and churches that seek to alleviate suffering, to come alongside marginalized persons and combat injustice around the globe. Witness organizations like Cupcake Girls, To Write Love on Her Arms, slaveryfootprint.org, Q ideas, Micah Challenge, Invisible Children, Love 146; not to mention larger Christian parachurch organizations that have risen to prominence like World Vision, World Relief, Sojourners, etc.<sup>6</sup>

Through what I believe to be an emerging awareness of global injustice and commitment to Christian social engagement, especially among young people, I explore Wesleyan-holiness identity narratives amidst twenty-first century post-denomina-

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<sup>4</sup>Roozen and Nieman, 34. In a parallel fashion—though an exploration for another paper—I think that the socially conscious turn among young people is driven by the market’s keen ability to provide outlets for expressive individualism, localism, and pluralism all at once.

<sup>5</sup>To learn more about the mission of these businesses and movements see: TOMS One for One shoe program: (Accessed June 23, 2013); Product Red: (Accessed June 23, 2013); and Kiva: (Accessed June 23, 2013). Also see the One Campaign: (Accessed June 23, 2013).

<sup>6</sup>For an interesting description of the socially conscious orientation of younger evangelical Christians, see Gabe Lyons, *The Next Christians: Seven Ways You Can Live the Gospel and Restore the World* (Colorado Springs, Multnomah Books, 2010).

tionalism. The identity and mission of the church appear to be sidelined within denominations due to what “post-denominationalism” may perceive as leaders’ hyper focus on declining membership and the maintenance of the institution. Rather than suggest structural changes and adaptations, I propose a way forward for denominations in examining, uncovering, and re-telling their theological identity narratives with a new complexity, multiplicity, and transparency. To accomplish this, I turn to the potential that lies within the shared historical narratives of social transformation across Wesleyan-Holiness denominations. Through this case study, I suggest new possibilities for evangelical denominations in being collectives of theological identity narratives. Furthermore, I offer new possibilities for co-laboring across denominational lines through shared narratives and practices regarding the church’s response to issues of global injustice.

### **The Death of One Institution and the Births of Others**

Given the hard reality that many associate denominations with institutionalism, a seemingly “natural” place to start this investigation would be exploring “re-form” in the church through a literal re-forming of the shape of church as denomination. A quick glance at emerging ecclesiological patterns in the changing landscape of denominationalism—such as the prominence of the megachurch, the broadening role of parachurch organizations, and the emerging church movement—would confirm this suspicion of denominational rigidity and irrelevance.<sup>7</sup>

The megachurch, for example, has the potential to be a one-stop platform for Christians seeking to be informed about global issues and find outlets for service alongside their church worship and community life. While younger Christians may be turned off by the “mega” of megachurches, other factors may outweigh their initial suspicion—they may find worship styles that appeal to them; a large number of their Christians peers gathered in one place; creative special interest groups; not to mention, music, coffee, creative service opportunities, style in pre-

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<sup>7</sup>These patterns can be attributed to Eileen Linder, Director of Organizational Development at the National Council of Churches, who argues that more than membership loss the changing shape of congregations is an often-overlooked effect of post-denominationalism. Eileen W. Lindner, “Issues of Post-denominational Identities and Emerging Ecclesiologies” paper presented at the Ecumenical Consultation for the Presbyterian Church USA, September 2007. Available at [and](#) (accessed October 28, 2013).

sentation, etc. Some megachurches have started their own international development initiatives, such as Saddleback's HIV/AIDS Initiative and Peace Plan, and have created avenues for plugging young people into their ministries or experiential learning through short-term mission trips.<sup>8</sup>

Additionally, the broadening role of parachurch organizations not only has deeply impacted emerging ecclesiology, but also has been instrumental in young people's social consciousness. Organizations like World Vision, Sojourners, Habitat for Humanity have shaped the Christian concern for social justice and provided ministry outlets for young people and Christians of all ages—from internships, to literature, to service opportunities, to education. Whereas in the past denominations may have provided outreach- and mission-related narratives and opportunities for young people, today they cannot compete with the creativity and complexity of parachurch programming.<sup>9</sup> World Vision, for example, has become the avenue for humanitarian aid for many denominations and congregations alike. A multi-million dollar operation, World Vision has programming in nearly 100 countries responding to a wide-array of intersecting global injustices of hunger, poverty, clean water, access to education, small business generation, anti-trafficking, etc.

Finally, the emerging church (EC) conversation and missional church movement in the twenty-first century is an interesting case in light of growing social consciousness. The emerging church has begun to reshape how congregations understand Christian mission and identity in the world. Among many other things, EC has focused its attention away from a missiology centered in overseas involvement and traditional evangelization and toward the incarnation of God's mission in the world. Fueled by this conversation, a focus on living out the mission has encouraged Christians in areas of service to a broken world. This manifests itself in Christians' embodiment of the ways of Jesus in a localized fashion in their neighborhood, or through the global connections they may have made in developing relationships and partnership with Christians in the two-thirds world. For example, one house congregation gathers and dedicates its resources (aka "tithe") to provide for the social needs of a family or organization locally or abroad. The caveat is that someone in the con-

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<sup>8</sup><http://hivaidinitiative.com> and <http://thepeaceplan.com/>

<sup>9</sup>Linder suggests the far-reaching influence of parachurch agencies, like Habitat for Humanity that "over the course of its 25-year tenure . . . has supplanted most denominational housing ministry strategies" (Lindner, 3).

gregation must have a direct relationship with that family or ministry. The organic person-to-person connection linking resources and need is an essential part of the vision for church as community.

Reflecting on these adapting patterns of ecclesiology, it is tempting to search for new organizational patterns for denominations themselves. If the shape of the church as congregation is adapting into new ways of being church in the world, why not the denomination? Herein lies the challenge: How can denominations adapt when their very existence arises out of a need for church to become institution, which suggests a certain stability that also produces rigidity? How can denominations be nimble without dismantling what has traditionally carried denominational identity and, in many respects, also maintains the participation and loyalties for those who remain in the denomination—Sunday schools, women’s organizations, church-related colleges, campus ministries, seminaries, hymnals, and so forth<sup>10</sup> When Protestantism has moved “beyond establishment,” is there a constructive way forward for the denomination?<sup>11</sup> Scholars claim that we are in the postmodern situation of American society, “expressive individualism, congregational localism, and pluralism’s potential for fragmentation” are among the challenges for denominations.<sup>12</sup>

### From Structure to Narrative

In order to conjure up any potential for constructive ecclesiological moves in a deconstructive era, I suggest that the first examination is not with structures or ways of organizing but with *what* a denomination invites people to gather around. Said differently, the root of the issue of post-denominationalism lies within how identity is formed. In the spirit of Richey’s assessment of the bleak fate of denominations in twenty-first century American society: “Might the problem, the cause, lie in the collapse of denominational purpose and in the loss of a real reason for hanging together?”<sup>13</sup> Thus, the adhesive needed to stick together in an ecclesial age of postdenominational confessionalism, I suggest, is to (learn how to) *confess* one’s identity anew (in humility and with transparency).

Allow me to play with some new imagery here—sort of a practical theological imaginative reconstruction of denominations. Stories are the “mediating mechanisms” by which denominations can begin to unearth,

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<sup>10</sup>Roozen and Nieman, *Church, Identity, and Change*, 34.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 33-34. See Roof and Carroll, *Beyond Establishment*, 343-344.

<sup>12</sup>Roozen and Nieman, 34.

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

rediscover, and share identity and mission.<sup>14</sup> Places and communities have meaning and become valuable to who “we” are because of the stories told and shared therein. Collective identity is conjured up in gathering and shaping life around stories. Additionally, stories don’t merely tell “us” who “we” are, they organize and instruct “us” how to live into that identity (in place and time). John Inge suggests, “the spatial story is not simply descriptive but prescriptive. Stories give us a way to walk.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, identity and mission, I suggest, encompass storied places, storied practices, and perhaps—when it comes to envisioning denominations—storied organizing. In other words, identity and mission are carried forth as a people embrace and embody shared stories together.

Yet an important qualifier to simply “living the story” is necessary. As the community walks together, they also are *retelling* the story together. The enterprise of unearthing and telling stories involves activating both *memory* and *suspicion*. Narratives as mediating mechanisms, especially as they pertain to institutions, run the risk of being scripts. In fact, it is exactly this fear of being “scripted” that contributes to anti-institutionalism. Activist and author, Rebecca Solnit writes in her book *The Faraway Nearby*:

We think we tell stories, but stories often tell us, tell us to love or to hate, to see or to be blind. Often, too often, stories saddle us, ride us, whip us onward, tell us what to do, and we do it without questioning. The task of learning to be free requires learning to hear them, to question them, to pause and hear silence, to name them, and then to become the storyteller.<sup>16</sup>

Solnit’s keen insights into humanity provide an interesting path forward when imagining them to be read from the perspective of denominations. Learning to be free from, in many cases our own narrative scripts, is found in learning to hear again, question, pause and hear silence, to name the stories, and to become the storytellers again. It is to this texturing of memory and suspicion in denominational narratives that I now turn.

As a part of the Organizing Religious Work study, conducted from 1997-2002 and involving eight denominations, James Nieman describes

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<sup>14</sup>Nieman, “The Theological Work of Denominations,” in *Church, Identity, and Change*, 625-653.

<sup>15</sup>Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 107; italics mine.

<sup>16</sup>Rebecca Solnit, *The Faraway Nearby* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013), 4.

how failures of denominations are best understood in narrative terms.<sup>17</sup> In all times, but especially in light today's contextual challenges for the church, it is when a denomination's narrative(s) become too narrow that it becomes especially vulnerable.<sup>18</sup> Adaptive denominations, suggests Nieman, promote complex theological identity narratives that address multiple perspectives and face their own blind spots.<sup>19</sup>

The ecclesial era of post-denominational *confessionalism* has brought forth new reasons to *confess* shortcomings and failures. Deeply concerned for authenticity and distrustful of institutional decision-making, young people's worldviews beg to open a denomination toward a healthy suspicion of itself and the stories it has told. Nieman also suggests that denominational identity narratives must "retain or restore multiple narrative strands, especially those that have been marginalized or forgotten."<sup>20</sup> A theological commitment to memory and suspicion, involves denominations re-opening their narratives, re-examining who and what has been left out, and then allowing these strands to be voiced. Retelling identity narratives from different perspectives—and allowing those previously excluded to speak their stories—affords the church new vantage points by which to see blind spots previously hidden. As new voices are recovered, it may be the honest re-telling of multiple narrative strands that expand the notion of who "we" are and what keeps "us" together. Though it seems counter-intuitive to unity amidst trends toward fragmentation, postmodern *confessionalism* demands a complex and somewhat messy reality about who "we" are. Rather than a uniform, neatly packaged center, the structure of such narratives take on a network of intersecting stories. This rediscovery of theological narratives becomes *confessional* not only in *confessing* shortcomings and *confessing* the complex narrative histories,

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<sup>17</sup>Nieman, 625. The Organizing Religious Work study, conducted from 1997-2002 study, involved eight denominations and at least 32 researchers of various disciplines. More information can be found here: <http://hirr.hartsem.edu/orw/orw.html>. (Accessed Nov. 18, 2013).

<sup>18</sup>Nieman, 648.

<sup>19</sup>Nieman writes, "Narrative theorists have long recognized that every effort to employ characters, scenes, and other story elements in a motivated and compelling tale is a matter of selection. It is in just this way that vested interest and approved ideology of the one making decisions are written into the story. Theological identity in denominations is subject to the very same forces. By not examining selectivity and the interests that drive it, however, the resulting limited perspectives can produce more serious organizational weaknesses" (Nieman, 648).

<sup>20</sup>Nieman, 648-649.

but also in *confessing* (in the sense of professing) new multi-stranded storied paths forward.

### Case Study: Re-telling the Wesleyan Story of Social Holiness

Allow me to advance this hypothesis from the particular ecclesial heritage and identity Wesleyan-holiness denominations. Wesleyan-holiness denominations have multiple narrative strands as part of their history, and at least two holiness narrative origins—that of John Wesley and the eighteenth century Methodist movement in England, and that of the nineteenth century American Holiness Movement. Aspects of these narratives brought Wesleyan-Holiness denominations into existence and drew Christians together. As the stories were told over time, the modern motivation for evangelization (and conversion of the heart) meant that identity narratives were traditionally focused on personal holiness. Though, at different points in their histories, Wesleyan-Holiness denominations have emphasized varying aspects of each of these narratives.

For the Church of the Nazarene, for example, the twentieth century marked an era of personal piety and holiness, of the second crisis of (instantaneous) sanctification—drawn out of the nineteenth century American Holiness Movement narrative strand. The twenty-first century, in turn, has become the era for recovering John Wesley's understanding of personal holiness. In light of the socially-conscious turn among young people, however, I suggest that denominations also must press further to uncover the social holiness threads—that is, the passion and action for social transformation through holiness of heart and life. This is a complex story in and of itself, yet perhaps in rediscovering and retelling this storyline, young people may begin to find a “storied place” from which to journey forth within a Wesleyan-Holiness heritage.

A lesser-known and seldom told narrative of Wesleyan-holiness evangelical traditions is how John Wesley creatively arranged ways for himself and the people called Methodist to care for vulnerable persons suffering from poverty in eighteenth-century England. The impetus for social holiness, for Wesley, arose quite simply out of the Christian commitment to love God and neighbor. According to Wesley, the poor were those who lacked the necessities of life, while “whoever has sufficient food to eat and raiment to put on, with a place where to lay his head, and something over, [was] *rich*.”<sup>21</sup> Wesley strictly advocated for *all people* to

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<sup>21</sup>Wesley, “The Danger of Riches (1781)” in *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology*, ed. Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heizenrater (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 453.

take responsibility in helping their neighbor no matter their own condition.<sup>22</sup> Wesley modeled his own principles of earning all he could—including soliciting large contributions from the wealthy—living in extreme thrift so as to save all he could, and giving generously to those he encountered living in need.

Wesley's mission to offer holistic transformation in Christ was creative and multifaceted. He organized schools for both children and adults, providing education for the underprivileged.<sup>23</sup> The schooling was offered free of charge for families in need, and children were often given clothing and meals.<sup>24</sup> Wesley also made use of technological advances in printing of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries to establish a "comprehensive and well-organized publishing program."<sup>25</sup> The goal was to provide the poor with books that would complement his preaching and provide instruction on ethical issues. Such books included many of his own writings, theological primers such as *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis, and also a broad spectrum of literature like biographies, poetry, school books, travelogues, etc.<sup>26</sup> His own book *Primitive Physic*, which included home remedies for illnesses to help those who could not afford health care, was among the publications.

Committed to the biblical mandate to visit and care for those imprisoned, Wesley regularly visited prisons and advocated for better conditions for prisoners, including foreign French, Dutch, and American prisoners.<sup>27</sup> He urged Methodist societies to visit prisoners and collect money in order to supply proper clothing, food, and mattresses for them.<sup>28</sup>

Wesley explored micro-loan programs to help struggling merchants and manufacturers initiate consistent earnings through small businesses. His journal entry in 1746 describes a lending system where one-time

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<sup>22</sup>Richard P. Heizenrater, Ed. *The Poor and the People Called Methodist* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 30.

<sup>23</sup>Heizenrater, *The Poor and the People Called Methodist*, 51-52. His first school was set up for Kingswood miners near Bristol in 1739. Heizenrater notes that Wesley followed suit with schools in Bristol, London, Newcastle upon Tyne and other places.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid. Also see, Manfred Marquardt, *John Wesley's Social Ethics: Praxis and Principles* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 83-84.

<sup>25</sup>Marquardt, 57.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>See John Wesley, *Journal* (October 15, 1759), *Works* [BE], 21, 231 (See also October 24, 1760, [BE], 21, 285). Also see previously cited works by Heizenrater, Jennings, and Marquardt.

<sup>28</sup>Marquardt, *John Wesley's Social Ethics: Praxis and Principles*, 83.

loans were given at twenty shillings, which was to be repaid after three months.<sup>29</sup> Though modest, this innovative program provided needed capital for securing materials, such as yarn for weavers' looms.<sup>30</sup> Alongside micro-loans, Wesley experimented with setting up work cooperatives. His 1740 journal gives indication of a women's sewing cooperative for twelve of the poorest women who worked to spin cotton for four months during winter in order to make sales in the spring.<sup>31</sup>

Many contemporary Wesleyan scholars point out that Wesley did not go far enough in how he addressed poverty and injustice by not attacking root causes of these issues.<sup>32</sup> And, there is no doubt, many of Wesley's experiments in social transformation—such as microloans and work cooperatives—were not without their share of failure. Others caution Wesleyan-Holiness Christians not to over-idealize Wesley's social transformation.<sup>33</sup> Telling these stories from various vantage points is necessary. Unquestionably, Wesley's primary motivation throughout his life was to inspire holiness of heart and life and promote love of God and neighbor. Yet, as Wesleyan-Holiness denominations tend to quickly forget—the revival of the heart that Wesley so intensely sought for the people called Methodist manifested itself also in revival of Christian action.

Similarly motivated, Wesley's Methodist predecessors also continued to stretch his legacy in social holiness, thus offering additional narrative

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<sup>29</sup>See Jennings, 61. Also see John Wesley, *Journal* (January 17, 1748), *Works* [BE], 20, 204).

<sup>30</sup>Heitzenrater, *The Poor and the People Called Methodist*, 34.

<sup>31</sup>See John Wesley, *Journal* (November 25, 1740), *Works* [BE], 19, 173). Also see previously cited works by Heitzenrater, Jennings, and Marquardt.

<sup>32</sup>See José Míguez Bonino. "Wesley's Doctrine of Sanctification from a Liberationist Perspective," in *Sanctification and Liberation*, ed. Theodore Runyon (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981), 49-63; Bonino, "Salvation as the Work of the Trinity: An Attempt to a Holistic Understanding from a Latin American Perspective," in *Trinity, Community, and Power: Mapping Trajectories in Wesleyan Theology*, ed. M. Douglas Meeks (Nashville: Kingswood Books, Abingdon Press, 2000), 69-83; Theodore W. Jennings, Jr. *Good News to the Poor: John Wesley's Evangelical Economics*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990; Manfred Marquardt, *John Wesley's Social Ethics*; and Elsa Tamez, "Wesley as Read by the Poor," in *The Future of the Methodist Theological Traditions*, ed. M. Douglas Meeks (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 67-84.

<sup>33</sup>See Heitzenrater, *The Poor and the People Called Methodist*, 25. Particularly see Randy Maddox's chapter in this volume, entitled "Visit the Poor": John Wesley, the Poor, and the Sanctification of Believers," 59-82.

thread that begs to be retold.<sup>34</sup> Confronted by injustices of slavery and poverty of nineteenth century America, communities of Methodists split off in order to more intentionally focus on addressing these needs as a part of their holiness identity and mission.<sup>35</sup> The Wesleyan Methodists under the influences of Luther Lee operated an Underground Railroad station in Utica, New York; William and Catherine Booth would start the Salvation Army out of a motivation to bring salvation to persons struggling with poverty and hunger by providing for their physical and spiritual needs; Benjamin Titus Roberts' outspoken criticism of pew rentals and other discriminatory practices that favored rich over the poor together with the failure of the Methodist church to stand against slavery would lead to the start of Free Methodism; and Phineas Bresee's commitment to the Peniel Mission, an urban outreach to the poor in Los Angeles, California would mark the beginnings of the Church of the Nazarene.<sup>36</sup>

Today, in light of these eighteenth and nineteenth century narrative strands, new narratives are being written as Wesleyan-Holiness denominations locate themselves within a larger Wesleyan matrix, as well as within a larger ecumenical theological identity. As a final observation on denominational narratives, Niemen notes that denominations also discover further blind spots and come to greater complexity in their stories, when they are challenged to locate themselves "within a larger ecumenical ecology of theological identity narratives."<sup>37</sup> One example of this collaboration can be found in the Wesleyan Holiness Women Clergy organization and its leadership in supporting women in ministry over the last decades. Recently, what is known as the Wesleyan Holiness Consortium—a group started to collaborate regionally for pastoral training across WH denominations—also has begun building a cohort around human trafficking awareness, prevention, and rescue, recognizing a common heritage and shared mission to fight against slavery in all of its forms in the twenty-first century. Wesleyan-Holiness denominations' unearth-

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<sup>34</sup>The Wesleyan denomination, for example, began out of the impetus to end slavery in America and many other Wesleyan-Holiness groups followed suit. See Donald Dayton, *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976).

<sup>35</sup>See Dayton, *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage* in its entirety.

<sup>36</sup>For this summary of Wesleyan-Holiness denominational narratives, I am indebted to the work of Jamie Gates and the Wesleyan Holiness Consortium's collaborative white paper on Human Trafficking as the new abolitionist movement.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*

ing of common narrative strands of social holiness may just teach them to re-narrate the stories of their own nineteenth-century denominational division and discover new storied paths as they walk together toward unity and collaboration in the twenty-first century.

### Conclusion

The narrative strands of social holiness are each imbedded in their own context, and flaws and blind spots are part of the story that must be told. Yet, the possibilities are rich as such stories are retold in light of contemporary community development and organizing around poverty alleviation through education, community based health care, microenterprise, anti-trafficking efforts, etc. At the same time, the recovery of these stories is not intended to replace or cover over other stories—stories of personal holiness, purity of intention, or the cleansing of the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit that mark Wesleyan-holiness identity. It becomes necessary to retain multiple narrative strands lest we lose the semblance of a woven fabric—no matter how threadbare it is, even when the threads curl from age and cross back on one another representing contradictory aspects of ecclesial identity. These narrative strands, in all of their complexity, form a shared history and identity.

Rather than a single-stream linear progression of one story to represent a denomination within broader Christian history, I propose that a denomination, as a carrier of many narratives, becomes a network of storied places and storied practices. Denominations house multiple perspectives, threads, itineraries, and paths. Following this trajectory, rather than managerial organizational bodies or judicatory structures, perhaps the emerging shape of denominations will arise out of the work of mining historical narratives, gathering multiple threads, and embodying complex, confessional identity. In this sense, denominations become collectives of heritage and identity narratives from each generation to the next. This means that while some carry the stories forth now, they must allow new generations to take up the mantle and retell the story. In such a way, as Rowan Williams so beautifully expresses, not only as congregations but also as denominations “we promise to go on listening to what we believe is an inexhaustible story.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Williams, Rowan. *Silence and Honey Cakes: The Wisdom of the Desert* (Oxford: Lion Publishing, 2003), 92.

## THE WORK OF LOVE IN RECOLLECTING ONE WHO IS DEAD:<sup>1</sup> A TRIBUTE TO ROB STAPLES

by

Craig Keen

I met Rob Staples on the first day of Systematic Theology 1 in my second undergraduate senior year. I had been more or less double majoring in religion and philosophy at Bethany Nazarene College since I returned there a newly married 20-year-old a year earlier, after an eight-month leave of absence. I had planned to get as quickly and as far as possible away from *the* place that during my freshman and sophomore years I had come to believe was the nadir of an especially low-oxygen self-righteous pseudo-Christianity.

Elesha and I had planned to head to the West Coast with my best friend Arvis. We were all aspiring hippies with our sights set on a nomadic minstrel life. That all changed when I became rather suddenly convinced that I was free to do nothing else until I found the answers to questions—specifically *theological* questions, I would come to realize—that would not let me rest. I decided that I had to address those questions fulltime and that meant that I had to major in religion. I was not at all inclined ever to work in any of the professions associated with the degree. I had in fact no professional plans. It was much more personal than that, a matter of life and death, of my eternal soul.<sup>2</sup> Elesha said okay, but told me she had no interest in ever being a “preacher’s wife.” I told her that she had nothing to worry about, we got rather unceremoniously married on a Sunday right after church, and went back to Bethany, Oklahoma, to the college where in my naïveté I believed I needed to reenroll to do this new work.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This is the title of the penultimate chapter of Søren Kierkegaard’s book *Works of Love*.

<sup>2</sup>No doubt having a draft lottery number of 24 out of 366 at the height of the Vietnam War and knowing that there was still available a “ministerial deferment” for those majoring in religion injected a less noble dynamic into my decision-making. Still, that was not a conscious tactic in my return to BNC.

<sup>3</sup>In the space marked “vocational plans” on registration forms I wrote “apostle.”

There I was in central Oklahoma in 1970, the kind of student BNC seemed to work overtime to make go away, a student with a bad reputation, longhaired, bare-footed, raggedly dressed, and restless, my hand in the air in class all the time. Many of my classmates, I recall, wore black suits, white shirts, skinny black ties, and carried briefcases. They were a compliant group of people, all but entirely male, polite, already practicing on weekends to be good “preacher boys.” Not a few of my professors seemed to be genuinely weirded out by me and found effective techniques for tourniquetting the hemorrhaging of class time caused by my endless questions—but not Rob Staples.

Rob thought of me primarily as a philosophy student who had by God’s inscrutable grace fallen into his classes. He asked other students to be patient with my questions, even if they were not their questions, and he never evaded me, but responded with respect to every sophomoric issue I raised, always listening for my reaction. I felt like a seed that I had finally fallen on moist, warm, fertile soil and though I was still very confused and disoriented, I felt that there was now something to think and not just remember.

Rob was a logical theologian, but he was also constantly on the lookout for the right set-up for a good punch line. Jokes were everywhere in his classes—from horrible puns to short one-liners to his masterfully crafted limericks—so much so that a comic logic accompanied, mixed with, and altered a more traditional, linear one. He lectured largely by evoking images from us, pictures of ordinary affairs, ones that gestured toward theological points he was working hard to make, many of them borrowed from the doctors of the church. And so, the Trinity was the Father’s speaking a word (the Logos) with a breath (the Spirit) that surrounded and upheld it. The incarnation was God’s spoken word taking shape as a human being. The church was Noah’s Ark precariously suspended above the churning waves of the great earth-smothering flood, populated by unwashed, defecating animals. “Have you ever smelled cow manure?” he would ask in his Kentucky accent, someplace between a drawl and a twang. “Then,” he would add, “you know what it was like inside the Ark.”

He was very much a Kentuckian. His memories of his childhood in those parts were vivid and peppered his lectures and other conversations. “Back in Kentucky,” he’d say, “we used to call the kind of economic theory the Republican Party advocates these days not ‘trickle down economics,’ but ‘mule and sparrow economics.’ If you feed a mule all he can eat, there will be exactly enough left over to feed a sparrow.” He was indeed also a

Democrat, a rarity among the faculty of Bethany Nazarene College. I was one of those, too, at the time, proud that the first person to receive my vote for President of the United States was George McGovern. I'm sure Rob voted for him, too, but he was not happy with the way McGovern seemed so willing to compromise to get votes. Rob was not the kind of Democrat associated with Minneapolis or New York or Boston or Chicago or Los Angeles. He was a Southern Democrat, a Populist, of a certain kind—though by no means a George Wallace Populist. Something of what was at the time called “the New South” was at work in him. Openhearted toward everyone, regardless of race, he took the struggle for black folks in America quite seriously. Still, he was not uncritical of the Civil Rights Movement. Once he'd gotten through his work at Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California, he'd told one of his professors who had been a Freedom Rider that activism of that kind was phony heroism. He said, “If you want to do something to fight racism in the American South, take a church down there!”

There was no sign of Democratic or Republican militarism in him. Like some other Nazarenes of his and previous generations, like William Greathouse, he was in fact a pacifist, if not an entirely consistent one. He didn't think killing another human being was ever justifiable theologically, though he did admit that there may be times when out of desperation one may find no other way to proceed but by taking a life. Even then, however, one's only hope for redemption would be the grace of God, not ethical rationalization.

There was so much in Rob that appealed to me. I couldn't get him to like the music I listened to (though I tried; e.g., loaning him three of my Cat Stevens albums), but we generally had similar tastes in art, from pop to *beaux-arts*. Although I seriously tried—but failed!—to like one of his favorite writers, C. S. Lewis, I did heartily agree with his love for the cartoonist Walt Kelly. Rob did not introduce me to Kelly; my hipster uncle Raymond and the newspaper did that, but it did make me happy to know that he, too, loved *Pogo*. And he really meant it, when he'd quote Porky Pine, “We have met the enemy and he is us.”

Rob the theologian is perhaps most remembered for his work on the doctrine of holiness and the sacraments. Both have everything to do with Rob's appreciation for the way the work of God becomes elusively manifest in concrete human life. He writes this in an essay published in the *Wesleyan Theological Journal* during the time I studied with him:

For the “substance” of sanctification, Wesley's primary authority was Scripture, but for the “structure” of sanctification his primary authority was experience—a fact which later Wesleyanism has tended to ignore.

There can be little doubt about the first claim, namely that Wesley had scriptural authority for his idea of the goal of sanctification as “love excluding sin.” From as early as 1730, when he began to be *homo unius libri*, love was accepted as the “one thing needful” and the goal of his religious quest. Throughout his ministry, perfection was described as “the love of God and man producing all those fruits which are described in our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount,” and First Corinthians 13 was thought to contain “the height and depth of genuine perfection . . . the love of our neighbour flowing from the love of God.” He insisted that to define perfection as anything other than love was unscriptural. “Pure love reigning alone in the heart and life” was “the whole of scriptural perfection,” and “this perfection cannot be a delusion,” he said, “unless the Bible be a delusion too.” The only way to avoid setting perfection too high or too low, Wesley was convinced, was “by keeping to the Bible, and setting it just as high as the Scripture does.” And the Scripture, he was equally convinced, stated perfection only in terms of love. “It is nothing higher and nothing lower than this,—the pure love of God and man; the loving God with all our heart and soul, and our neighbour as ourselves.” Of course, in his examination of the religious experiences of many persons, Wesley found support for his concept of “love excluding sin.” But the testimonies of these “living witnesses” only confirmed what he had already found in Scripture.<sup>4</sup>

“Life,” he writes here, “precedes logos, . . . experience precedes dogma. . . . [The human being] lives life before he writes theology.”<sup>5</sup> Though there may be patterns of human life that are consistent enough to warrant a schematizing, an outlining and enumerating, of God’s work among us and such a schema may be supported by psychological research, phenomenological description, and a church’s liturgy, in the end “there is an irreconcilable variability of the operations of the Holy Spirit on the souls of men”<sup>6</sup> that none of us can or may subsume under the authority of a linear logic. This is one of the most important things I learned from him in those years.

What Rob always was quick to point out is that though there are good reasons to think that there are stages in the Christian life, it is much more important to remember what Wesley remembered so well, that the

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<sup>4</sup>Rob Staples, “Sanctification and Selfhood: A Phenomenological Analysis of the Wesleyan Message.” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 7 (1972) [3–16]: 6–7. The direct quotations in this passage are from Wesley’s letters and sermons.

<sup>5</sup>Staples, “Sanctification and Selfhood,” 8, 9.

<sup>6</sup>Staples, “Sanctification and Selfhood,” 11. He is citing Wesley’s letters.

Christian life is love or it is nothing at all. To be made holy is to be the recipient of God's good favor, of God's grace. And God's grace is God the Holy Spirit. And God the Holy Spirit is love. "You," Rob learned to say from Scripture before he learned to say it from Wesley, "shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' . . . [and] 'your neighbor as yourself.'"

It was just this confidence in holiness as love and this suspicion of any attempt to nail such love down that got him into trouble around 1980. There were some Nazarene theologians who criticized the standard understanding of the structure of entire sanctification. Rob thought there was room in the Church for various interpretations of the doctrine. Defenders of a status quo, who seemed to understand anyone not fighting for their team to be an enemy to be defeated, went after him. He was by that time a not yet tenured professor of theology at Nazarene Theological Seminary. These self-conscious "true believers" and "defenders of the faith" wanted him fired and for a while Rob feared that they would get their way. Rob suffered a great deal during those years. I had several talks with him about the way his chronic back pain flared up then and how hard it was to find relief.<sup>7</sup> Yet he made it through his "ordeal of fire" and most of the old Rob Staples returned.<sup>8</sup>

It is Rob's book *Outward Sign of Inward Grace: The Place of the Sacraments in Wesleyan Spirituality* that will be remembered as his most significant contribution to theology. When I studied with him, the last thing I had interest in taking seriously was the church. It may be that it was that apathy that blocked what he had to teach at that time, but I have no recollection of his significantly engaging my imagination or thought ecclesialogically or sacramentally. Rob's work on the sacraments is the unfolding into human social interaction of his thinking concerning holiness that, as I recall, dominated his work in the early 1970s. He approached the sacramental life of the church as a kind of working out of his earlier approach to the particular Christian's journey into holiness. His love for Martin Buber had always inclined him to think not individu-

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<sup>7</sup>We shared back trouble as well. Rob got the greatest relief from acupuncture, by the way.

<sup>8</sup>When my going to teach at Nazarene Theological Seminary was actively supported by three of six General Superintendents, actively opposed by two others whom a third reluctantly joined after a year of indecision, and therefore my way was blocked (four out of six needed for approval), Rob wrote me a poignant letter, recollecting his own pain when a similarly mean spirit was unleashed against him. It meant the world to me.

alistically, but relationally. It was reasonable that in the last years of his work as a theologian he would attend to “the people’s work” and the way God becomes elusively manifest among them.

I more than once told Rob that it was because of him that I had become a theologian. He always responded that he didn’t believe that, that I would have become a theologian whether or not I ever encountered him. It was Rob, though, who introduced me to Wesley, Luther, Barth, Buber, Tillich, the Fathers of the early church, and I suppose I should mention the first theologian I read at length, H. Orton Wiley—and nurtured my already growing love for Kierkegaard. I am sure that I am a member of the Church of the Nazarene and a Holiness theologian because of him. For years, every time I saw him he would retell the story of the day I came into his office and told him I was thinking about transferring to Nazarene Theological Seminary once I finished the M.A. at Bethany. He would always say, “I almost fell out of my chair, but I didn’t want you to know it.” He gave me reasons to attend, one of the strongest of which was that I could work with Paul Bassett there (which I did). And because he encouraged me to go, I went—not at all sure how long I would last there. I have two degrees from Bethany Nazarene College, one from Nazarene Theological Seminary, 24 years as a professor at three Nazarene universities, and on the edge of retiring from that work, an ordained deacon in the Church that attached its name, if not always its good will, to those schools.

Rob was deeply happy that he’d made an impact on his students. I am perhaps inordinately proud of the fact that he listed me among the ones he named his “Magnificent Seven.” He was wrong about that. It is not pseudo-humility that leads me to say that I am a theologian who whistles in the dark, anything but “magnificent.” Still, I can think of no greater gift than that I will go to my grave remembering that Rob Staples thought of me that way.

## BOOK REVIEWS

Payne, William P. *American Methodism: Past and Future Growth*. Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2013. 361 pages. ISBN-13: 978-1-60947-047-0.

Reviewed by B. Craig Drurey, D.Min. student, Ashland Theological Seminary, Ashland, OH.

Lessons can still be learned from the old adages “learn from the past” and “history repeats itself.” William Payne had these concepts in mind when he wrote *American Methodism: Past and Future Growth*. Payne’s passion for the future of Methodism is vividly displayed in his examination of early American Methodism. Payne believes early American Methodism engaged in relevant concepts that helped to propel it from “virtual insignificance to the domination of the religious landscape” (1). His purpose for writing this book is to discover these transferable concepts that took the early Methodist denomination from its meager beginning to the largest denomination in America within three decades (3). The book examines the past in order to inform and help the future growth of the Wesleyan movement.

Payne first enumerates factors that contribute to or inhibit church growth. These factors include contextual and institutional environments. Payne rightly describes contextual factors as those elements external to the church that can either inhibit or contribute to the growth of the church. Payne describes that contextual factors include: culture, politics, natural disasters, economics, and wars. Institutional elements relate internally to the overall church administration and theology. These may include church programs, patterns of organization, and evangelism methods. Payne describes how early American Methodism, at times, did well in changing its institutional factors to match the contextual environment, while at other times did not respond as well. An observation to be made regarding the growth of the Wesleyan movement is that the church responded to the contextual factors by adapting its institutional factors. Specific examples of institutional factors that Payne illustrates will be examined further.

Payne validates his conclusions about what propelled early American Methodism with extensive statistics. Chapter three describes how Payne sifted through the numbers to come to his conclusions. He reveals that he

scoured the numerical data that was available from 1770 through 1812. He assembled the data from the minutes of the Annual Conferences. Payne meticulously grouped circuits by state and region. By doing this analysis, Payne discovered what he thinks to be institutional and contextual factors that contributed to or inhibited early American Methodism growth by region.

His book divides early American Methodism into three time periods. The first period begins in 1770 (the beginning of early American Methodism) to the Christmas Conference held in 1784. The second period is from 1785 to 1799. The last segment of early American Methodism begins in 1800 with the beginning trend of campmeetings and the Second Great Awakening, and concludes with the contextual factor of the War of 1812. He further divides the book by institutional and contextual factors that affected early American Methodism regionally. Again, Payne describes how early American Methodism responded to contextual issues, utilizing statistics to support these conclusions.

Based on his analysis of early American Methodism, Payne offers some concepts that he believes speak into contemporary Wesleyan contextual and institutional settings. Many of these concepts have been abandoned or lost in the Wesleyan tradition's progression from early American Methodism. Additionally, many of the current contextual factors would complement a reframed consideration of these institutional factors that Payne believes gave way to the rapid growth early American Methodism experienced. Payne's goal is not to make the church look antiquated but to explore principles that can be reframed in contextual settings so the church may focus primarily on making disciples again.

From Payne's perspective, several practices reveal these concepts that can transfer to the current contextual church environment. One concept is found in the organization of the circuit and the itinerant preaching position. The itinerant preacher has evolved over time into the current pastor of the local church. But in early American Methodism, the itinerant preacher oversaw and developed a circuit of preaching points/societies that eventually developed into churches. The original pastor (itinerant preacher) focused primarily on evangelism. The goal was to add preaching points by developing new circuits or expanding current circuits. Because of the focus on evangelism and a large geographical responsibility, the itinerant preacher could only oversee the pastoral functions carried on by the laity. The contemporary church has lost this focus on evangelism by combining the roles of the itinerant preacher and the pastoral work that the laity originally accomplished. What would happen

today if the church placed a greater emphasis on evangelism like the early American Methodists did with the role of itinerant preachers?

The issue of lay ministry is another of Payne's important transferable concepts. The early American Methodist movement relied heavily on lay participation and ministry. Because the itinerant preacher had several charges, lay people were trained and expected to carry out the pastoral functions that today's church normally attribute to the local pastor. By virtue of the early American Methodist organization, the laity was trained and ingrained in the process of being an active disciple and lay minister. They provided help for those in need and visited the sick. They could not wait for the itinerant preacher to come to town to carry out pastoral functions. How can today's church more effectively empower the laity in ministry involvement? How can the church change the way pastoral responsibilities are viewed and administered today?

Another contributing factor is found in the organization of the early American Methodist movement. John Wesley had intentionally and methodically created an organization that promoted his concept of the order of salvation. Wesley's movement was centrally formalized around the concept of conferencing. All Methodists and those desiring to be Methodist were expected to be part of groups that supported and promoted growth in grace.

These group organizations became smaller and smaller, the further one was in the progression of salvation. Preaching points were to awaken people. Societies were organized at preaching points to provide biblical instruction and pastoral care. Societies were broken down into smaller groups called class meetings to help awakened people move on into justifying grace. Bands specifically focused on helping people move on into sanctifying grace. Early American Methodism was structured so that every step of the order of salvation was supported and promoted by group structures. It appears that much of today's church structure could not be viewed in this manner. Does each activity in the church promote some aspect of the order of salvation intentionally? Are there gaps, where no activity is taking place, to promote one or more of the graces in the order of salvation?

Payne also considers the concept of revival. He suggests that the revivals of 1775 and 1787 caused the early American Methodists to expect revivals and to try and "do those things that make for revivals" (140). These revivals are what influence and shape many revivalist notions and evangelistic actions today. Payne tracks revivals and absence of revivals and correlates the data to these experiences. He asks some important

questions regarding revivals: Are revivals solely the act of God's timing? Or are there contextual and institutional factors that also affect the ability to receive and experience revival? Payne does not conclusively answer these pressing questions. It appears that he does not consider revivals to have solely a divine or human source. The author suggests that divine, contextual, and institutional factors all contribute to when revival is experienced. Does the church today have an appropriate understanding of revival? Does the church place all expectations for revival on the side of God's responsibility? Or, is there something required in terms of human effort? Does the church consider the contextual implications of seeking revival?

In summary, Payne's work offers a compelling examination of early American Methodism to reveal what characteristics propelled this movement into a formidable church. This book is an important read for anyone wanting to explore transferrable concepts for future church growth from the perspective of early American Methodism. Payne provides some clear principles to consider in seeking out how best to grow the church. One will find that the author's methods and conclusions are successful in demonstrating how context influences the church's ministry and determining what contextual factors contributed to past growth. The reader will be challenged to consider present contextual factors and determine how the past can inform future church growth.

Pope-Levison, Priscilla. *Building the Old-Time Religion: Women Evangelists in the Progressive Era*. New York and London: New York University Press, 2014. ix + 270 pages. ISBN-13: 978-0-8147-2384-5.

Reviewed by Charles L. Harrell, Director of Pastoral Care, Asbury Solomons, Solomons, MD and Adjunct Faculty in Church History, Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, DC.

Priscilla Pope-Levison has written an especially valuable and groundbreaking study on institutions for evangelism and holiness founded and led by women during the Progressive Era (roughly, that span of years bracketed by the American Centennial and the First World War) and on the remarkable personalities behind them. These missions, schools, and denominations—established at great personal cost and sacrifice—frequently arose only to be taken over and changed profoundly or managed and “helped” into ultimate oblivion by ecclesiastical officials and (male) leaders who did not share the same vision that had launched them. Still, they played a critical role in the formation of the Holiness movement and its related ministries in the United States.

The heart of Pope-Levison’s book comprises four chapters, focusing in turn on the following areas: (1) evangelistic organizations, (2) Christian denominations, (3) training schools, and (4) rescue missions. (A fifth area, faith homes, was ultimately omitted as not quite fitting the paradigm represented by the others, but offers a potentially fruitful area for future study.) The author has unearthed and now presents people and institutions of which we otherwise hear almost nothing—and that’s the point. While some of the organizations ultimately failed, and more than one of the key players evinces character flaws or behavior rendering them controversial in their own time (and unattractive, at a minimum, in our own), each made a significant contribution to the American religious and social-ministry landscape of the period, and some have been absorbed into other organizations since them, albeit in reworked and even repurposed form.

For this reviewer, Pope-Levison’s study evoked the question, “Why was I never taught about these outstanding people and works?” The answer is clear: their stories have been largely obscured, co-opted, and lost over the decades, a situation that points to the great gift that the author has given to us. More than once, her study proves to be one of those rare books that helps conceptual pieces fall into place, so that I found myself responding internally (and sometimes, aloud), “So *that’s* what that was about!” One instance may serve to illustrate. Pope-Levison

pulls back the curtain on the subtle but critical shift in Methodism from a conception of evangelism that was conversion-based to one which was education-based. This change left institutional casualties in its wake and was pregnant with significance for the decades that followed, down to the present time. In addition, movements and aspects of church life of which I had not even been aware were opened up and displayed with clarity, such as the vibrant turn-of-the-century Roman Catholic evangelistic missions. Consequently, this volume should be considered not only a “must-read” for specialized course offerings in women’s studies, but more generally as part of the curriculum for courses in American Christianity and on the history of the Methodist and Holiness traditions.

A great strength of Pope-Levison’s study lies in its balance of readability and careful scholarship. From the introduction, the reader is “drawn in” with compelling stories that evoke, by turns, both wonder and outrage. The author’s use of anecdotal material is both judicious and compelling. Her careful scholarship and meticulous weighing of evidence are demonstrated both in the text and in the extensive endnotes. The result of this felicitous arrangement is that the interested reader who wishes to get the main points and move quickly to the heart of the subject will not be bogged down in minutiae. At the same time, a more serious investigator of the period who wishes to incorporate Dr. Pope-Levison’s insights into her or his own work will be amply rewarded, as will the curious non-specialist who wishes to use the footnotes to drill down to new levels of understanding regarding component topics of interest.

This book made me want to know more. Whether it was chasing down further information on the remarkable life of Iva Vennard and the Chicago Evangelistic Institute, or trying to locate the site of Mattie Perry’s Elhanan Training Institute in western North Carolina, my curiosity was whetted even as an amazing amount of information and an entirely new perspective on the period and the great evangelistic movements of the late nineteenth century in America were opened to my eyes.

Along the way, it becomes clear as the book unfolds just who were some of Pope-Levison’s champions in history. However, she never succumbs to what must have been a strong temptation to commit hagiography, insisting instead on a clear-eyed picture of the humanity, strong and weak, healthy and dysfunctional, not only of the villains in the stories (of which there are plenty), but of the heroines and a few devoted heroes, as well. Another place where the author bucks the tide is in her refusal to surrender the term “evangelist” for the trendier term “revivalist”. These represent related but quite distinct categories, both theologically and psy-

chologically, and the manner in which Pope-Levison quietly insists on her terminology is both significant and refreshing.

Additional areas in which the author presents some new and heuristically suggestive material include the success and ultimate eclipse of the “soup, soap, and salvation” triad of ministry, as well as the difference in how history is preserved for those institutions founded by men as opposed to those established by women. She also made clear once again how *much* was done by so *few* with resources limited nearly to the point of nonexistence, when today the clamor is always for “more” even amid an abundance that would have been dazzling to those living a century ago. She also explodes any contemporary assumption that gender is of no consequence when it comes to leading traditionally women-led institutions: the record is clear that nothing could be further than the truth.

Very little remains to be offered by way of criticism. After the first chapter, it would have been helpful to find a more academic-type “state of the question” section. Attenuating that desire, however, are two considerations: (1) the author has essentially done much of that work *en passant* in each section and in the notes; and (2) she is breaking new research ground in many ways, meaning there are many instances where material offered here has really not been examined before. Still, a summary appendix with some of this information, as well as a “rest-of-the-story” postscript on critical players and institutions, would have been icing on what is already a superb academic cake.

Priscilla Pope-Levison’s study is of huge value for the Church. Some of this is obvious, such as exposing and lifting up some under-studied and even suppressed history in evangelism and missions, and fostering a deeper awareness of cultural and ecclesiastical trends in the period. As such, this work promises to be, in addition to its clear academic appeal, a trenchant resource book for missional organizations and women’s ministry, both at the local and general church levels. Its bent toward institutions of a generally Wesleyan or Holiness orientation will attract readers similarly committed. Beyond this, it is an important study for present cross-cultural and international mission work, especially with reference to the question of whether the sorts of dynamics that marginalized or absorbed women-led institutions in the American experience might have the potential to replicate themselves in present or future missional settings and offer clues on how to obviate this problem. There is a great deal here that is heuristically suggestive as well.

Contemporary academic studies often purport to allow us to hear previously-silent historical voices or to offer us a new perspective on

events, people, or organizations from beyond the usual seats of power. In some cases, the promise is kept. What is remarkable about Priscilla Pope-Levison's book is the way in which she opens entirely new vistas on what we had considered to be very familiar and well-trodden historical paths. By revealing these key women, people of power and influence in their own right who were the equal of (and in many cases far more successful than) their often vastly more famous male contemporaries, yet whose stories and contributions have been lost, forgotten, rewritten and even suppressed, she offers us a deeper and more nuanced view of our own past, challenges to our complacency about what is "possible" in our infinitely more affluent and open time, and warns against the subtle yet profound ways in which the valences of personal and institutional power can be subverted, assimilated for other purposes, and neglected to extinction. It is a contribution both timely and welcome.

Crisp, Oliver D. *Deviant Calvinism*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014. 260 pages. ISBN-13: 978-1-4514-8613-1.

Reviewed by Joshua McNall, Assistant Professor of Religion and Philosophy, Oklahoma Wesleyan University, Bartlesville, OK.

In *Deviant Calvinism*, Oliver Crisp attempts to broaden the perception of Reformed theology by demonstrating the diversity that may exist within a tradition that has become known, especially in recent years, for its doctrinal rigidity. The goal is therefore to present “a softer face to Calvinism” (237) and to show that Reformed theology “is still regarded too narrowly” by both detractors and defenders alike (236). At issue is the doctrine of salvation as it pertains to the topics of divine sovereignty, human freedom, and the scope of the atonement. In terms of style, Crisp combines a penchant for analytic theology with an historical attention to some of the more eccentric, overlooked, or misunderstood voices within the broadly “Reformed” tradition (e.g., Karl Barth, John Cameron, Archbishop Ussher, Robert Dabney, John Davenant, and to a lesser extent, Jacob Arminius).

The author makes the following claims. One may affirm the major confessions of the Reformed faith while also holding to a (mostly) libertarian view of human freedom. One may be both an Augustinian and a universalist, both Reformed and a defender of a universal atonement. More specifically, Crisp argues that the so-called “double-payment” objection to universal atonement (that is, the contention that simultaneous belief in universal atonement and human damnation creates an injustice by which the same sins are penalized twice) actually fails to invalidate the notion that Christ died for all. It does so by overlooking the fact that “faith” and not atonement alone, is “a condition of the application of the redemption accomplished by Christ” (233). Thus, in Crisp’s view, a “hypothetical universalism” remains possible for the Reformed theologian.

For the Wesleyan, there are several things to appreciate within this *Deviant Calvinism*. First, Crisp’s objective is the presentation of a Reformed theology that differs from the more narrow and aggressive “New Calvinism” of the so-called “Young, Restless, and Reformed” movement. Thus, while he never states so, this more exclusive and homogenized branch of the Reformed tradition seems to be in the crosshairs throughout. Secondly, Crisp also reveals an openness to doctrinal positions that have often been understood as the domain of Wesleyan-Arminian theology, such as libertarian freedom and the idea that Christ died for all. Thirdly, although Crisp identifies himself as a Reformed the-

ologist, there is a genuine desire to appreciate and understand the diverse traditions within the Christian family, as witnessed in his comment that he is “not interested in perpetuating the historic antipathy between Reformed and Arminian theologians that has been the cause of so much unhappiness between fellow Christians” (188). All this makes *Deviant Calvinism* a more charitable Calvinism, and especially as it intersects with Wesleyan interests.

Yet the book also has its limitations. Because the goal is not to show what Calvinists (or Christians) *should* believe but rather what they *may* believe while still calling themselves “Reformed,” the reader is left to wonder what Crisp himself thinks about such a crucial subject as the doctrine of salvation. Did Christ die for all? Did God irrevocably choose before the foundation of the earth which humans would be damned? Crisp never states his position, and instead argues that one may take a variety of positions on such statements while still remaining self-consciously “Reformed.” This may be true, but it is certainly less interesting (not to mention less important) than actually attempting to answer such questions. Thus, although the book largely succeeds in demonstrating the potential diversity of Reformed thought, those readers who are more interested in clear answers than in labels may be somewhat disappointed.

Others may find the analytic style to be frustrating at certain points. The value of the method lies in its quest for terminological and argumentative clarity, which can help reveal the logical merits and problems of particular viewpoints. This is no small matter, and one might argue that Wesleyan theology (with its emphasis upon the *feeling* of the “heart strangely warmed”) could use more in the way of analytical rigor. Still, the problems emerge when the arcane intricacies and hypothetical scenarios of analytic reasoning seem to occlude rather than illumine what is actually at stake. This happens, for instance, when God’s “just” damnation of the reprobate, whom were decreed to be non-elect from the foundation of the world, is approached by virtue of a hypothetical scenario in which “Jones” may be held liable for *attempting* to drink and drive, even though his friends secretly replaced all his drinks with non-alcoholic beers so that he did not actually possess the “free ability” to become inebriated. Such scenarios may make for interesting debates in Ethics classrooms, but they do little to answer why a good God would damn, from the foundation of the world, those who could not do otherwise. In the face of this question, both “Jones” and his drink-switching friends hardly seem helpful.

The strength of Crisp’s work, however, is that he often seems both aware and troubled by the sharper edges of his own tradition. Thus, while

acknowledging that a doctrine such as double predestination may be found in Scripture, he simultaneously admits that the traditional Calvinist opinion on such topics seems “harsh” and “incongruous, given the [loving] nature of God” (209). There is honesty here, and it seems to leave Crisp searching for a better way, as in the chapters that explore the possibility of, say, universalism or libertarian human freedom. So, although Crisp remains firmly Reformed in his approach to Scripture and tradition, I find this attempt to broaden and soften Calvinist theology to be refreshing. For these reasons and others, Crisp is indeed the kind of generous and tough-minded Calvinist with whom Wesleyans, and indeed Christians of all stripes, can make common cause. Perhaps, as he himself hopes in the final sentence, we may find that these alternative forms of Calvinism are not so “deviant” after all.

Sirvent, Roberto. *Embracing Vulnerability: Human and Divine*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014. 202 pages. ISBN 9781625646545.

Reviewed by John Daniel Holloway III, Union Theological Seminary, New York, NY.

Traditional Western philosophical thought would have us think of perfection as consisting of impassibility, the inability to experience emotions. Especially in our post-Enlightenment world, reason is elevated to supreme status, and emotional vulnerability is degraded to the level of vice. Emotions taint reason and inhibit decision-making, the thinking goes. What Sirvent does well in this work is demonstrate that not only is emotional vulnerability virtuous, it is a necessary factor of perfection. He does this through a theology of divine passibility, stating that God can and does experience emotional vulnerability. He further claims that the Christian doctrine of *imitatio dei*—the ethical practice of imitating of divine perfection—is incompatible with a theology of impassibility. In broader analysis, he suggests, impassibility is the thing that lacks virtue.

Sirvent begins his treatment in the introduction with a preliminary discussion of “God-talk,” with special regard to morality. He asserts that God, in seeking to relate to and be known by God’s creation, must accommodate to human modes of understanding, and so our sense of morality must resemble God’s. If the morality of God is wholly other to human understanding of morality, then we cannot understand God or morality. “Our sense of morality,” he says, “must apply to God because it is the only one we have” (16). He elaborates on this perspective in chapter three. This reviewer welcomes this understanding of morality, as it offers a more compelling alternative to the problematic assertion that God can rightfully do things that we would otherwise recognize as immoral.

In the second chapter, Sirvent traces the development of the theology of divine impassibility, from its early Greek inception to its influence on the church fathers and up to modern theological perspectives. He fairly presents the trains of thought that have led various thinkers to conclude that the divine must be above emotional feeling.

Sirvent explains his support for *imitatio dei* ethics in chapter three, drawing mostly from the Old Testament. The material he offers and the sources he gathered together form a compelling case for the doctrine. Sirvent goes on from his examination of *imitatio dei* to posit that the doctrine necessitates the affirmation of a “shared moral standard” between humans and God, in which our sense of morality is understood as resem-

bling God's. This shared moral standard is a central aspect of his framework, as the rest of the book assumes that what is morally desirable for humans is morally desirable for God.

In chapter four, Sirvent highlights the moral quality of emotional vulnerability, specifically emphasizing its necessity in love and in justice. His argument is made especially strong by his analyses of differing understandings of love—as robust concern, as value, as union, and, of course, as emotion. Regardless of how one defines love, he states, in order to love one must exercise emotional vulnerability, and any of understanding of love that tries to do away with emotional vulnerability is ultimately inadequate. Sirvent's examination of emotional vulnerability in justice is equally strong, as he demonstrates that the pursuit of justice implies compassion, which involves emotional vulnerability.

The discussion in chapter four is illustrated in chapter five by Sirvent's overview of divine love and justice in the Old Testament. Chiefly informed by Abraham Joshua Heschel, Terence Fretheim, and Walter Brueggemann, Sirvent provides Old Testament examples of God experiencing each account of love and of justice discussed in the previous chapter. His examples reveal a dependence on emotional vulnerability for divine love and justice. It is unclear why Sirvent chose to privilege exploration of the Old Testament over the New Testament. The work as a whole could have benefited from equal emphasis on New Testament theology. Nevertheless, the material in chapter five provides a nice demonstration of the concepts considered in the preceding chapter. Especially noteworthy is Sirvent's inclusion of rabbinical quotes about God's experience of emotional feeling. The beautiful words of these rabbis, not found in the classic works on divine pathos, constitute a true gem that Sirvent's book has to offer.

In his final chapter, Sirvent contests the morality of impassibility. He first establishes the common defense of impassibility that an impassible God is more reliable because emotions distort moral judgment, are arbitrary, and cannot be controlled. Against the claim that emotions are arbitrary and involuntary, Sirvent states that, although we cannot control the emotions we feel, we can control our reactions to our emotions, which is the more serious issue. Furthermore, with the help of psychological study, he makes the case that "emotion and reason can *and must* work together in order to achieve the most morally desirable state" (138). In making this case, Sirvent rightly criticizes the modern over-emphasis on reason, which he says has wrongly given emotions a bad name.

Sirvent goes on to address the argument against divine passibility that a passible God would be a self-serving God, as God's emotions would necessarily make God self-important. Sirvent counters that self-concern is not the same as selfishness, in which one privileges one's interests over those of others. He further argues that self-concern does not imply that the self is the lone subject of all decision-making, for other factors can carry equal or more substantial weight. Additionally, he demonstrates how over-emphasis on self-denial can be unhealthy, as it can become indifference toward one's own well-being. He emphasizes that divine self-concern does not have to be understood as negative; on the contrary, the lack of self-concern in God would have negative results.

Sirvent's final discourse concerns Christology. In addressing the defense of impassibility that "true love aims to alleviate another person's suffering rather than participate in it" (162), he refers to God's redemptive work in Jesus Christ as a prime example of the ideal combination of the alleviation *and* participation in suffering. Defendants of impassibility state that one would not want an emotional doctor, tending to them, and Sirvent counters that one would more likely object to the service of a doctor who did not care about one's well-being. The God revealed in Jesus, he says, is not an ambivalent doctor, who tends to human pain without emotion, but is a doctor and a fellow-sufferer, with an emotional stake in whether or not humans recover. Referring to the work of Jürgen Moltmann and Eberhard Jüngel, Sirvent not only sees an emotionally vulnerable God behind the Cross, but he claims that emotional vulnerability must be recognized in God if we are to make any sense of the Cross event.

Overall, Sirvent's work is both compelling and has the potential to complement Wesleyan and Holiness studies, as his discussion of *imitatio dei* is equally applicable to holiness ("Be holy, for I am holy"). Furthermore, Sirvent's understanding of divine and human perfection is quite at odds with our present culture, in which feelings are considered weak. The opposition towards emotions has long been prominent in Christianity as well. Paolo Azzone, in his article "Sin of Sadness," indicated that for a significant portion of Christian history sadness has even been treated as sinful.<sup>1</sup> Thus, Sirvent offers an outstanding criticism of modern sentiments with a portrait of God as one who suffers, and human perfection as being in harmony with the suffering of others.

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<sup>1</sup>Paolo Azzone, "Sin of Sadness: *Acedia vel Tristitia* Between Sociocultural Conditionings and Psychological Dynamics of Negative Emotions," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 31 no. 1 (2012):16-30.

Kelle, Brad E. *Ezekiel: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*. New Beacon Bible Commentary. Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2013. 349 pages. ISBN-13: 978-0834129450.

Reviewed by Brent A. Strawn, Professor of Old Testament, Candler School of Theology, Graduate Division of Religion, and Department of Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies, Emory University, Atlanta, GA.

*Ezekiel* is the latest book to flow from the prolific pen of Brad Kelle, who teaches Old Testament at Point Loma Nazarene University. It is also one of the latest installments in the New Beacon Bible Commentary series—a series that attempts to update and replace the much earlier Beacon Bible Commentary, a ten-volume set that was produced in the 1960s by Wesleyan scholars (all or nearly all of whom belonged to the Church of the Nazarene). The NBBC is similar—a decidedly Wesleyan affair—as indicated by the subtitle of Kelle’s volume and the others in the series. The project is a fascinating one at precisely this juncture: what constitutes Wesleyan commentary as opposed to, say, Pentecostal commentary or Reformed commentary? There are only a few specifically Wesleyan “call out” boxes (known as sidebars in the NBBC) in Kelle’s commentary (for one, see 49)—unlike, say, the *Wesley Study Bible*—though Kelle does an admirable job in doing his best to refer to Wesley and Wesleyan theology frequently. Happily, this does not feel as forced as it might in some biblical books, since several distinguishing marks of Wesleyanism, preeminently holiness, are already on display in *Ezekiel* in fascinating ways (see 57-61 for a nice summary by Kelle). One wonders, then—or at least I wonder—if Wesleyan commentary that addresses every verse of a book (running, full commentary, that is, like the present series) is ultimately commentary *written by a Wesleyan*, which is to say that some aspects of the text might be lifted up for special consideration but not at the expense of other texts that do not contain particularly Wesleyan accents. Running commentary must comment on the whole text, not just the parts that strike one as particularly important (and that “one” could be an entire series and its commitments to a particular theological tradition). Kelle offers just such a full commentary in this volume on *Ezekiel* without neglecting the chance to draw the text into dialogue with Wesley whenever possible and reasonable.

Kelle is an ideal person for this job, as he has spent a good portion of his scholarly career working with the prophetic texts. His insight and his

pedagogical skills are on display throughout the book, which is shot through with fascinating (though sometimes all too brief) sidebars on a host of important topics (e.g., Ezekiel's wheel in music and art; Ezekiel and early Christian interpreters; the absence of Babylon in Ezekiel's rhetoric; fat sheep and ecological stewardship, etc.). These alone are worth the price of the volume and comprise no small education in a host of topics—not just in Ezekiel proper. It is rather unfortunate that these are not listed in the Table of Contents.

By way of engagement and summary, I lift up two important aspects of Kelle's commentary. First, one is immediately impressed with how current the scholarship is. This is no surprise, coming from Kelle, but it is a real boon, nevertheless. While the series format means that this volume (as others in the NBBC) is mid-range and therefore limited in size and scope, readers can nevertheless be confident that they have a fully up-to-date treatment of Ezekiel here—one that remains accessible and highly readable despite the top-notch scholarship. Particularly important at this juncture is the special emphasis Kelle places on trauma and trauma studies and how the Babylonian exile was a traumatic experience that left its mark on the prophet's audience and his book (e.g., 30-32, 49-51, and *passim*). Kelle is more reticent than I would be in tracking such effects in the prophet himself, but that is a small disagreement. I myself would argue that if one can find psychological effects of trauma in the literature, then one can do the same with the author of the literature—though of course one must proceed cautiously on both points since the texts we have are not personal journals.

Second, one is impressed with the care with which Kelle treats difficult aspects of the text. Perhaps the most (in)famous of these texts in Ezekiel are chapters 16 and 23, which draw in troubling ways on matters of sexual violence. Kelle is fully aware of the problems such texts pose for many contemporary readers and is exceedingly sensitive about how they should be heard and interpreted (see, e.g., 201-205; 241-43). He also deserves credit in doing his best to interpret even these difficult texts for present day communities that consider the entire Bible sacred scripture. In the case of chapters 16 and 23, for example, Kelle argues that, at their heart, they represent a call for people to have undivided loyalty to God—a message that should resonate with Wesleyan readers (204, 241). I find Kelle's work on both of these fronts—acknowledging the difficulties the biblical text can pose but seeking to find significance beyond the problems—admirable, even though I might quibble here and there with various moves or points of connection, including those made to Wesleyan

theology. So, for example, as Kelle notes, Wesley thought very highly of Ezek 36:25-38 as representing one of the clearest portrayals of sanctification in the Old Testament (see 305). But one wonders, even at this specific point, if Wesleyan theology meshes with other, correlate aspects of the book that Kelle points out: the sovereign theology of God in the book coupled with the (at times rather) low anthropology of the moral self that sees humans as completely incapable of any sort of moral redress. My wonderings at this intersection have less to do with Kelle, of course, than with Wesley and Wesleyanism vis-à-vis Ezekiel, but they do circle back to the nature and place of specifically Wesleyan commentary. Then again, insofar as Wesleyans can and must care about all of Scripture, including those texts that may not always correspond precisely to their favorite theological accents, these parts of Ezekiel may simply remind us of the hair's breadth that separates us from all others within the family of God.

Wainwright, Geoffrey. *Faith, Hope, and Love: The Ecumenical Trio of Virtues*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014. 72 pages. ISBN-13: 978-1-4813-0085-8.

Reviewed by Tyler R. Huson, Claremont School of Theology, Claremont, CA.

Geoffrey Wainwright, Cushman Professor Emeritus of Christian Theology at Duke University and long standing member of the World Council of Churches (WCC), writes about faith, hope and love and the power that these virtues have for unifying the church at large. W's book is a series of lectures delivered at Baylor University's annual Leo and Gloriana Parchman Endowed Lectures (October 2012).

Wainwright's goal in this book is to examine the Spirit's gifts and virtues (for Wainwright, a virtue is a habit of action) of faith, hope and love in relation to acts of Christian worship and ecumenical relations. Inspired by the Apostle Paul's trio of faith, hope and love, Wainwright matches faith with Holy Baptism, hope with the Lord's Prayer and love with the Lord's Supper. He believes that all churches can embrace this trio of virtues and sees them as both unifying and empowering ecumenical tools.

In his first chapter, "Faith and Baptism," Wainwright seeks to build a common ground for Christians of all traditions. One of the challenges that the author discusses is infant baptism versus believer's baptism. Wainwright shows how there can be unity among those who believe in either a baptism of faith (infant baptism) or virtue (confession of faith), a very controversial topic among the church. Wainwright mentions directly the tension between Methodists and Baptists on this issue. In finding an acceptable ground, Wainwright argues that both faith as a virtue and a gift must be present in baptism in order to be a full and active member of the ecumenical church, meaning that if an infant is baptized, then a personal confession of faith must follow later on in life. Wainwright closes the chapter saying, "Faith is meant to be spoken out, to be rendered in testimony to the gospel, so that more and more people may become believers and become incorporated into the eucharistic community" (23).

The author's solution to the infant baptism controversy between different denominations is not easily settled by expecting a confession of faith later in life. This is at most hopeful but doubtful as to whether or not it will provide a fruitful common ground. It is difficult to imagine how his treatment would satisfy a Catholic, who understands infant baptism as an act that changes the one being baptized by receiving grace and removing

original sin. Wainwright's suggestion somewhat undermines this notion by saying that the work is incomplete until there is a confession of faith.

In his second chapter, "Hope and the Lord's Prayer," Wainwright draws upon the work of scholars of diverse backgrounds to explain each line of the Lord's Prayer. Wainwright uses the Lord's Prayer to show that all who pray this prayer are God's children, thereby establishing a commonality. Wainwright argues, "The substance and the direction of hope are sketched and guided by the eschatological Pater Noster and other prayers of Jesus, all said in the Holy Spirit" (39). The common "hope" of all Christians in the Lord's Prayer is this: "Thy kingdom come." Wainwright offers various scenarios where the message of hope and God's kingdom applies. He mentions that hope can refer to both the eschatological and the here and now. That is, whether one believes in a metaphysical or a metaphorical coming of God's kingdom, there can be fellowship among Christians. Wainwright also notes that the Lord's Prayer and baptism both have a long tradition of being used in unison. Wainwright writes that "unity among Christians and their communities is integral to Christians' missionary witness and thus to the hope for the world's coming to faith in the Lord, and thereby to salvation" (36). Wainwright concludes this chapter by emphasizing the importance of fellowship through prayer. Wainwright cites Charles Wesley's hymn, which declares, "For all servants of our King In earth and heaven are one" (38). These quotes from Wesley are inserted to encourage Wesleyans to recognize that God's servants are not only Wesleyan but also extend to other denominations.

In his third chapter, "Love and the Lord's Supper," Wainwright shows that the "Lord's Supper is the rite in which the love of the Lord Jesus is demonstrated and experienced, whereby the virtue of love may be inculcated among the immediate recipients and even extended beyond them through their corresponding conduct" (42). Wainwright mentions that historically, the Eucharist has been a centerpiece for church division in regards to both doctrine and discipline. Wainwright admits a lot of reconciliation still must be done before the whole church can partake in communion together, but is hopeful that attempts are underway. His view of the Eucharist is that communion with Christ offers hospitality and a living and active presence of Christ, and this presence should empower believers' love and hospitality towards others. Wainwright concludes the chapter with a hopeful tone that love will conquer the division between denominations. He concludes with a Wesleyan hymn that affirms, "Love, like death, hath all destroyed, Rendered all distinctions void." This chapter is perhaps the most challenging for Wainwright because the church has

been and continues to be divided in its views and practice of the Eucharist.

This book has a strong Wesleyan theme. Wainwright is a self-proclaimed Methodist himself and references both John and Charles Wesley. Wainwright relates some of their writings and hymns to his trio of ecumenical virtues. Wainwright engages some specific quotations from Wesley, thereby exemplifying the usefulness that Wesley's works have for today. Wainwright quotes Wesley, "If we cannot as yet think alike in all things, at least we may love alike." This quote is to encourage denominations to work together. I think this quote could have application to inter-religious dialogue, too!

It seems that Wainwright wishes to unite people through faith, hope and love perhaps at the sacrifice of specific beliefs. While this is not necessarily wrong to begin with, it is just a lot to ask for some people. Many people participate in baptism and communion because of what they believe to be true about these sacraments and their efficacy, as these ordinances are taken very seriously (Wainwright takes them seriously, too). Asking people to prioritize unity over their specific beliefs regarding these sacraments is perhaps too much to ask from some people.

This book offers good tools for building stronger relations between Wesleyans and other denominations. The tools, of course, are faith, hope and love. This book will prove beneficial to anyone who is interested in WCC and ecumenism. One might wonder if this trio could apply to inter-religious dialogue as well, thereby expanding the usefulness of this book.

Pinnock, Clark H. and John D. Wagner, eds., *Grace for All: The Arminian Dynamics of Salvation*. Eugene, OR: Resource Publications (imprint of Wipf and Stock, Publishers), 2015. 328 pages. ISBN-13:978-1-4982-0012-7.

Reviewed by Barry L. Callen, Anderson University, former editor of the *Wesleyan Theological Journal* and author of the Clark H. Pinnock biography, *Journey Toward Renewal* (2000).

To understand the 2015 book *Grace for All*, edited by Clark H. Pinnock (died in 2010) and John Wagner, one must go back to the big 1970s turning point in Pinnock's prominent theological career. Prior to the turning, Pinnock believed deeply that effective Christian evangelism must be supported by the faith's intellectual integrity, which he believed relies on a fully accurate revelation of the Bible—inerrancy. That integrity, he initially believed, must be rooted in a Calvinistic theological orientation. Any alternative (like Arminianism) was judged unacceptable since it implies—presumably—that sinners can somehow aid in their own salvation, which is by grace alone.

Then came the big change for Pinnock. As I described it in my biography of Pinnock (*Journey Toward Renewal*, 2000, 99), Pinnock “was taking an early first step away from adherence to a strict Calvinism. Sinners *can* do something on behalf of their own salvation, if that something is only to listen and consider the claims of Christ. Surely, where there is a high level of *accountability*, God grants some level of real *ability* to hear and respond to the overture of divine grace, thus making one truly *responsible*.”

Thus, Pinnock edited the book *Grace Unlimited* in 1975 to help give “a louder voice to the silent majority of Arminian evangelicals.” He really meant “majority” since he was convinced that the believing masses take human free will for granted and Christian evangelists “seem to herald the universal salvific will of God without hedging.” So why the Calvinistic dominance? For Pinnock in the 1970s and beyond, it was mainly because Calvinists maintained substantial control of the large evangelical seminaries, the largest publishing houses, and the biblical inerrancy movement in general. He judged that the 1970s was the time to begin breaking free of this stranglehold, at least in some of its “rigorous particulars,” and begin the quest for a more adequate theology rooted in a fresh dynamic as the Spirit of God might lead.

Now in 2015 comes this new book *Grace for All*, an updated and revised version of the 1975 *Grace Unlimited*. Pinnock's new co-editor, John D. Wagner, has initiated this work, believing that much has hap-

pened in the intervening forty years and that a new version of the earlier book will benefit the contemporary theological world. The recent book *Calvin vs. Wesley* by Don Thorsen (Abingdon, 2013) reflects Wagner's judgment of the contemporary scene and Pinnock's judgment of the similar circumstance in the 1970s: "I have met many Christians outside the Wesleyan tradition. Very often, they lived in a manner that was more like the way that [John] Wesley described the Christian life than was reflective of their own [Calvinistic] theological tradition. If my thesis is correct, then Christians would do well to learn about Wesley" (Preface).

Wagner has retained several of the original articles collected by Pinnock, each with some editing, and he has added six new ones. Prominent among the new ones is the lead article by Roger Olson titled "Arminianism is God-Centered Theology" and the one by Vic Reasoner titled "John Wesley's Doctrines on the Theology of Grace." Wagner's overall intent is offer a "powerful anthology of Arminian essays" in order to "articulate the doctrine of grace in the most biblical and coherent way possible," the way that he is sure leads to an understanding of the universality of God's saving grace, "the all-inclusive scope of God's salvific will" (xv).

An irenic tone is heard in some of this book's articles, but a more combative one is certainly present here and there. For instance, one of the newly added articles is by Glen Shellrude (Ph.D., University of St. Andrews) and titled "Calvinism and Problematic Readings of New Testament Texts Or, Why I am Not a Calvinist." Even more confrontive is the endorsement on the back cover by Terry Miethe, former Dean of the Oxford Study Centre, Oxford, England. He announces to the reader: "I cannot think of a more dangerous unbiblical teaching than Calvinism!"

This directness of judgment tends to reflect Clark Pinnock's general view and his occasional directness of statement. The judgment of Roger Olson in the lead article is about as direct as one can get: "The God who stands at the center of classical, high Calvinism of the TULIP variety is a morally ambiguous being of power and control who is hardly distinguishable from the devil. The devil wants all people to go to hell whereas the God of Calvinism wants some, perhaps most, people to go to hell" (16). John Wesley had great respect for the work of John Calvin in general, but he also deviated from him at this key point of rigid predestination, thus Wesley's "prevenient grace" teaching.

There is in this new book a detailed subject index and an extensive index of scriptural references. It is well researched and vigorously consistent in pursuing its central goal of addressing "the majority of Christians [who] recognize and believe the truth about the wideness of God's mercy

and the generous offer of grace to all sinners, and do not embrace the malformed theological theories we find it necessary to oppose” (xxiii).

The irony, the one Pinnock knew in the 1970s and that Thorsen explores today, seems to remain in the view of John Wagner and his several writers. Many Christians act *in practice* as though God is loving, forgiving, and responsive to human decisions, but they believe *in theory* that God is in total control, has an inflexible plan in place, and has determined in advance who will be saved and who will not. This new volume addresses again and extensively this irony, insisting throughout that the Bible calls clearly for the faulty theory to be brought in line with the wise practice. That is, the “Arminian dynamics of salvation” teaches that God’s grace is *for all*, for all who will accept this divine graciousness and thus be saved.

Healy, Nicholas M. *Hauerwas: A (Very) Critical Introduction*. Interventions series. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014. 142 pages. ISBN-13: 978-0802825995.

Reviewed by David C. Cramer, PhD candidate in Religion, Baylor University, Waco, TX.

Stanley Hauerwas is without a doubt one of the most important theological ethicists of our time, and for that reason alone Nicholas Healy's critical assessment of Hauerwas's work deserves the attention of theologians and ethicists alike. But given Hauerwas's indebtedness to Methodism, readers of this journal should be especially interested in Healy's book. Indeed, Healy's criticisms of Hauerwas's work might profitably be read as an indictment of a certain strand of holiness ecclesiology more generally—an indictment that Wesleyan theologians would do well to consider.

Healy explains in the first chapter that, given Hauerwas's enormous influence, a sustained analysis of his project as a whole is needed. Rather than focusing on a particular issue in Hauerwas's work, such as his pacifism, Healy attempts to offer a comprehensive (though not exhaustive) account of Hauerwas's project in order to evaluate it in a systematic way. Writing as a Roman Catholic, Healy acknowledges that he is largely sympathetic to Hauerwas's "general agenda" of "seek[ing] to bring about changes within the church" (6); but he takes issue with much of Hauerwas's "particular agenda" that "seeks to bring the churches to agree that pacifism is the central Christian norm, that all forms of Constantinianism must be rejected, [and] that liberalism and other traditions have no place in Christian thinking and practice since Christianity has its own rationality" (7). Healy's argument is thus best read as an immanent critique of Hauerwas's work. According to Healy, Hauerwas's particular agenda undermines his general agenda in ways that call one or the other (or both) into question.

In chapter two Healy seeks "to show that there is a center to Hauerwas's theological web or system, and that this center is his account of the church" (18). Healy summarizes the "marks of the Hauerwasian church" as including "a distinct narrative, a distinct identity, distinctive practices and, as such, a distinct people, who constitute an alternative community that is holy and truthful, and as such, embodies and witness to the truth in and for the world" (38). According to Healy, this account of the church "provides the structure and principles of [Hauerwas's] understanding of

Christianity” and thus serves as the basis for Hauerwas’s theological reasoning as well as his assessment of the work of other theologians and ethicists (38). However, in the remainder of the book, Healy argues that Hauerwas’s understanding of the church is itself deeply problematic.

Chapter three constitutes the heart of Healy’s argument. Drawing from the work of David Kelsey, Healy distinguishes three distinct logics utilized by theologians: the “logic of belief” or theology proper, the “logic of coming to believe” or apologetics, and the “logic of living our beliefs” or ethics (52). Following Kelsey, Healy argues that modern theology—as epitomized by Schleiermacher—has tended to conflate these logics, whereas traditional theology tended to keep them relatively distinct and, significantly, to keep the logic of belief “logically, epistemologically, agentially, and ontologically” primary (42). According to Healy, Hauerwas’s work, like Schleiermacher’s, “tends to conflate all three logics, to the detriment of the logic of belief” (55). While granting that Hauerwas is critical of Schleiermacher’s “turn to the subject,” Healy concludes that Hauerwas and Schleiermacher are nevertheless quite similar methodologically: both “develop contrastive definitions of the church which stress its distinctive identity in terms that move the logic of belief to a secondary position” (71-72). In short, Hauerwas, like Schleiermacher, “is thoroughly ecclesio-centric” (72).

In chapter four, Healy critically examines Hauerwas’s ecclesiology. This chapter deepens the common objection that Hauerwas’s church is overly idealized or theoretical. Healy writes, “For Hauerwas’s argument to work, it must be the case that the church has the kind of visible identity he says it has, for otherwise the church cannot be the kind of alternative way of life he insists it should be” (73). But, Healy argues, Hauerwas’s evidence for such a church—for example, his story of Broadway United Methodist Church—is underwhelming. Rather than relying on stories, Healy offers ethnographic data to argue, first, that the church is filled with “unsatisfactory Christians” (86), and, second, that even active Christians are not simply formed by *the* practices of *the* church but rather “by the church of our choice, and thus by the Christian practices and beliefs that are more likely to appeal to us” (90). There is significant dissonance, then, between “Hauerwas’s normative account of the church” and ethnographic “descriptions of what church life is actually like” (98). Healy suggests that such dissonance could be accounted for by a theological account of God’s action in and through the church “irrespective of whether we are transformed by our practices or are merely unsatisfactory Christians” (99); but, argues Healy, “It is this theological account that is missing in Hauerwas’s work” (99).

In his concluding chapter, Healy makes explicit a number of theological problems that result from Hauerwas's ecclesiocentrism. In Healy's judgment, "Hauerwas is indeed an insightful Christian thinker and a splendid social ethicist, but theologically his work is surprisingly thin" (102). Instead of developing a theological account of the church, Hauerwas bases his description of practices and tradition largely on the work of social philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre. Healy writes, for example, that "Hauerwas's apparent acceptance of Methodist perfectionism and his stress on formation and virtues . . . finds encouragement in MacIntyre's work, but no help for developing an alternative, more theological understanding of failure and mediocrity, and what difference that understanding might make to our account of the church" (107). In contrast to Hauerwas's ecclesiology, which Healy suggests "veers close to a naturalistic account" (129), Healy argues for a "theocentric account of the church" in which "the church—in all its messiness and confusion—is a product of the Holy Spirit who acts freely within us, in spite of us, and apart from us" (130, 131). Such an account, Healy concludes, rightly prioritizes God's unconditional, loving, and gracious action toward humanity, which entails that Christian living is not about striving for human excellence as much as it is a humble response to God's gift.

In this admirably concise and readable book, Healy offers not only a cogent, systematic interpretation of Hauerwas's massive and wide-ranging corpus but also a subtle and nuanced criticism of it. Despite its brevity and clarity, however, it is somewhat misleading to call this book an "introduction." Rather than offering a primer for the uninitiated, Healy has thrown down the gauntlet to those indebted to Hauerwas.

There are a number of ways one sympathetic to Hauerwas might respond. One might argue that Healy has overemphasized Hauerwas's indebtedness to MacIntyre at the expense of other influences, such as Yoder and Barth, or overemphasized Hauerwas's writing on the church at the expense of his treatment of other issues, such as pacifism and disability. One might find passages where Hauerwas does speak of divine agency as distinct from the church. Or one might simply question Healy's reliance on Kelsey's typology and its privileging of the "logic of belief."

There would be a certain validity to such responses, but I think Healy's basic questions for Hauerwas would still stand: Is the church sufficiently distinct from the world to offer the kind of embodied witness that Hauerwas imagines? If not, how does one account theologically for that seeming failure? Does the problem lie with the church or with Hauerwas's conception of the church or both? Those of us in holiness traditions are in Healy's debt for raising such questions anew.

Hammond, Geordan. *John Wesley in America: Restoring Primitive Christianity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. 237 pages. ISBN-13: 978-0198701606.

Reviewed by Jennifer L. Woodruff Tait, Managing Editor, *Christian History Magazine*.

After many years, many writers, and many books, it's getting pretty hard to say something new about John Wesley. In this book, Geordan Hammond has succeeded. He approaches Wesley's brief sojourn in the American colonies as if we did not know what was going to happen next, and as if we were not reading our later concerns—whether of evangelical zeal or high-church commitment—back into the story. The result is enlightening.

Hammond's basic reason for examining the Georgia mission in close historical detail is that it was “a laboratory for implementing [Wesley's] views of primitive Christianity,” and that, furthermore, “understanding the centrality of primitive Christianity to Wesley's thinking and pastoral method is essential to comprehending his experience in the New World” (vii). Approaching the mission from this angle allows the reader both to better understand the nature of what actually happened in Georgia—what failed *and* what succeeded—and to better understand Wesley's desire to see primitive Christianity as a “normative model for Christian faith and practice” that needed to be “restored in the Methodist movement” throughout his entire ministry (viii). In service of this, Hammond has read and carefully studied many sources not often consulted in more traditional tellings of the story.

Hammond begins by outlining what Wesley's conception of primitive Christianity actually was at this point in his life—his family history in the matter, and his close connection to Usager Nonjuror ideals of primitive Christianity. Then, he discusses how Wesley and his fellow missionaries put these ideals into practice on the *Simmonds*—holding public worship services twice a day and three times on Sundays (including the atypical practice of weekly communion), preaching extempore, caring for the sick, and attempting to baptize by what Wesley felt was the primitive method—trine immersion. Hammond continues by explaining Wesley's relationship with not only Moravians on the ship and in Georgia, but also Lutheran Pietists in Georgia, a less well-known story. Diaries and letters of both Moravians and Lutherans describe Wesley and provide a new perspective on what these groups saw as his puzzling desire to restore primitive liturgical practices. This formed a “fundamental barrier” between

him and his Pietist friends even as their “hymnology and theology exerted a lifelong influence” on him—though not so dramatic an “immediate and rapid refocusing” as has sometimes been claimed (107).

Hammond then puts in a fresh light what Wesley actually *did* in Georgia—from theological reading to revising the prayer book to insisting on practices from the 1549 BCP to conversations with the Indians—arguing that “his passion for restoring primitive Christianity was the driving force behind...prayer book revision, precise sacramental observance, confession and penance, ascetical discipline, deaconesses, religious societies, mission to the Indians, and re-assessment of the primitive councils and canons” (158). What Wesley did, as we all know, aroused opposition, and Hammond talks of those who caricatured him as an enthusiast, as a Roman Catholic, and as a “divisive clergyman;” who thought he “interacted with women in a way that many male colonists found repulsive;” and who undermined the authority of the Georgia magistrates in several prominent ways that supported “ordinary Georgians” (159). It is in this light, with the broad theological and social background laid out, that Hammond considers the Sophia Hopkey Williamson case, challenging those who have considered it merely a matter of “sex and psychology” (159). Hammond lays stress in interpreting the event on Wesley’s overall insistence on celibacy as a “commitment to imitating the poverty of Christ and the primitive church” (173), and his close friendships with, and encouragement of as spiritual equals, *many* women in the colony, not just Hopkey.

In conclusion, Hammond traces how Wesley’s commitment to primitive Christianity fared during the rest of his ministry. He maintains that Wesley’s focus on the early church peaked from 1732-1737, but in contrast to older biographers who saw a great discontinuity in Wesley before and after Aldersgate, he (in concert with the most current scholarship) sees that commitment as still active throughout his life—though modified. Wesley “came to see Christian antiquity as subordinate to Scripture” (195), eventually concluded that bishops and presbyters were essentially the same order, focused more as he aged on how “‘the mystery of iniquity’ had affected the church even in the apostolic age” (202), returned to regular use of the 1662 prayer book and ceased experimenting with it until he made his revision for the American church in 1784, and (as the *Sunday Service* itself demonstrates) concluded that the Eucharist did not necessarily require prior preparation. But he continued to read the church fathers and to maintain that the primitive church was a “normative model for doctrine and practice” (200). In fact, his followers characterized him

on his tombstone as someone who wanted to “revive, enforce, and defend the pure, apostolical doctrines and practices of the primitive church” (203).

At every turn, this book fills in with extensive primary-source research the stories of Wesley’s sojourns, which many of us have imbibed in a more mythical form. It paints both the mis-steps and the successes of his Georgia sojourn in close-grained detail—a detail neither hagiographic nor debunking, but profoundly illuminating and appropriately complex. It is a worthy successor to Richard Heitzenrater’s study of Wesley’s Oxford years, which it notes as a model, and it will serve as a reference and as a pointer towards further study for decades.

Griffin, David Ray. *Panentheism and Scientific Naturalism: Rethinking Evil, Morality, Religious Experience, Religious Pluralism, and the Academic Study of Religion*. Claremont, CA: Process Century Press, 2014. 308 pages. ISBN-13: 978-1940447032.

Reviewed by John Culp, Professor of Philosophy, Azusa Pacific University, Azusa, CA.

Griffin's explanation of panentheism and its implications for a number of important topics offers a valuable resource to two groups of readers of this journal. For those attracted to process thought, this work gives a good overview of Griffin's contributions to process theology. For those seeking to critique process theology, Griffin offers a comprehensive discussion of many crucial aspects of process theology and how those relate to traditional Christian theism. Reading Griffin's work will give opponents a good grasp of process theology and its criticisms of traditional Christian thought as well as how Griffin responds to traditional Christian criticisms of his position.

Griffin proposes panentheism as the most adequate way of relating science and religion. Griffin identifies his presuppositions and the influences upon his position in his introduction. His basic presuppositions are that perception is prehensive rather than sensationist, meaning that feeling is more basic than sense perception, panentheist rather than atheistic, and panexperiential rather than materialistic, meaning that events rather than substance are the basic realities. These basic presuppositions are primarily derived from the philosophy of A. N. Whitehead, but Griffin also relies heavily upon ordinary experiences of religion and morality, logical consistency achieved through reasoning, and scientific naturalism rejecting supernatural interruptions of the normal causal processes.

Griffin first examines the historical development of alternatives to traditional Christian theism and explains why both supernaturalism and atheistic naturalism fail to resolve the conflict between science and religion. Supernaturalism fails to account for the order in the universe because God intervenes in the natural order. God's intervention in the natural order also raises the problem of why God does not end evil in the present world. Atheistic naturalism in its denial of God cannot account for the fine-tuning of the universe, the direction of evolution, the presence of novelty that appears in all biological and cultural evolution, the objectivity of mathematics and morality, and the continuing importance of religion. Griffin then utilizes a Whiteheadian understanding that God constantly interacts with all parts of the world without completely deter-

mining any particular event or interrupting natural causation to explain that what he means by scientific naturalism. Scientific naturalism makes possible a positive relationship of science and religion. This relationship is demonstrated by the identification of design in the world when design is understood in terms of spatio-temporal events embodying creativity and some self-determination. Design results from God providing possibilities for both order and novelty to local events. Pantheism's understanding of God as persuasive rather than coercive avoids the problem of evil. Horrendous evil occurs because increases in the potential for good also increase the potential for evil. Human freedom can bring about great good and great evil. God as perfect in power and goodness neither causes evil nor fails to overcome evil. Furthermore, Whitehead's non-materialist metaphysics and prehensive doctrine of perception recognize the validity and importance of religious experience. In religious experience, the prehension that there is something holy comes to consciousness. Likewise, moral experience of a universal moral standard recognizes the idea of a holy reality as a comprehensive factual reality in which normative values are rooted. This moral experience is diverse but is more than mere personal preference because ideals are known in God and as desired by God. Scientific naturalism recognizes the value of many religions without falling into destructive relativism by accepting several ultimates in relation to each other.

A number of features of Griffin's position commend this book to those seeking to maintain the importance of Christian theism in relation to contemporary science. His Whiteheadian pantheism describes God as perfect in goodness and power, as a necessary being who makes possible contingent existence, and as characterized by an internal relationship to creation. In contrast to atheism, he strongly affirms God's existence; his clear distinction between God and the world distinguishes his position from pantheism; and his defense of God's variable action in the world avoids any sense of deism. Although he rejects the traditional Christian understanding that God created the world from nothing, he retains a concern for a biblical perspective in relation to contemporary science by basing his rejection of the doctrine of creation from nothing upon the biblical materials. Wesleyans will appreciate that Griffin gives an account of the reality and the importance of religious experience.

Theologically, many Christian theists will find Griffin's rejection of creation from nothing problematic even if there is biblical justification for that rejection. Creation from chaos raises questions about divine freedom. If God creates out of chaos, is God free to create or does God create

out of necessity? Griffin rejects creation from nothing in order to affirm that relatedness is a necessary characteristic of God, of God's nature. As such, God must always be in relationship in order to be God. Griffin finds an inter-Trinitarian relationality to be inadequate because it does not involve a relationship with something other than God. If God's relationality does not involve an external reality, then that relationship is arbitrary and could be terminated at any point. Philip Clayton ("Creation *Ex Nihilo* and Intensifying the Vulnerability of God," 17-30 in Tom Oord, ed., *Theologies of Creation: Creatio Ex Nihilo and Its New Rivals* [New York: Routledge, 2015]) defends creation from nothing by arguing that creation from nothing affirms divine freedom. Divine freedom provides a basis for hope because God is free to love and act as God chooses to will and act. Griffin counters that argument by holding that the divine nature of seeking greater intensity of experience provides a reliable basis for hope.

Griffin's rejection of creation from nothing also raises the question about God's transcendence over the world, since the doctrine provides the basis for divine presence and action in the world. Griffin, as process thought generally, holds that God is subject to metaphysical principles. Since God is subject to metaphysical principles, many Christian theists conclude that Griffin's concept of God fails to recognize God's transcendence. However, metaphysical principles do not necessarily limit God's transcendence. Attributing power to metaphysical principles misunderstands the nature of principles, whether logical or metaphysical. Metaphysical principles describe how reality functions, just as logical principles describe how thought works. Metaphysical principles do not control or cause events to happen. The doctrine of creation from nothing often responds to fear that the existence of chaos limits God's power. Griffin describes chaos as neutral and energy rather than having power to oppose God. Griffin describes God as presenting the possibilities that make actualities possible but rejects creation from nothing because it fails to supply a basis for opposition to God, evil. The issue between Griffin and the defenders of creation from nothing involves the nature of divine transcendence. Discussions in continental philosophy of religion have distinguished between horizontal and vertical transcendence. Horizontal transcendence refers to the capacity of individuals, at least human individuals, to think beyond their own existence. Vertical transcendence describes a difference in type of existence. A supernatural being has vertical transcendence over all natural existence. While horizontal transcendence can describe both human and divine Trinitarian transcendence, it appears that in process thought God is limited to horizontal transcendence due to

the necessity of relationship with realities that are external to God. Another articulation of this issue describes it as the difference between strong and weak concepts of transcendence. A strong concept of transcendence maintains that God is beyond being. Weak concepts of transcendence use human categories of being to describe God. Griffin's articulation does not deal with divine transcendence and the nature of that transcendence directly although he clearly affirms a distinction between God and the created world. There are further resources in Whiteheadian thought to respond to the concerns of vertical/strong transcendence. As mentioned above, metaphysical principles describing how God acts describe rather than limit God's actions. The eternity of God in contrast to the temporal nature of creation indicates a significant difference between God and creation. God's consequent nature and on-going responses to non-divine events indicate God's continuing response of suffering with those who suffer evil and working to overcome evil. God's placing of evil in a contrast to good supplies a final defeat of evil without denying the reality of that evil.

Griffin's book challenges traditional Christian theists seeking to respond to the challenges of atheistic scientific thought to consider carefully their theological commitments. Those who reject his and other process theological proposals have a clear and careful argument with which to dialogue in responding to those who reject any form of theism in relation to science. Further examination of panentheism may discover responses to the reasons for rejection and facilitate even further development of panentheistic responses to the challenges of atheistic scientific thought.

Ingersol, Stan. *Past and Prospect: The Promise of Nazarene History*. Eugene, OR: Point Loma Press, 2014. 124 pages. ISBN-13: 9781625647894.

Reviewed by William Kostlevy, Director, Brethren Historical Library and Archives, Elgin, IL.

In the spring of 2014, in words eerily reminiscent of George W. Bush's ill fated statement "mission accomplished," after the first few weeks of America's 2003 military adventure in Iraq, Wheaton College announced that the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals, a fixture and key component in the serious study of American Evangelicalism (ISAE), had successfully accomplished its mission and would be closed at the end of the calendar year. Apparently, since Evangelicalism was now being studied by Ivy League trained scholars and serious students of Christian history making no claim to be Christian, the study of its history was no longer an endeavor worthy of the financial support of evangelicals themselves. There are, of course, other explanations for such a ridiculous decision, not the least of which is the longstanding evangelical belief that all Christians need to do is to retreat to the New Testament text since nothing of significance has happened since the crucifixion of Jesus. This has the added bonus of allowing Christians to avoid becoming knowledgeable about two thousand years of embarrassing Christian behavior.

Stan Ingersol's bold defense of history as a serious and worthy academic enterprise is an important antidote to Wheaton's decision not to fund the ISAE and other similar defunding of history departments across academia. To use Ingersol's own words, it boldly challenges the all-too-common view that the past is "a distraction, or worse, an impediment that somehow violates the self image of forward looking individuals" (101). As Ingersol notes, "Historical inquiry is neither nostalgic nor antiquarian. It is a process that requires useful knowledge of the forces that shape our lives and are shaping our future" (101). It is this process of discovering a useable past that unifies Ingersol's small but exceedingly important book.

As Church of the Nazarene Archivist and one of the authors of the official centennial history of the Church of the Nazarene, Ingersol brings an uncommon mastery of the history of the Church of the Nazarene in North America and around the world to this task. Ingersol further unites this factual knowledge with the interpretative framework of a sophisticated student of the religious landscape of North America. Drawing on the model pioneered by Church of the Brethren scholar Donald F. Durn-

baugh, Ingersol locates the Church of the Nazarene as a Believer's Church in the Methodist tradition. As such the early founding churches of what became the Church of the Nazarene were serious about the church as a gathered and disciplined body of believers who testified to their faith by word and deed. While allowing great latitude as to the forms of baptism, the church was united in its insistence that the church formed was a real communion of discipleship. As Ingersol notes, there was always a bit of tension between the Methodist and Believer's Church poles in the Church of the Nazarene experience. Although this and other chapters in the book first appeared as articles in, among other places, this very journal, all articles have been updated and expanded, making this book far more than merely a book of collected essays.

As a denomination taking shape during the height of the Modernist-Fundamentalist controversy, the Church of the Nazarene sought to remain faithful to its roots in the Holiness Movement without succumbing to the determinism of popular Reformed-based Fundamentalism. Nevertheless, Ingersol wisely notes "not all fundamentalism should be regarded as alien to the Wesleyan tradition" (74). Still, Church of the Nazarene leaders especially in the post World War II era sought to create "a post Fundamentalist Evangelicalism." As such they were hardly alone, as early as the 1930s James M. Gray, president of Chicago-based Moody Bible Institute, insisted that he was not a Fundamentalist but merely an "evangelical Christian."

Finally, Ingersol notes how the real differences in the visions of the Church of the Nazarenes between two most important early institutional leaders, Phineas Bresee and Hiram F. Reynolds, shaped the contours of Church of the Nazarene history. For Bresee as a Democratic Methodist, the central purpose of the church was to "Christianize Christianity" through the creation of centers of holy fire epitomized by his own Los Angeles-based Glory Barn. For Reynolds, the focus of the church was the evangelization of the world. It was Reynolds who served as Executive Secretary of foreign Missions while also serving as General Superintendent (1907-1932). And it was Reynolds who insisted that the General Superintendent "was to be general in a manner broad enough to engage the missions of the church outside the United States and Canada" (92).

Ingersol has written an important book that deserves to be read not merely by those in the Church of the Nazarene and the broader Wesleyan tradition but by all interested in the history and historiography of modern Christianity. It cannot be recommended too highly.

Gounelle, Élie and Henri Nick. *Réveil et christianisme social: Correspondance 1886-1897*. Ed. Christophe Chalamet and Grégoire Humbert. Avant-propos de Patrick Cabanel. Paris: Labor et fides, 2013. lxxiv + 405 pages. ISBN-13: 978-2-8309-1515-0.

Chalamet, Christophe. *Revivalism and Social Christianity: The Prophetic Faith of Henri Nick and André Trocmé*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013. ISBN-13: 978-1610978583.

Reviewed by David Bundy, Visiting Professor, Seoul Theological University; Research Professor, New York Theological Seminary.

These two volumes mark an important advance in scholarship on French Protestantism, as demonstrated in the foreword to *Réveil et christianisme social*, which is really an erudite bibliographical essay, by Patrick Cabanel (v-ix), one of the leaders of the discipline of French Protestant historiography. They also are an important contribution to the discussion of the global parameters of the Holiness Movements, especially the Radical Holiness Movements. In particular, these works underscore the influence of the Salvation Army and its commitments to social ministry that inspired, as it turns out, not only Walter Rauschenbusch and the USA “Social Gospel,” but also the French experience of “Christianisme Social,” which arose quite independently of its American counterpart, but which drew self-consciously and openly upon Wesley, J. F. Oberlin, and Finney, as well as upon the Booths and especially the Salvation Army. A word of caution must be given for North American readers: “Social Christianity” in France, despite similarities with the American Social Gospel, has important discontinuities with the American tradition. There was some contact between the leaders of the two traditions, but these were separate developments, and different cultural and ecclesiastical contexts.

The 168 letters edited by Chalamet and Humbert, primarily from previously inaccessible family collections, document the relationship between Élie Gounelle (1865-1950) and Henri Nick (1868-1954), who were two of the major figures of “Christianisme Social” in France. Gounelle came from a revivalistic Methodist background; Nick came from a French Reformed family. Both studied and became friends at Montauban. Gounelle wrote a thesis on *Lagnosticisme de M. Herbert Spencer. Étude critique* (1889); Nick’s thesis was on conversion: *Notion de la metanoia d’après le Nouveau Testament et l’expérience chrétienne* (1890), in which he discussed divine and human agency in the process of salvation-sanctification. Both accepted ministry positions in southern and then in northern France.

Both (especially Gounelle) rejected both liberal theology and the intellectually and socially isolated conservative theology (called Orthodox or Evangelical in the French context). They sought a middle way (as pioneered by Tommy Fallot) that combined intellectual rigor with spiritual vigor and evangelism. Theirs was a French intellectual version of the Salvation Army without the uniforms! Gounelle and Wilfred Monod became editors of the periodical that defined the movement in France: *Revue de Christianisme social* (1896-1909), which after 1909 was entitled *Christianisme social*. The premise of the movement was that Christians should demonstrate their love for God by loving one's neighbor, with a special obligation to minister to the poor. The movement competed with the Socialists and Communists for the minds and hearts of the working people who were generally ignored by all of the Churches. It is important to note that both Henri Nick and Wilfred Monod seriously and considered joining the Salvation Army.

The correspondence, to which was added another fifty previously unpublished letters from Tommy Fallot, Wilfred Monod, Paul Minault, Aquilas Quiévreux, Hélèn Nick and others, reveals much about the social, cultural, ecclesiological and theological world of French Protestantism during the last decades of the nineteenth century. It documents the networks of "Social Christianity" within French Protestantism. The edition of the letters is skillfully done according to rigorous scholarly standards, with an extremely valuable apparatus that provides explanation and documentation of the details of the letters. The volume will be a standard resource for scholars of French Protestantism, and one would hope, of the global Holiness Movements. Indexes facilitate access to the data provided.

The volume, *Revivalism and Social Christianity*, on Nick and Trocmé analyzes the personal, theological and ministerial pilgrimages of these two persons, placing them within their contexts. Nick, while aware of world efforts to minister to the poor, was primarily shaped by his French culture. Trocmé was influenced by the same revivalistic movement through Nick and Wilfred Monod, but was also shaped by his American experience at Union Theological Seminary of New York and his encounter of the Rockefellers. The biggest scholarly contribution of the volume is the description and analysis, for the first time, of the influence of Nick on Trocmé. The biggest surprise to North American readers may be the influence of the Salvation Army and Pentecostalism on the "Social Christianity" network, influences that could have been more fully explored.

The work is an important contribution to the study of the nineteenth-century Réveil (Revival, or Awakening) in France and is suggestive

regarding its influence in the development of Social Christianity, the rescuing of many Jews from the Nazis and the French Vichy government by French Protestants, including Trocmé, who risked their lives for the others. Also important is the discussion of the development of Trocmé's pacifist commitments. The text makes clear that the spiritual heritage of revivalistic Protestantism of Nick and Trocmé was one of the important factors that led to their ministries to the poor and to their work in rescuing Jewish people.

If possible, these two works should be read together. *Réveil et christianisme social* provides a more thorough introduction to the context in which Nick and Trocmé lived and worked; it also provides brief very useful biographical sketches of the figures mentioned in the correspondence and introduction. This is crucial for understanding the theological and ministry networks of the period. The second volume introduces more fully two important figures and their relationship, but scholars of revivalism unfamiliar with the personages and details of French Protestant history may have difficulties interpreting the significance of persons mentioned. Both volumes make important contributions to the study of modern Christianity in Europe and will long be standard texts.

Kapic, Kelly M., ed. *Sanctification: Explorations in Theology and Practice*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014. 275 pages. ISBN-13: 978-0-8308-4062-5.

Reviewed by E. Jerome Van Kuiken, Associate Professor of Ministry and Christian Thought, Oklahoma Wesleyan University, Bartlesville, OK.

This multi-authored work consists mainly of papers from the 2011 Edinburgh Dogmatics Conference. The Introduction notes a popular tendency among evangelicals to react against perceived legalism by emphasizing God's agency to the exclusion of human agency, faith to the neglect of works, justification at the expense of sanctification. To cure these imbalances, the contributors offer remedies from the Reformed tradition. Wesleyans will find the book relevant not only because the "Calvinist resurgence" makes it important to hear what responsible Reformed voices are saying about sanctification, but also because a third of the dozen contributors directly interact with Wesleyan-Holiness views, thus testifying to Wesleyanism's historic influence on the subject.

Editor Kelly Kapic has organized the book with an opening homily by Derek Tidball on holiness as the restoration of the *imago Dei* (preached from Col. 3:5-17). Following are three sections: "Sanctified by Grace through Faith in Union with Christ"; "Human Agency and Sanctification's Relationship to Ethics"; and "Theological and Pastoral Meditations on Sanctification." The first section begins with chapters by Richard Lints and Henri Blocher on the roles of faith and the law in sanctification. The next chapter, by Brannon Ellis, considers the close connection between individual believers' union with Christ and their participation with other believers in community. In the concluding chapter, Bruce McCormack puts John Wesley in dialogue with Karl Barth on Christian perfection.

The middle section begins with Michael Horton's trinitarian (especially pneumatological) account of compatibilism as opposed to divine coercion, on the one hand, and, on the other, divine self-limitation to allow for created beings' libertarian free will. On Horton's heels comes Oliver O'Donovan's discourse on the relationship between theology and ethics and, drawing on Barth, between sanctification and love. Finally, James Eglinton examines the link between theology and ethics in nineteenth-century Dutch dogmatician Herman Bavinck.

Ivor Davidson starts the book's third section by stressing the objectivity, completeness, and concreteness of holiness in Israel's God, in Christ's sinless life, and in believers' positional sanctification. Based on his wife's experience of chronic illness, Kelly Kapic shares how suffering

affects one's faith, hope, and love. Julie Canlis reflects on the inseparability of Christ's person and benefits in believers' union with him and on the agency of the Holy Spirit in believers' lives. Like the previous two sections, this last one ends with a historical study: Peter Moore defends fourth-century bishop John Chrysostom as much more than a mere moralist, but rather as a role model of one who preaches to change the very disposition of one's audience. Moore's chapter on preaching *for* sanctification serves as a matching bookend to a volume that begins with Tidball's preaching *about* sanctification.

The book contains several insights that Wesleyans can appreciate. To begin at the end: Moore himself notes that both Wesley and Calvin valued Chrysostom's sermons (255-56), so much so that Calvin even excused Chrysostom's synergistic view of salvation (265-66). Moore's description of Chrysostom's homiletic method plus Tidball's exemplary homily at the book's outset are fine resources for practical theology. Tidball, Moore, Ellis, and Kopic each underscore the need for the faith community as a sanctifying context for individual believers. Wesley shared the same skepticism of "holy solitaires," and his organization of Methodist societies was the result. Kopic's additional discussion of prayer, Scripture reading, the Eucharist, and meditation on Christ as aids to sanctity in the teeth of suffering square with Wesleyan convictions concerning the means of grace. Davidson's and Canlis's refusal to abstract holiness or any of Christ's benefits from the particularity of his person is a healthy corrective to insufficiently Christocentric spiritualities, including some Wesleyan-Holiness spirituality. O'Donovan's thoughts on Christian holiness as love and his caveat against equating the sanctifying process with the ageing process are also worth reading.

Other aspects of these essays are more problematic. Critiquing Arminianism, Horton eloquently depicts the noncoercive harmony between trinitarian and creaturely agency that brings forth goodness, truth, and beauty in the world; he omits, though, the logical conclusion that creaturely evil is also equally the product of divine action. Lints endorses by name a form of antinomianism and denies that rewards and punishments have any bearing on Christian conduct, which should be motivated simply by delight in the divine. He not only ignores the New Testament data on the rewarding and punishing of believers (e.g., Luke 14:41-48; 1 Cor. 3:10-15) but also fails to perceive that delight in God contains its own reward, while penalty for refusal to delight in God inheres in the very refusing. A more biblically faithful corrective to Lints appears in Bavinck's ethics, as described by Eglinton (181-82).

Canlis, Davidson, Blocher, and McCormack directly refer to Wesleyan-Holiness theology. Their interactions with it, though, are uneven.

Canlis critiques the view that believers should fully surrender to God so that their human agency is replaced by the Holy Spirit's. She attributes this view to the Wesleyan-Holiness and Keswick Movements, but her sole example is a book by John Crowder (245), a hyper-Charismatic revivalist without overt ties to either movement. Davidson writes respectfully of Charismatic, Pentecostal, Keswick, Wesleyan-Holiness, and above all, Wesley's own teachings, citing Nazarene theologian Tom Noble's *Holy Trinity: Holy People* to acknowledge how far back in church history the doctrine of Christian perfection goes (191). Davidson himself prefers the Reformed stress on the finished work of Christ and the definitive sanctification of the believer as less conducive to absorption with one's own spiritual successes and failures, but his treatment of Wesleyanism is fair and his concern valid. Blocher traces the history of the notion of sanctification as a second work of grace attainable by simple faith and subsequent to justification. He begins with Wesley (but misinterprets a quote from him on p. 68; in context, Wesley is making justification *logically*, not *chronologically* prior to sanctification and differs nothing from the Reformed on this point) and moves through Oberlin Perfectionism to the Keswick Movement, noting that the great Dutch Calvinist Abraham Kuyper fell briefly under its spell and claimed a higher experience of grace, only to renounce it all later and return to his Reformed roots (68-72). Blocher's coverage of the Holiness Movement's beliefs depends almost wholly on a hostile source, B. B. Warfield's *Perfectionism*, and results in caricatures, such as that the only biblical proof-texts for a second work of grace are Acts 19:2 and 2 Cor. 1:15 in the KJV (72). His own view of stages of spiritual maturity (73-74) stands closer than he realizes to Wesley's view. As a Nazarene-turned-Presbyterian, McCormack presents Wesley's theology with sympathy and general accuracy. He commends Wesley for taking Scripture's "perfection" language seriously while finding more satisfactory Barth's paradox that we really exist as perfect, but in Christ, not in ourselves. McCormack sees Wesley's view as dependent on a classical substance ontology that Barth does not share. A worthwhile response to McCormack would be to introduce Nazarene theologian Mildred Bangs Wynkoop's Wesleyan theology and existentialism-influenced ontology as a mediating stance between Wesley and Barth.

As attested by its recommendations from well-placed scholars, the publication of *Sanctification* signals a timely Reformed word on the subject. May we as Wesleyans listen carefully, reply responsibly, correct courteously, and build bridges generously. By these means we will bear witness to the holy love made possible for Christians in this life.

Wallace O. Thornton, Jr. *When the Fire Fell: Martin Wells Knapp's Vision of Pentecost and the Beginnings of God's Bible School* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2014).

Reviewed by David Bundy, Research Professor of World Christian Studies, New York Theological Seminary; Visiting Professor, Seoul Theological Seminary.

Wallace O. Thornton, Jr. has provided a remarkably important book that examines a key figure in the Radical Holiness Movement, Martin Wells Knapp (1853-1901). Knapp was the progenitor of many Holiness denominations and Pentecostalism. The most important early founders of North American Pentecostalism (William Seymour, A. J. Tomlinson, Glenn Cook, Robert McAlister) were students at God's Bible School and developed the implications of his theology. Many of his associates were involved in the founding of Holiness denominations including the Pilgrim Holiness Church (Seth Cook Rees) and the Church of the Nazarene (C. W. Ruth and A. M. Hills) as well as the Metropolitan Church Association (A. J. Harvey and others). He worked closely with publisher/evangelist L. L. Pickett and Henry Clay Morrison, founder of Asbury Theological Seminary, and a host of other Radical Holiness leaders. As a publisher, he built *The Revivalist* (later *God's Revivalist*) to a circulation of more than 20,000 copies per week. The Revivalist Press made A. M. Hills (publishing his first book), Seth Cook Rees, Samuel A. Keen, G. D. Watson, Abbie Morrow, and a host of others into household names among the Holiness people. The songbook edited with L. L. Pickett sold hundreds of thousands of copies.

Knapp was a Methodist Episcopal minister until the last year of his life. He had wanted to join the William Taylor self-supporting missions but was rejected for health reasons. Maintaining that interest in mission, he created with Juji Nakada (arguably the founder of the Holiness Church in Japan and the progenitor of the Holiness churches in Korea) and the Cowmans what would later become the Oriental Missionary Society. From the mission work from his ministry come Holiness denominations in India, South Africa, China, Korea, Japan, Mexico and other countries. Because the institution he founded (God's Bible School) and *God's Revivalist* now seem to many to be on the margin of the Holiness churches and even the Wesleyan Theological Society (perhaps due to the struggles over the meanings of Christian Perfection and glossolalia), Knapp has been ignored by the traditions to which he gave birth through his theological synthesis and organizational prowess.

The theology of Knapp is carefully elucidated, for the first time, in Thornton's book. It was a theology that called Christians "back to the Bible" but not in a Fundamentalist way. He insisted that the paradigm for the church and responsible Christian living must be that of Jesus as revealed in the Gospels and as lived by the early church in the Acts of the Apostles. This was model for the "Pentecostal Church." The "Pentecostal Church" was to minister to the poor, share all things in common, and serve those in need. It was to be engaged in evangelism and in leading converts into the experience of Baptism with the Holy Spirit.

It was a socially activist holiness theology, not only a holiness theology concerned with the interior spiritual life. Thornton describes the ministry developed by Knapp to live out this theology. Knapp was a strong advocate of social, economic and educational justice. He worked with the poor in Cincinnati and the mountains of Kentucky, and he sought to protect the economically and socially vulnerable. He promoted vigorously the ministry of women. So revolutionary was this that it attracted attention beyond the Holiness movement; during the Great Depression, Eleanor Roosevelt attended a Thanksgiving meal served for the poor of Cincinnati on the "Mount of Blessings" at God's Bible School.

Knapp also accepted the "Four-fold Gospel" evangelistic slogan of A. B. Simpson, which included the recent theological innovations of pre-millennial eschatology and divine faith-healing. He was also an organizer of the Chicago Holiness Convention that was organized in response to the exclusion of the Radical Holiness leaders from the Chicago Convention of the National Holiness Association. The Radical Holiness leaders' counter-convention drew the crowds and made many converts, forcing the NHA to generally adopt the Radical theological agenda. Thornton's analysis needs to be read in conjunction with the analysis of that event by William Kostlevy, *Holy Jumpers: Evangelicals and Radicals in Progressive Era America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) who focuses on other actors in that event.

Thornton places Knapp in a careful reading of American religious history. In addition to interacting with the work of Kostlevy, Thornton uses the popular "primitivism" category of Richard Hughes. Most helpfully, he accurately describes the various interpretations of data by earlier historians and theologians. Indeed, the volume could be read as a bibliographical essay on the interpretation of late nineteenth and early twentieth century religion with Knapp as example! The volume fills an important gap in the study of the Holiness Movements. The institutions of the Radical Holiness tradition are devoted to education for practical ministry

and for entering the social mainstream. They have not devoted resources to the study of that branch of the tradition. To further complicate things, these institutions were also late to recognize their own importance in the American Holiness story and to begin to document that tradition. As a result, primary sources are hard to find. Thus, another significant contribution of Thornton is the locating and evaluating of many rare and important sources.

Thornton also deals with the dark side of the Holiness tradition as represented by Knapp. At times, he was shrill and angry at co-religionists who disappointed him. At times, his calls for social reform and transformation appeared to focus on the symptoms rather than the structural issues. He encouraged independent activity but clearly dominated his ministry. The struggles for power and direction of the ministry after his premature death suggest that the structures of the ministry were not well grounded in the legal and cultural realities.

*When the Fire Fell* is well-written and well-researched. It is an important book. It will long be both a standard work of the history of the Holiness Movements and a mine for other scholars as they begin to more closely examine this pivotal period in Christian history. Indeed, it can be argued that it provides the proto-history of about twenty-five percent of Christians who now are living out the theological distinctions promoted and adapted by Martin Wells Knapp.

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