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EDITOR'S NOTES

In keeping with our long standing tradition, this issue of the Wesleyan Theological Journal (*WTJ*) is comprised largely of papers presented at the previous year's annual meeting. The President of the Wesleyan Theological Society (WTS), Mr. Doug Koskela, selected "New Birth" for the conference theme. The Presidential and Plenary addresses, as well as several other outstanding papers on this theme, are included here.

Immediately following publication of the fall 2016 issue of the *WTJ*, an error was brought to my attention. In his excellent article, "The Vital Relationship between Holiness and Health," Joe Gorman twice cited Robert Webster's edited volume, *Perfecting Perfections: Essays in Honor of Henry D. Rack*. In both instances, Mr. Webster's name was omitted. On behalf of myself, the editorial committee, and the copy editor at Old Paths Publishing, I would like to apologize to Mr. Webster for this oversight. It was not intentional. While we strive for perfection here at the *WTJ*, in this instance, we clearly came up short.

Finally, membership in the WTS and subscription levels to the *WTJ* remain strong. I would like to encourage all members to recommend both society membership and the *WTS* to seminary and graduate students who show interest in any of the theological disciplines or who simply want to undertake the work of ministry in theologically informed ways. The student rate is affordable, and the articles and reviews in the *WTJ* are consistently top notch.

Jason E. Vickers, Editor
Spring 2017

“THE NEW BIRTH AND THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD”

by

Douglas M. Koskela

Presidential Address Delivered at the 2016 Annual Meeting
of the Wesleyan Theological Society, San Diego, California

Wesleyans have long resisted the academy’s tendency to separate matters of the mind from matters of the heart. The recognition that ours is a unique approach to knowledge runs deep in our tradition, at least back to the founding of the Kingswood School. In the hymn that Charles Wesley wrote for that occasion, he took it as a given that knowledge and vital piety were not only “disjoined,” but in fact had been so for “so long.” Kingswood was one embodiment of the conviction that this should not be. And in the intervening centuries, Wesleyan educational institutions have aspired to, and often lived into, the idea that who we are matters for what we know of God.

Academic guilds such as ours are in a unique space when it comes to the relationship of knowledge and vital piety. On one hand, many of our members were trained in and feel accountable to research methodologies designed to correct for any hint of bias. Additionally, our practices of scholarly engagement often mimic those of academic guilds that are highly suspicious of the influence of one’s personal commitments on one’s research. Yet on the other hand, we remain connected and accountable to our tradition—the very tradition that resists the disjunction that Charles Wesley lamented. It is worth asking: is it inevitable that the Wesleyan Theological Society will remain in this space between? Or is it possible that the very approach to knowledge embraced by the Wesleyan tradition might not only guide our work, but might also contribute something to the broader theological academy?

It might be objected that a distinction must be drawn between the epistemological dynamics of the life of faith on the one hand and research methodologies on the other. It is one thing, the objection runs, to know God experientially in the context of a worshiping, praying community. It is quite another to aim to understand religious texts, communities, and expe-

riences in a manner that is academically credible. In the latter case, it has often been taken for granted that intellectual virtues and spiritual virtues are distinct. Colleagues in the field of religious studies are more likely to regard a scholar's own commitment of faith as an obstacle to genuine understanding than as an aid to it. While it is recognized that pure objectivity might be impossible, there is still significant pressure in the academy for a researcher *qua* researcher to check her religious identity at the door.

But might such a chasm be uniquely problematic in the theological disciplines, where the subject is the work of God? What if the very quarry of the theological pursuit—really seeing what is going on in the life of faith—is only accessible from a certain posture? Could it be possible that the only way truly to recognize what communities of faith have found is to join them, in repentance, in prayer, and in worship? Especially if part of what these communities claim is that sin has epistemic effects; that it clouds our ability to see and know clearly. Might the very detachment of academic respectability lead us further from our goal?

In this address, I wish to explore precisely that possibility. I aim to examine the role that particular dispositions might have in our experience of knowing God—dispositions such as humility, trust, and reverence. Of the many directions such an approach might take, I wish to focus on the theme of this Annual Meeting: the new birth. At one level, we will reflect on a particular proposal in the thought of John Wesley, whereby he fleshes out the epistemological significance of the new birth. At another level, my aim is broader: what sort of people must we be to know God? And what difference does that make for an academic society such as ours?

To begin, then, let us trace some of the main lines of Wesley's epistemology of theology. Much of the scholarly reflection on Wesley's epistemology has focused on his general epistemology; that is, how Wesley thought we might acquire any sort of knowledge, without explicit attention to knowledge of God. This approach has generally involved the attempt to place Wesley within the empiricist-rationalist framework. On this score, he is usually regarded as some sort of empiricist given his conviction that knowledge comes through sense experience rather than through innate ideas.¹ However, a number of scholars have pointed out

¹For just two of many examples, see Wesley, "An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion" (1743), §32, in *Works* [Bicentennial], 11:56; and Wesley, Sermon 117, "On the Discoveries of Faith," §1, in *Works* [Bicentennial], 4:29. However, Long reads Wesley as equivocating on this question occasionally. See *John Wesley's Moral Theology*, 82.

that it is somewhat misleading to read Wesley exclusively as an empiricist, particularly if such a reading is cast in Lockean terms. One example of this, as Rex Matthews and others have argued, is that Wesley's empiricism shared more with the Aristotelian tradition than it did with John Locke's empiricism.² And more recently, D. Stephen Long has cautioned against trying to fit Wesley into the modern epistemological framework at all, since that approach can obscure the way he drew upon more typically medieval themes.³

When we turn specifically to knowledge about God, it is perhaps most tempting to see Lockean influence in Wesley's use of the language of spiritual senses. Indeed, on a number of occasions, Wesley self-consciously used the imagery of spiritual senses as analogous to the physical senses.⁴ Yet James E. Pedlar has suggested that, rather than seeing this as an extension of Lockean empiricism, Wesley's use of this language was a way of trying to express by analogy what was beyond explanation.⁵ I would set forth a further distinction between them, one that signals the heart of Wesley's epistemology of theology. The critical observation is this: Wesley did not understand the spiritual senses as supplying new content in our knowledge about God. Rather, he saw them as confirming in the strongest way what had been revealed through testimony—primarily, what had been revealed through Scripture and mediated through the Christian tradition. Wesley did not believe that we use our spiritual senses to perceive new ideas about God; rather, through them we perceive directly the reality of the spiritual world mediated to us through various forms of testimony.

In this light, it seems worthwhile to take a fresh approach to Wesley's epistemology of theology. Rather than beginning with his general epistemology and trying to locate him as an empiricist or rationalist, we will aim to focus specifically on Wesley's account of Christian belief. In particular, we might distinguish between two questions: first, how does one acquire knowledge about God and salvation? That is, how do our minds apprehend the claims of a robust form of Christian theism? A second question

²Rex Dale Matthews, "'Religion and Reason Joined': A Study in the Theology of John Wesley" (ThD diss., Harvard University, 1986), 255-280.

³Long, *John Wesley's Moral Theology*, 57.

⁴Wesley, "Earnest Appeal," §31-35, 11:56-57, provides a classic example of Wesley developing this theme.

⁵James E. Pedlar, "Sensing the Spirit: Wesley's Empiricism and His Use of the Language of Spiritual Sensation," *The Asbury Journal* 67:2 (2012), 89-91.

is: how do we know whether the claims of the Christian faith are true? In other words, how does one become convinced that what is received by testimony reflects the way things really are? These questions are often conflated in discussions of the epistemology of theology. But in the case of Wesley's account of the knowledge of God, we need to take these questions separately to grasp what was going on. In short, I wish to argue that Wesley answered the first question by appealing primarily to the epistemological concept of testimony. And to answer the second question, he turned to the epistemological concept of perception of the divine. By laying out how each of these functioned in Wesley's overall vision, we'll be in a position to see the significant connection he drew between spiritual posture and knowledge. Since perception relates more directly to the new birth in Wesley's account, we'll focus a bit more of our attention there.

How, then, did Wesley approach the question of how we apprehend knowledge of God? The notion of testimony was absolutely pivotal in this respect, and he recognized two basic movements: God's own testimony in divine revelation, and the testimony of Christians throughout the ages to bear witness to what God has revealed. The first movement was necessary because Wesley believed that human beings don't naturally have access to much significant knowledge of God—certainly not saving knowledge. Thus, we are dependent on what God has revealed about God's own self. God's own testimony through revelation is thus the initial step in our acquisition of knowledge of God. For Wesley, the divine self-disclosure centered on the ideas of incarnation and inspiration. The incarnation of Jesus was the pivotal movement that shed the light of the knowledge of God's saving purposes on the world. He stated this in rather strong terms in his sermon, "On Working Out Our Own Salvation":

Notwithstanding a spark of knowledge glimmering here and there, the whole earth was covered with darkness till the Sun of Righteousness arose and scattered the shades of night. Since this Day-spring from on high has appeared, a great light hath shined unto those who till then sat in darkness and in the shadow of death. And thousands of them in every age have known, "that God so loved the world" as to "give his only Son, to the end that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life."⁶

⁶Wesley, "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," §3, in *Works* [Bicentennial], 3:201.

This vivid account gives rise to a natural question: how can the incarnation, in a particular time and place, be known by "thousands in every age?" This is where we see the crucial place of Scripture in Wesley's notion of divine revelation. As he saw it, the inspiration of the Scriptures by the Holy Spirit was a distinct act of divine agency that made this possible. Scripture both fleshed out the implications of the incarnation (including what Wesley saw as the preparatory work of the Old Testament) and preserved those implications for people across the generations. The divine two-step of incarnation and inspiration thus constitutes God's self-testimony that makes saving knowledge possible. We can read the familiar passage from the Preface to the first volume of Wesley's *Sermons on Several Occasions* with this in mind: "I want to know one thing,—the way to heaven; how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to teach the way: for this very end he came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price give me the Book of God!"⁷

Given that Wesley understood Scripture to be God's testimony to God's own salvific work, we should not be surprised that he resisted the notion that any human testimony could supersede it. Still, he allowed that the testimony of Christians played an important, though secondary, role in the transmission of saving knowledge across time. Here we might point to Wesley's admiration of the writings and example of the early church, or his recognition of the authority of the doctrinal standards of the Church of England as a faithful Anglican priest. This notion of human testimony to divine revelation also seems to be implicit in the way he understood his own published sermons to function in the lives of others. Beyond these published works, the very act of Christian preaching was essential in making the connection between God's self-disclosure and those for whom it promised life. Or, to put it a bit more precisely, God's self-disclosure began with incarnation and inspiration and extended to human proclamation in every generation. Therefore, the church's testimony played a key role for Wesley in mediating salvific knowledge of God throughout time and space.

All of that can help us understand how one comes into contact with the claims of the Christian faith. But what about the second question? What is it, for Wesley, that makes one embrace those claims? Why should one believe what is proclaimed? Here we must turn to the epistemic cate-

⁷Wesley, "Preface," §5, in *Works* [Bicentennial], 1:105.

gory of perception. Wesley placed great emphasis on what was going on in the mind and heart of the believer in answering this question. He often appealed to what he called the “internal evidence” for Christianity, by which he meant the direct sensation of what was promised through testimony. Such perception was not a source of new claims about God or salvation; rather, it was the direct experience of the mind and the heart beyond any doubt that Scripture’s claims are true. And it is precisely here that we see the crucial epistemic significance of the new birth in Wesley’s vision. To begin to take stock of this network of claims, we need first to explore the condition of our cognitive faculties in a state of sin.

Wesley repeatedly insisted that, due to the effects of sin, we are unable to see into the realm of spiritual reality. Even if we hear the claims of the Christian faith, we do not have a functioning capacity to assess their truth. While it was true that Wesley believed our knowledge of the physical world comes through the physical senses, those senses will get us nowhere when it comes to the reality of God and the promise of salvation. Consider the following passage from “An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion”: “It is necessary that you have a new class of senses opened in your soul, not depending on organs of flesh and blood to be the evidence of things not seen as your bodily senses are of visible things, to be the avenues to the invisible world, to discern spiritual objects and to furnish you with ideas of what the outward ‘eye hath not seen, neither the ear heard.’ And till you have these ‘internal senses,’ till the eyes of your understanding are opened, you can have no apprehension of divine things, no idea of them at all. Nor, consequently, till then, can you either judge truly, or reason justly concerning them, seeing your reason has no ground whereon to stand, no materials to work upon.”⁸ If we just pause at this point and take in the implications of this quotation (and others like it in his corpus), it is easy to be taken aback. In a context such as this, a theological society that draws our very name from the Wesleyan theological tradition, what would it mean to take him seriously on this point? Even if we may quibble with the particular way in which Wesley frames this epistemic breakthrough, do the cognitive effects of sin register on our collective radar screens as we go about our academic work? We’ll return to these questions at the end of the address.

If we are caught in such a state of need, as Wesley suggested, what then? He argued that the Triune God acts in very particular ways to

⁸Wesley, “An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion,” §32-33.

restore the believer's ability to perceive God directly. As we saw in the Earnest Appeal, Wesley sometimes referred to this capacity as the "spiritual" or "internal senses." At other times, he used the term "faith" to refer to this divinely restored capacity—one of a number of ways Wesley used the term faith. We see this, for example, in his sermon "On Discoveries of Faith," where he argued that our senses "furnish us with no information at all concerning the *invisible world*. But the wise and gracious Governor of the worlds, both visible and invisible, has prepared a remedy for this defect. He has appointed *faith* to supply the defect of sense."⁹

We might note three things about the spiritual senses, or faith in this particular usage of the term. First, and germane to the theme of this conference, Wesley repeatedly connected the opening of the spiritual senses to the new birth. This link is explicitly made in his sermons "The New Birth" and "The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God," and more obliquely in "The Marks of the New Birth." That is, one of the aspects of the great work God does in us at new birth is a new capacity to perceive "the things of God." Wesley uses the analogy of a newborn baby finally engaging the senses that had been present—but unused—in the womb. In a similar manner, when we are born of God, the eyes of the understanding are opened, as are ears to hear the inward voice of God. The "thick impenetrable veil" that previously prevented spiritual sight is no longer present. There is, in other words, an epistemological awakening that occurs at new birth.¹⁰

A second thing we might note about the opening of the spiritual senses in the new birth is that it is a work of God rather than a human achievement. Like justification, Wesley saw the new birth as an act of divine grace through and through. As he asks rhetorically in the "Earnest Appeal," "can all your wisdom and strength open an intercourse between yourself and the world of spirits? Is it in your power to burst the veil that is on your heart and let in the light of eternity? You know it is not."¹¹ And in "The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God," Wesley specifically connected the new birth to the operation of the Holy Spirit.¹² Thus the agency by which the spiritual senses are opened is God's alone. Lest someone worry that Wesley was thus a determinist when it came to salva-

⁹Wesley, "On Discoveries of Faith," §3-4, 4:30.

¹⁰Wesley, "The New Birth," II.4.

¹¹Wesley, "Earnest Appeal," §10.

¹²Wesley, "The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God," I.1.

tion—though surely no one at WTS would worry about such things—Wesley understood the gift of faith as spiritual perception to be available to all who humbly acknowledge their need for it.

This leads naturally to a third observation regarding the spiritual senses. While their restoration was entirely a work of God, it still required a posture of repentance, humility, and trust on the part of the human being. True, drawing from various streams of his Reformation heritage, Wesley could equivocate on whether that trust was a precondition of new birth or itself a gift of God. But if we focus on those texts that emphasize spiritual perception as part of new birth, we see something very significant: new birth is something for which we have to ask. We see this in the “Earnest Appeal,” for example, where Wesley suggests that it is given to those “whose only plea was, ‘God be merciful to me, a sinner.’”¹³ We also see it in “The New Birth.” Wesley concludes that sermon by exhorting those “who have not already experienced this inward work of God” to pray: “Lord, add this to all thy blessings: let me be ‘born again.’”¹⁴ And we see it in “The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption,” where the one who cries out to the Lord in his trouble, asking to see God’s glory, is the one who “sees (but not with eyes of flesh and blood) the Lord, the Lord God; merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, and forgiving iniquities and transgression and sin.”¹⁵ These are important passages for our purposes. Implicit in these prayers is a humble awareness of sin, the recognition that one is incapable of regenerating oneself, and trust that God is both able and willing to give mercy. While God alone opens the spiritual senses, there is a crucial place for asking for this gift in a posture of humility.

What is the object, then, of spiritual perception? Once these senses are opened, what precisely do we see and hear through them? Wesley had a knack for generating lists to answer this question, and not surprisingly, the lists varied somewhat. But four things tended to appear again and again. We might note that the first two are fairly general perceptions, while there was more specificity in the latter two. The first thing we come to sense is the existence and presence of the God in whom we live, move, and have our being.¹⁶ Second, we perceive the love, mercy, and goodness

¹³Wesley, “Earnest Appeal,” §11.

¹⁴Wesley, “The New Birth,” IV.4.

¹⁵Wesley, “The Spirit of Bondage and Adoption,” III.2.

¹⁶“Earnest Appeal,” §7, 11:46-47; and “The Great Privilege,” I.8, 1:434-35.

of God, and Wesley commonly used the image of light to convey these attributes.¹⁷ Sure knowledge of the forgiveness of sins was a third, and more particularly focused, object of spiritual perception.¹⁸ Fourth, Wesley drew on Romans 8:16 to claim that we directly perceive our status as children of God.¹⁹ This was one of the more intriguing claims in Wesley's epistemology of theology. The witness of the Spirit does not only require restored spiritual senses, but it also depends on the direct action of the Holy Spirit to assure us that we are loved and welcomed as God's children. Here we see again how the agency of God drives everything in this epistemological awakening. It is God who gives the gift of faith to those who call out to God. It is God who assures the believer that sins have been forgiven. And it is God, the third person of the Trinity in particular, who witnesses to our spirit that we are children of God.

So in Wesley's epistemological vision, God does the heavy lifting—indeed *all* of the lifting—of the veil that keeps us from knowledge of the things of God. And God offers this to anyone who calls out for divine mercy. Now these claims did not preclude a role for the usual forms of acquiring knowledge. Wesley read widely and advocated reading among the people called Methodists. He emphasized the importance of studying Scripture, reflecting on church history, or becoming well-versed in Christian doctrine. But one could learn all manner of things about the Christian tradition and never feel their truth in the way that Wesley described. One could attend carefully to all of the claims mediated by testimony, but until the spiritual senses are awakened, Wesley argued that those claims could not take hold of the heart. Without the posture that welcomes God's transforming work, one remains incapable of perceiving the fulfillment of the promise of the gospel.

Our brief exploration of Wesley's epistemology of theology leaves us with the natural question of what we should do with it, standing as we are in the twenty-first century. The epistemological revolution that one expe-

¹⁷"Earnest Appeal," §7, 11:46-47; "The Great Privilege," I.9, 1:435; "Spirit of Bondage" III.3; Sermon 130, "On Living Without God," §9-11, in *Works* [Bicentennial], 4:172-72; and Sermon 9, "The Spirit of Bondage and Adoption," III.3, in *Works* [Bicentennial], 1:261.

¹⁸"Earnest Appeal," §7 & §62, 11:46-47, 70-71; "On Living Without God," §9. This helps us to understand the significance of the famous Aldersgate experience in Wesley's own life.

¹⁹Wesley's two sermons on "The Witness of the Spirit" are the most extensive developments of this theme.

riences at new birth is not an area of Wesley's thought that has received a great deal of recent attention. And while I am inclined to see this neglect as regrettable, perhaps there are good reasons for it. Yet one need not embrace Wesley's entire phenomenology of the new birth to see the potential for a range of fresh considerations regarding the knowledge of God. In particular, we might focus in on two ideas at the heart of the foregoing discussion. First, Wesley was convinced that, given the cognitive effects of sin, we are not naturally in a position to see clearly the spiritual realities to which the gospel points. Second, he was convinced that when we take the spiritual posture called for by the gospel, God enables us to perceive those spiritual realities. When we phrase these claims in that way, we can hear their resonance with the ideas of a contemporary thinker who has proposed a significant shift in religious epistemology. I refer here to the philosopher Paul Moser.

In recent years, Moser has made a number of contributions to the relationship of faith and knowledge. I wish to focus especially on his 2008 book *The Elusive God: Reorienting Religious Epistemology*. Moser's primary focus in that work was God's existence. He begins with a fairly straightforward premise, writing: "If God exists, according to many able-minded adults, God's existence is concealed or hidden at least from them at some times. At those times, God's existence, we're told, isn't obvious to them or even beyond reasonable doubt for them."²⁰ He then proceeds to ask, if God's existence is hidden, why should we suppose that God exists at all? And why would God's existence be concealed, especially if God desires to relate to people? The way in which Moser answers these questions brings to mind many of the dynamics we saw in Wesley's vision. True, Moser's sustained attention to God's existence and evidence suggests a narrower scope. Wesley was concerned with perceiving not only the existence of God, but also the love, mercy, and forgiveness of God. Still, the particular moves that Moser makes in accounting for knowledge of the hidden God make a conversation with Wesley irresistible.

The basic approach that Moser takes in *The Elusive God* is that divine hiddenness is deeply related to the cognitive state of the knower. As he puts it, "the urgent cognitive problem is not so much in the available evidence itself as in the *people* capable of receiving that evidence."²¹ His pri-

²⁰Paul K. Moser, *The Elusive God: Reorienting Religious Epistemology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), ix.

²¹Moser, *The Elusive God*, ix (original emphasis).

mary thesis is that evidence for God's existence is "*purposively available* to humans, that is, available in a manner, and only in a manner, suitable to divine purposes in self-revelation."²² Such evidence would not simply be available for mere apprehension, but rather would be the sort of evidence that coheres with the yielding of one's will to a trustworthy God. The very aim of divine self-revelation is drawing us into transformative encounter with God, and thus knowledge of God unfolds in the context of that encounter. Moser suggests that evidence of God's reality "is *person-involving* and even *life-involving* in identifying and challenging *who we are* and *how we live* as morally responsible personal agents indebted to a perfectly authoritative and loving personal God."²³ Later in the volume, Moser will use this sort of evidence to offer an argument for God's reality, one based on volitional transformation. While Wesley was open to these sorts of arguments from conspicuous sanctity, exploring this would take us into different territory. Thus, our focus is on the claim that one's posture toward God shapes what one is able to know of God.

Moser's beginning point is to call his readers to recognize themselves as personal agents. Specifically, this means that their access to certain kinds of knowledge might be shaped by their own motivation in knowing. He proposes a reorientation that "involves a change of intentional attitudes beyond one's assenting to information. In particular, [this reorientation] involves one's *will*, and not just one's intellect." He suggests that "some cognitive questions about (human knowledge of) God's existence aren't purely intellectual but irreducibly involve matters of the human will."²⁴ It may well be that we are not in a position to receive the available evidence of God's reality "because our wills have gone awry and thus need attunement to reality, including divine reality."²⁵ In this light, the key question is not: do we humans know that God exists? Rather, the key question as Moser states it is: "*Are we humans known by God* in virtue of . . . our *freely and agreeably being willing* to be known by God and thereby to be transformed toward God's moral character of perfect love as we are willingly led by God in volitional fellowship with God, thereby obediently yielding our wills to God's authoritative will?"²⁶ He notes that this key

²²Moser, *The Elusive God*, x (original emphasis).

²³Moser, *The Elusive God*, x (original emphasis).

²⁴Moser, *The Elusive God*, 3 (original emphasis).

²⁵Moser, *The Elusive God*, 5.

²⁶Moser, *The Elusive God*, 4 (original emphasis).

shift, from knowing that God exists to being willing to be known by God, echoes language in Pauline texts such as I Corinthians 8.2-3: "Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge, but anyone who loves God is known by him."

Moser proceeds to make one clarification that highlights a notable difference from Wesley. One does not need to yield one's will to God, Moser suggests, before one can have *any* access to purposive evidence of God's reality. Rather, one needs only to be willing to receive an authoritative call to willful fellowship with God. That invitation may be ignored or rejected, but the willingness at least to receive it opens one to a kind of evidence that is not otherwise available. He frames the question this way: "Am I willing to be known by God in virtue of being authoritatively challenged by God for the sake of my being transformed toward God's moral character via my being led by God in volitional fellowship?"²⁷ This varies somewhat from Wesley, who suggested that we need to experience new birth even to have the capacity to perceive spiritual realities directly. Moser sees the pivotal movement as a willingness to be called by God into willful fellowship—one may accept or reject the call, but one is aware of God's reality in doing so. Of course, Moser makes it clear that deeper knowledge and fellowship with God follow from accepting and acting upon God's invitation.

If we press the question of why our posture toward God shapes our knowledge of God, we detect another interesting difference between Moser and Wesley. The two are in agreement that human knowing has gone astray. But *how* they have gone astray is described in somewhat different terms. For Wesley, the epistemic issue was that our spiritual senses are unable to function—that is, a capacity needs to be restored by God. For Moser, the epistemic issue is a habit of willing wrongly. He argues that "our *intentions* can go astray, even in morally accountable ways."²⁸ More specifically, at the root of the problem are "cognitive commitments that obstruct our apprehending purposively available authoritative evidence of God's reality."²⁹ He calls these obstructions cognitive idols. These idols are standards that we establish, explicitly or implicitly, that determine what can reasonably be counted as real. Given this problem, God's manner of self-revelation corresponds with what we most need spiritually. Moser

²⁷Moser, *The Elusive God*, 10 (original emphasis).

²⁸Moser, *The Elusive God*, 8 (original emphasis).

²⁹Moser, *The Elusive God*, 12.

puts this point quite sharply: "So, we may expect God to be purposively elusive or incognito at times, given the corrective challenges needed by wayward humans. Contrary to popular wishes, God wouldn't be at our beck and call, and this would be in our best interest after all."³⁰ Because our selfishness in particular blocks us from willful knowledge of and fellowship with a God of unselfish love, our need is for God "to challenge and then noncoercively transform our deadly selfishness."³¹ As with Wesley, Moser understands God to be the one graciously making possible our experience of knowing God. But that grace must be welcomed, and Moser describes this as an act of human will.

We thus have before us two accounts of knowledge of God that are deeply connected to the spiritual posture of the knower. Both suggest that direct encounter with God decisively shapes what one is able to know about God. Both argue that God's self-revelation corresponds to what God desires to do in us. Both emphasize postures of reverence, namely humble repentance for Wesley and unselfishness for Moser. And they agree that it will be hard for those who are not in such a condition to comprehend what a believer experiences in knowing God. What, then, do these reflections have to do with WTS? What do they mean for our work? The top of our website includes the tagline: "An international community of Wesleyan-Holiness scholars serving the church and academy since 1965." This very description suggests that who we are matters for what we do. Implicit in our history and our self-description is the idea that the dynamics of commitment, transformation, and particular dispositions should not be separated from our academic work. I would suggest that, in practice, this means three things.

First, it means *we are a worshipping society that approaches its work with and for the church*. I am not speaking here of membership restrictions so much as a posture of reverence toward God and fellowship with the community of faith. It is significant, I believe, that we include worship services as part of our annual meetings. Not only does that consecrate part of our time together to the explicit act of worship, but it also reminds us that everything we do—papers, panels, and breaking bread—can be done as to God. We are also reminded that our relationship to the church is a significant part of what gives us life. We in the academy have a habit of emphasizing how much the church needs us. But we also deeply need

³⁰Moser, *The Elusive God*, 13.

³¹Moser, *The Elusive God*, 15.

the church. If there is anything to learn from our epistemological reflections, it is that the mind alone cannot access all there is to know of God. Our intellectual pursuits doubtless have a key role: if we think back to Wesley's use of the category of testimony, we can certainly understand our scholarly work as refining the witness across time and space to what God has done. But without the actual experience of that transforming work—which happens in the context of communities of faith—that witness will simply not be received. Intellectual engagement that is properly theological finds little reason for being without the work of the church.

Second, the idea that who we are matters for what we do means that *we approach our work in a posture appropriate to the theological task*. Some may wish to make the case that we need to distinguish among the various sub-disciplines at this point. One might argue that it is possible to be a first-rate historian or biblical scholar without any personal attention to the life of faith. And yet, does not one's experience of faith shape, for example, the texts that one will privilege in the interpretive task? Might it not be the case that one's participation in the community of faith enables the recognition of the import of a particular text? What we may chalk up to the intuition or instincts of a historian or biblical scholar may in fact be the product of formation—all to the good of the academy that benefits from that scholar's work. I suspect that these lines of thought are very much worth pursuing.

Even clearer are the dispositions that correspond to the work of the systematic, constructive, dogmatic, or practical theologian. My colleague Daniel Castelo has offered one exploration of these dynamics in his essay "The Fear of the Lord as Theological Method."³² In that essay, he draws a contrast between what he calls adamic fear and mosaic fear. Castelo describes adamic fear as an ever-present dimension of the human condition, by which alienation from God leaves us with a perpetual sense of vulnerability to suffering and death. By mosaic fear, or "fear of the Lord," he means the disposition that enables and elicits walking humbly with God. As Castelo puts it, "God should be feared continuously because only God can sustain life."³³ Not only is this fear the beginning of wisdom, in that only God-fearers fully realize that God alone is to be praised, but it also calls us to covenant-keeping practices. Castelo argues that, in the

³²Daniel Castelo, "The Fear of the Lord as Theological Method," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 2:1 (2008), 147-160.

³³Castelo, "The Fear of the Lord," 154.

contemporary context, the appropriate concern to avoid adamic fear has an unhealthy byproduct: it has left us largely unable to recognize the important place of mosaic fear. Yet there are passages of Scripture that distinguish carefully between these, as in Exodus 20:20, where Moses exhorts: "Do not be afraid; for God has come only to test you and to put the fear of him upon you so that you do not sin."

Castelo goes on to suggest that fear of the Lord in this mosaic sense is a disposition fully appropriate to theology proper. In particular, it ensures a place of apophatic as well as cataphatic dimensions of the theological task. When we fail to recognize the "tentative quality of all theological reflection," he suggests, we run the risk of conceptual idolatry or even blasphemy.³⁴ This is a different form of cognitive idolatry from what Moser identified. In this case, the danger is not that our commitment to certain cognitive standards will restrict us from seeing purposively available evidence of God. Rather, the danger here is that our commitment to particular conceptual accounts of God will prevent our worship of the living God alone. In this light, the fear of the Lord that holds such a tendency in check results from actual communion with God; it is the response that emerges from being in the presence of God. As Castelo puts it, "the fear of the Lord is the disposition that sustains and maintains the task of theological reflection as legitimately theological."³⁵

At this point, it is appropriate to consider an important possible objection to the particular dispositions we have recognized. Does our lifting up of humility, repentance, selflessness, and proper fear reflect a position of privilege? By describing an appropriate spiritual posture in these terms, have we succumbed to the common tendency to identify pride as the only sin that inhibits knowledge of God? An important feminist critique of a classical notion of sin as pride has emphasized the experience of those who have been subjugated by unjust uses of power. As Joy Ann McDougall writes, "defining sin in terms of the rebellious will (or in modern terms as the self-inflated ego) presumed a notion of autonomy and agency that many women do not enjoy."³⁶ I would argue that this critique must be embraced. Considerations of power in human relationships and

³⁴Castelo, "The Fear of the Lord," 157.

³⁵Castelo, "The Fear of the Lord," 158.

³⁶Joy Ann McDougall, "Sin—No More? A Feminist Re-Visioning of a Christian Theology of Sin," *Anglican Theological Review* 88:2 (January, 2006), 215-235.

social structures would enrich our understanding of the kind of posture that enables deeper knowledge of God. McDougall envisions one way forward in this regard, drawing on Kathryn Tanner's notion of sin as the blockage or denial of God's gift-giving. She suggests that particular forms of healing, such as empathy or self-assertion, might position one to receive God's giving of gifts.³⁷ The point here is that, rather than fixating exclusively on the particular dispositions identified by Wesley and Moser, we should attend to their more formal commitment. That is, we can embrace the idea that our posture before God can be decisive in our knowledge of God without prematurely concluding the discussion about what that posture entails. By attending carefully to the dynamics identified by McDougall and others, we can fill out a more complete picture of the dispositions that enable knowledge.

Third, and finally, the conviction that who we are matters for what we do means that *the telos of our work is the cultivation of the knowledge and love of God*. Building an academic career is not an end in itself. And treating our work as such is a symptom of the kind of habit of heart that can prevent us from receiving God's gifts of fellowship and transformation. By contrast, an openness to those gifts would surely shape the way in which we go about our work as scholars. Of course, this does not mean that we should refrain from critiquing each other—far from it. Critical engagement is often precisely what is needed in the cultivation of the knowledge and love of God. What it does mean is that our manner of interaction should be directed toward that end. Our critiques, our encouragement, our sharing of ideas and bread, are means by which we can love God with our heart, mind, soul, and strength—and love our neighbors as ourselves. A Wesleyan Theological Society that embodies that kind of fellowship would indeed reflect a happy union of knowledge and vital piety.

³⁷McDougall, "Sin—No More?," 234.

HOLY SPIRIT, NEW BIRTH, AND THE HUMAN STORY

by

Oliver Davies

Introduction

There is something particularly challenging about speaking on the theme of New Birth with you this morning. What other image is there in the New Testament which captures so well such radical change? If incarnation and Pentecost make a difference, then the theme of New Birth is the strongest expression we have to indicate both the unfathomability of that difference and its ultimate reality. We do not give birth to ourselves: rather birth is the utterly gratuitous way in which we become real, with others, in a miraculously real world. And so new birth suggests new reality.

And reality, as we know, is the one thing that our mainstream modern theology doesn't really do very well. It is in the very nature of reality that it is shared: what is real for me must be real also for you. And if it is not, or not straightforwardly so, (as when we find that we have different tastes in music for instance), then we are left in the strange situation of protesting "well, it's real for me and if only you could think like me or have the same experiences or tastes that I do, it would be real also for you." But, of course, we wouldn't want to say that a particular person exists "just for me" or "for me and my friends." That would be nonsensical.

We can begin to see here the outline of what has been perhaps the primary theological challenge facing Christianity in the modern period. How do we communicate to others the sense of the reality of Jesus and the Holy Spirit we have in faith? And how do we do that without on the one hand reducing Christian revelation to something it is clearly not (something more purely human or rational perhaps), or to something that looks more cultural (whereby we just accept that the *reality* of Christ or the Holy Spirit is just never going to be communicable across the boundary of faith). But Christian witness itself presupposes realism. We feel that we witness to a real Christ through a real Holy Spirit. But again, the nature of realism is that it must also be explicable in terms other than that of pure experience.

Our modern crisis in Christian realism goes back to the fact that we actually inherit from Scripture an outrightly realist and very successful account of who Christ is and where Christ is. It is an account that dominated Western civilisation for fifteen hundred years. Prior to the mid-sixteenth century and the astronomy of Copernicus and then Kepler, everyone—ancient Greek, Muslim, Jew and Christian alike—believed that there is such a place as heaven, and that heaven is at the farthest or highest point of our circular and finite universe (right at its very edge). This was a universal belief. What made Christian doctrine distinctive was our conviction that the risen Jesus still lives in the fullness of his humanity, and that he is *in* heaven. The fact that he is in heaven had profound implications for our understanding of how he could also be with us on earth. In Acts 2, St Peter sees the Holy Spirit of Pentecost descend upon the Church as “poured forth” from the body of Jesus in heaven. In a parallel way, the life of the sacraments and the imperatives of our caring for the vulnerable and the poor likewise look back to Christ in his Lordship seated to the right hand of the Father in heaven (following messianic psalm 110). The pre-modern Church then used its most powerful language, the language of cosmology, to give a profoundly realist account of Jesus. In fact, we should call this “hyper-realism.”

And so, I want to make two brief points here. The first is that Christianity is at source a profoundly realist religion: nothing else will do. Secondly, it is also an historical religion: one that changes over time. I am not sure that I would want to say that *revelation* changes over time. In fact, I think the notion of the Lordship of Christ prohibits this. If we are to be able truly to encounter Christ as Lord, as human beings, then this will need to be in our own space and time. But as Lord of space and time, Christ cannot be changed by history, even if he can still share our history. This means that what changes is the *humanum* itself: our understanding of what it is to be human. That is certainly changing today. And since Christianity is a historical religion in this sense, we shall have to understand our own history in order to understand ourselves as Christians. Our history teaches us of course that the claim that Christ is real was undermined by science at the birth of the modern age, leading to the collapse of the scriptural cosmos. Thereafter, from the time of the first Reformers, it was the Holy Spirit who was increasingly understood to do the work of “making Christ present on earth.” In other words, the Holy Spirit took over the role of cosmology by creating a context in which Christ could be real on earth.

In our times, New Birth through the Holy Spirit has become a powerful scriptural image for faith as the apprehension of what is ultimately *real*. But we are still left with the challenging question of where and how that new birth occurs, or what its locus may be within our shared reality. To define its locus is not to reduce the Holy Spirit to something else, to space and time, nor is it to constrain God to our space and time. It is rather to give fuller meaning to the claim that the Holy Spirit does indeed change us, who are after all spacio-temporal beings, and does indeed change the world, as Scripture says it does. We need realism then not only because the Creator cannot be any less real than the creation itself, but because the Creator who makes us also *transforms* us. This leaves us theologians with the obligation to think through what being part of such a *transformational* religion might mean, in very different times and places, and with quite different understandings, over time, of what it is to be human beings. In fact, I think we can make the claim that the idea of realism and the idea of transformation belong very strongly together. If we are changed in our Christian faith, then this is real change: a deep response to the reality of God as God comes to meet us in the person of Jesus. It becomes imperative then that we do what we can with the realist claim, opening up to its challenge but also to the very real hope we can have today that after so many centuries, we may at last be in a position where we can once again find a common framework within which the mysterious presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit can be framed by realist thinking which neither obscures, nor constrains, that reality of faith.

1. Science Today

What we are about here then is not finding scientific proofs for Christian belief but rather drawing out the fact that science today is undergoing fundamental change. Paradoxically in fact it is coming closer to our traditional, scriptural cosmological beliefs. This is a point well made by Amos Yong, Philip Clayton, and others who have worked on emergence theory and the Holy Spirit, as well as in other areas of the new dialogue between science and theology.¹ The focus in this paper for theology will lie in a very specific area of science, which is very new and not as yet well known, but it is important first to set the broader picture.

¹Clayton, Philip, *Mind and Emergence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2006, and Amos Yong, "The Spirit at Work in the World: A Pentecostal-Charismatic Perspective on the Divine Action Project," *Theology and Science*, 7:2, 2009, 123-140.

I want to begin then with just a word about quantum mechanics. Since its beginning in the early-twentieth century, it has been difficult to know what this strange new science of interconnectedness at the most fundamental physical level of our universe might mean—if anything at all—at the so-called classical level (which is the level at which we all live). But recently quantum effects have begun to be tracked at the classical level in the biological sciences, and today of course we are at the early stages of building quantum computers. And for some time now, there have been strong arguments for the view that interconnection at the quantum level, or so called “entanglement,” may lie at the root of our remarkable human consciousness, in which some thirteen trillion moving parts of the human brain appear to come into varying degrees of harmony. The main argument against such quantum effects has been the fact that the human brain is warm and moist, while entangled particles in order to endure, have to be isolated in intense cold and dryness. Quantum effects seem to collapse as they come into contact with matter. But just in recent months, the physicist Michael Fisher has published a paper that puts forward mathematical models which suggest that some specific particles in the brain with an exceptionally slow spin may make quantum interconnectedness within the brain possible over a period of seconds.¹ This is potentially very significant for us since it defines the brain more strongly as interconnected but also sets that interconnectedness within the context of a cosmic interconnectedness, entanglement being a feature that would also connect the human brain with the world beyond it. The recent work of Max Tegmark and others suggests that consciousness admits of degrees of intensive integration, suggesting that the most intense brain activity may be associated with the difficult complexities of our moral or social reasoning.³ Perhaps then the interconnectedness which we know at the experiential level of our human love is somehow paralleled physically and cosmically, through quantum effects. If it turns out that there are indeed such quantum effects in the human brain, then it would open the way to a more transformational account of the human self in its cosmic contexts.

²Fisher, M. P. A., “Quantum cognition: The Possibility of Processing with Nuclear Spins in the Brain,” *Annals of Physics*, 362, 2015, 593-602.

³Oizumi M., Albantakis L., Tononi G., “From the Phenomenology to the Mechanisms of Consciousness: Integrated Information Theory 3.0,” *PLoS Comput Biol* 10(5), 2014.

But perhaps the most intriguing thing of all about the quantum world is that it shows that space is more fundamental than time. Complex experiments have shown that when nature has to choose between either the priority of time or the priority of space, then it is space that emerges the victor.⁴ There are constant hints in our own Christian tradition which parallel this. The idea that there will be a new creation and a second coming, and that we shall see a new heaven and a new earth which are “eternal” (and so somehow outside time), suggests not so much the overcoming of time as its fulfilment or completion as place. The idea that Jesus can be in history, but no longer subject to history, also suggests that his—in some real though unique sense—spacial body represents the fulfilment of time. And intriguingly, there is a constant holding together of seeming opposites in Christian tradition. On the one hand we human beings are physically intricate compounds that move immensely slowly in this world, and so have a very extended sense of time (as the theory of special relativity confirms). As human beings, we are fascinated and moved by our past, with what it would be like to look into the eyes of a living ancestor, those two or three million year old “missing links”? And like other religions, we Christians live intimately in our present with an ancient book. But at the same time we are fascinated with light—heaven is full of light, resurrected bodies are light-filled, and on the road to Damascus St Paul encounters a Jesus who is in light. But light moves as fast as it is possible to move in this universe: and photons which constitute light are exactly the same age as when they were created. The glory, for which we hope, is precisely our slow moving bodies changed to light. Do we glimpse here then something of the great transformative tension of the universe playing through our human bodies, as—through worship and prayer—we reach out for light from within time?

This theme of place and love also plays through a second key area of science I would like to mention this morning. Life at its most basic level has been described by evolutionary thinkers such as John Odling-Smee and Kevin Laland as “non-random movement.”⁵ This works well for the contemporary evolutionary theory of “niche-construction,” which challenges the conventional wisdom of neo-Darwinism with its rather deter-

⁴Rovelli, C., *Seven Brief Lessons on Physics* (Penguin), 2016.

⁵Odling-Smee, J. and Laland, K., “Cultural Niche-Construction: Evolution’s Cradle of Language,” in Botha, R. & Knight C., eds., *The Prehistory of Language* (Oxford: OUP), 2009, 99-121.

ministic account of natural selection acting directly on genes. In fact, all living organisms move and so interact with their particular environment, shaping it in particular ways and being shaped by it, before natural selection operates.⁶ The principle of life as “non-random movement” both supports the role of the behavior of the individual creature, including the social way in which one rabbit interacts with other rabbits, as well as working very well for us human beings as creatures who can take responsibility for our actions. A human life patterned upon habituated practices, which shape our human niche, is a deliberate and social life together, for which we take responsibility, and for which we can allow ourselves to be held to account. In us, “non-random movement” in effect designates a recognisable and *personal* life. As a fundamental description of life, “non-random movement” signals the emergent power of reflexivity within the creation which we can associate with the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit also allows us to hold the life of Jesus, a life lived throughout in the power of the Holy Spirit, as the most personal and recognisable life of all, which is to say the highest fulfilment of life as such.

For many evolutionary anthropologists, human “behavior” and the construction of our human niche has at its heart the phenomenon of “hyper-cooperation.” This points to our strongly social or pro-social characteristics through altruism or taking seriously the needs of the other. From very early on, we have had to work systematically together, in order to ward off predators and to access food successfully in a competitive environment. We have survived against the challenges of the environment by pulling together.⁷ This is to be welcomed of course since it means that we are not condemned to be the inherently selfish species of the fashionable atheist. We are in fact deeply orientated to one another, as social creatures for whom some degree of putting the other first comes naturally. At least this is the picture that consistently appears for the last 99% of our time on earth, when we roamed around in smallish groups, as hunter-gatherers, but frequently meeting up with other groups, for festivals and partying. Over the last ten thousand years or so, from the Neolithic period, the story has changed however. Now the archaeological

⁶Odling-Smee, J., Laland, K. N., & Feldman, M. W., *Niche Construction : The Neglected Process in Evolution* (Woodstock: Princeton University Press), 2003.

⁷Fuentes, A., “Hyper-Cooperation is Deep in our Evolutionary History and Individual Perception of Belief Matters,” *Religion, Brain & Behavior*, 5(4), 2015, 284-290.

and historical records show ample evidence of us as creatures who are also capable of violence and genocide.⁸ We need only glance at what is happening in our own world to realize that something quite fundamental separates us today from that pre-Neolithic form of being human. This is the conundrum which lies at the heart of our human story.

Much attention has been paid to exactly what it was that changed in us. We know in that time period there was a growth in the human population, and a turn to agriculture (with the consequent risk that crops and livestock would be plundered) and we began to live in townships of several thousand inhabitants. This increase in the size of settlement groups is significant as is territorialization (which produced boundaries to be defended). But the unknown and yet vital question concerns the evolution of our modern human language and, with that, our modern linguistic consciousness.

The question of exactly when we first acquired our modern human language is so difficult for two particular reasons. The first is that we need to be able to define modern human language in order to date its emergence and, secondly, it seems likely that it could have appeared over a very short period of time, as a result perhaps of settlement. There is a general consensus today that all the elements required for advanced human language may well have been in place for some time and that what might have happened is a “leap” which reflected purely, or largely, cultural and social factors. There are significant pointers here which suggest that the move from basic or proto-language to the advanced resource we have today, may have involved no change in the brain as such, but just a sudden merging or convergence of a range of skills with explosive effect. We can see that, strangely, in the history of mathematics. There is a biological ground for one-ness, two-ness and three-ness, and then for “more than three-ness.” But there is no biological ground for the number 98. As the very distinguished neurologist Andy Clark points out, there is no ninety-eight-ness. 98 simply maps the gap between 97 and 99. It is purely cultural.⁹ There is no reason therefore why it might not have happened very

⁸Lahr, M. M., Rivera, F., Power, R. K., Mounier, A., Copsey, B., Crivellaro, F., . . . Foley, R. A., “Inter-Group Violence Among Early Holocene Hunter-Gatherers of West Turkana, Kenya,” *Nature*, 529(7586), 2016, 394-398.

⁹Clark, A., “Language, Embodiment and the Cognitive Niche,” *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 10(8), 2006, 370-374. See also Dehaene, S., Spelke, E., Pinel, P., Stanescu, R., & Tsivkin, S., “Sources of Mathematical Thinking: Behavioral and Brain-Imaging Evidence,” *Science*, 284(5416), 1999, 970-974.

quickly, within a generation or two. But of course such a move would not have been insignificant, since with these new skills in advanced counting, came mathematics and the possibility of advanced technologies.

The potential “suddenness” of the development of our advanced modern human language is something we need to understand, as well as the fact that it may have developed really very recently. A prior simpler, proto-language may have arisen originally from our social interactions, of grooming, leading to gossiping as Robin Dunbar has it, but crucially undergoing a final transformation through the sophisticated tool-manufacture (or flint-knapping) and tool-use which was such a prominent feature of human societies over the last thirty thousand years or so (tools and words are linked by the human brain).¹⁰ In a recent article Peter Hiscock paints a picture of “lithic landscapes,” or huge expanses of worked and discarded flints, which were our environment at a crucial time in our evolution when stones must have been worked in public places with the advanced skills of flint-knapping being taught in eager groups.¹¹ And here a particular configuration comes into view. After all, we learn language from each other, in close proximity, as perhaps the fullest expression of our innate sociality. But tool use is often tantamount to slashing and cutting (stripping meat from animal bone), or at least robustly shaping our environment. Tool use is principally about how we control the world and shape it as we would wish it to be. And so we can see that our modern human language, which may in fact have been born from a combination of both inter-human intimacy and cutting, could be inherently unstable—not wholly unlike a new and potentially dangerous technology.

Above all, our use of language to name and order things, bringing the world under our cognitive control, leads to the possibility that we can hierarchalize society, choosing to designate other groups as “below” us or as “other than us.” Indeed, the “tool” aspect of language might overwhelm its grooming, inclusive aspect, so that I finally choose to instrumentalize the interfacial human other entirely for my own purposes. In this way, our modern human language, this new social tool-set, would lay the ground for human to human alienation and ultimately the ground also for our unique capacity as a species for genocidal destruction. The distinguished

¹⁰Stout, D., “Stone Toolmaking and the Evolution of Human Culture and Cognition,” *Philos Trans R Soc Lond B Biol Sci*, 366(1567), 2011, 1050-1059.

¹¹Hiscock, P., “Learning in Lithic Landscapes: A Reconsideration of the Hominid ‘Toolmaking’ Niche,” *Biological Theory*, 9(1), 2014, 27-41.

neurologist Vittorio Gallese has commented that this ability to deny another's humanity is "probably one of the worst spin-offs of language."¹²

In sum then evolutionary biology tells us that at our core is an ancient form of social reasoning or social embodiment—which we share quite substantially with other higher primates and ancient human-like groups—and that this tends to inclusivity or "altruism" within the group. In ourselves, genus *Homo*, this core was recontextualised really very recently in our evolutionary history with the emergence of modern linguistic consciousness. This is associated with the extensive changes in patterns of settlement and life that occurred during the Neolithic period. We can probably add that modern tool-based language also allowed us either to moderate, suppress, or indeed to enhance our innate social inclusivity in the way that we use our modern language, with its origins both in grooming and embrace as well as the instrumentality of tool-use. And of course it is in this period of the growth of Neolithic townships, through the rise of agriculture, that the first signs of modern or larger scale religions can be seen. We can think of Ian Kweit's work on Jericho, 7,000 years BC, with its first representations of the human face and trans-generational burial rituals, with an eastern orientation. In Jericho, the faces of the ancestors were refashioned with white plaster and their skulls were reburied without the mandible: perhaps as if to say that the ancestors had now fallen silent.¹³

The 'In-Between'

But the particular kind of transformational place that I want to focus on for the talk this morning, with the radicality of New Birth in mind, is bound up with a new field of science which developed in the late-60s and 70s. This is the neuroscience of social cognition, which was concerned with the "study of information processing in a social setting," which involves the encoding, storage, retrieval, and processing of information about other people.¹⁴ What this means is that new measuring techniques allowed us for the first time to see into our face-to-face socializing. Here everything happens very quickly, too quickly in fact for consciousness to be aware of it, even though what takes place between people communi-

¹²Gallese, V., *New Scientist*, 221(2952), 2014, 1.

¹³Kuijt, I., "The Regeneration of Life," *Current Anthropology*, 49(2), 2008, 171-197.

¹⁴Frith, C. D., "Social cognition," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 363(1499), 2008, 2033-2039.

cates to us as a “feeling” we have about the other, which may be positive or negative. This is significant for a host of reasons. In the first place, the neuroscience of social cognition offers us the opportunity, for the first time, to look into the internal structure of our species-wide “hyper-cooperation.” It can therefore potentially cast light on our own nature as evolved; and may also give us clues as to what might have happened to make us so capable of violence as well as social bonding. This points potentially to new forms of philosophical self-understanding or to theorizations of what Peter Sloterjijk has called “the species-wide, interfacial, glasshouse effect.”¹⁵ Hermeneutical philosophers such as Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur have recognised the vital significance of face-to-face communication for our human self-understanding while acknowledging that this is just too immediate for us to get a grasp of it (which is the reason of course why Paul Ricoeur turned to the objectivity of texts, for his philosophical analysis, at a distance from the live face-to-face).¹⁶

So we need to understand what exactly this is: what we are calling here “the in-between” (in-between human beings). Kai Vogeley from Cologne calls it a “cognitive system,” which is a physiological event in which one body’s social reflexes interact with another body’s social reflexes, at very high speeds, and in which a stream of information is exchanged. This requires each answering response to encode the fact that it understands the message previously sent. This is an intelligent, social response system therefore between two interacting sets of physical coordinates which in this context are two human bodies facing each other and regulating or harmonizing with one another across a range of interactions and responses which include synchrony and phase attraction, in pulse and brain, as well as the mimicking of gesture, expression, and eye gaze.¹⁷ As an intensely complex set of physical reflexes, this “cognitive system” is self-organizing in the sense that it is not under the control of our self-aware, deliberate, and intentional consciousness. It works automatically

¹⁵Sloterdijk, P., *Bubbles*, W. Hoban, transl., Los Angeles: Semiotext, 2011, 169.

¹⁶Davies, O., “Niche Construction, Social Cognition, and Language: Hypothesizing the Human as the Production of Place,” *Culture and Brain*, 4(2), 2016, 87-112.

¹⁷Vogeley, K., Schilbach, L., Newen, A., “Soziale Cognition,” in H. M. Hartung, ed., *Interdisziplinäre Anthropologie* (Heidelberg: Springer VS), 2014, 13-39.

unless we choose deliberately to close the system down (generally by averting our gaze from the other, looking past the other or turning our back, literally or metaphorically). But for all its pre-thematic, instinctive or autonomous nature, it is also intensely *evaluative*. We can say that our bodies come to judgment about the other (although “judgement” is not the right word here for it implies our capacity for free, linguistic decision-making whereas our social cognition at this level is pre-thematic and pre-linguistic). It is perhaps truer to say that our bodies subtly try to “dance with one another” and so arrive at a sense of how well we can do that, with implications for how well we might also be able to work together socially in the pursuit of common goals.¹⁸

What the neuroscience of social cognition points to here is the shape or structure of our foundational sociality. It is this, with its dynamic processes of affectivity, empathy, evaluation and intensive layers of self-monitoring and of monitoring the other, and which we have in common with all other human beings, that we take into every situation in life. Of course, we all manage this social system, with its radical human inclusivity, differently, filtering it through our culture and linguistically shaped consciousness. The young child already learns who is an insider and who an outsider (who they can play with and who they should not play with). To become an adult has much to do with learning to control our inclusivity, marshalling it and channelling it in ways we come to think of as appropriate.

From very early on something really important began to emerge from the new neuroscience of social cognition. This is the fact that the schemes of the self which are current in cognitive psychology could be applied also at this instinctive, pre-thematic level, and could be recognised there. In our “in-between,” the thematic or linguistic self is already prefigured, even in its high functioning powers of relating, reasoning and social decision-making. This has an important consequence. Our instinctive pre-linguistic engagement with the human other in face-to-face encounter is already empathetic, inclusive and evaluative, within our social embodiment. This means that how we respond to the other freely and in language not only determines how we treat the other, but it also determines the relation that will come about between my own body and mind. Let me explain what I mean. The extent to which I accept the com-

¹⁸Schilbach, L., Timmermans, B., Reddy, V., Costall, A., Bente, G., Schlicht, T., & Vogeley, K., “Toward a Second-Person Neuroscience,” *Behav Brain Sci*, 36(4), 2013, 393-414.

plex, particular and unpredictable other, also marks the extent to which I become one with the internal structure of hyper-cooperation within myself, within my own social embodiment. To that extent, I also accept my own social embodiment, by which I am in the world in the first place, as self-aware consciousness. In other words, my wholeness as person will depend on this moment of convergence, as this comes about in my encounter with the complex, human other.

And it is here that something else very significant comes into view. It is not our subjectivity that is primary in how we encounter the other, but rather what we here call our social embodiment. The “in-between” is constituted by an astonishingly rich system of interactive responses which can be measured, and so is physically objective. It is this that is primary, and as free subjects, we have to decide what we are going to do with it, in each and every case that we meet another human being.

Since what we are describing here is objective and physical, the question arises for those who research it as to what to call it? Is this me, for instance, is it you, or is it both of us? In the scientific literature, so-called theory takes the view that what comes into view here is a self who infers the existence of other selves from rapid physical movements. This is somewhat individualistic and rather at odds with the data. A more social approach is Simulation Theory which understands this matrix to be one of reciprocal physical interactions on which one side of the system—me or you—constantly imitates the other, and so together we communicate. One research team takes the novel recourse of referring to it metaphorically by the term from physics, “dark matter,” on account of its enormous density and complexity as a physical system.¹⁹ Another describes it in terms of constituting an “environment,” while a third describes it in terms of physical reflexes that are so dense that they are more accurately described as “world” rather than you or me in the world.²⁰

What is clear is that the pre-thematic, pre-linguistic though also highly cognitive, affective, empathetic, and evaluative “in-between” which is now coming into view scientifically, is fundamental to who we are. This physical “place” between us which is constituted as immensely high levels

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Konvalinka, I., & Roepstorff, A., “The Two-Brain Approach: How can Mutually Interacting Brains Teach us Something about Social Interaction?” *Front Hum Neurosci*, 6, 2012, 2. See also Di Paolo, E., & De Jaegher, H., “The Interactive Brain Hypothesis,” *Front Hum Neurosci*, 6, 2012, 2.

of mutual physical interactions, of which consciousness is only dimly aware as something felt or intuited, is both the source of our consciousness and the form of our physical rootedness in the world. For all these reasons then it is very difficult to understand it objectively. If I have already chosen to live in a way that allows me to control the world, from a distance, for instance, then I will see my own governing and controlling cogito in the “in-between.” On the other hand, if I choose to live more relationally, exploring interdependence, mature emotions and accepting the truth of my own embodiment, contingency, vulnerability, and indeed mortality, if I am more inclined to recognise the needs of the other within a framework of interdependence, then I will tend to see in the “in-between” my own relationality.

But what if we are theologians? What shall we call it then? That’s the question! But the answer, I think, is really quite obvious. We shall name, in the “in-between,” our own *creatureliness*. What occurs between self and other, at this fundamental level, is indeed world, but world as God’s creation. Self and other here are both equally creatures of the one Creator God. The ancient lineage of the “in-between,” our social embodiment, means at that pre-thematic level, that each of us is fully open to the other. Each allows change through the other since that is the nature of any truly reciprocal system or “dance.” The “in-between” that today comes into view through deeper and more careful measurement I take to be world but world as shaped by the Holy Spirit, reaching out in love towards God the Father and God the Son from within the created order. This is a trinitarian moment when through the power of the Triune God world exists in a new way: becoming *capax dei*.

One of the lessons we should take from this then is that we should not allow our modern cultural sensibilities to confine the sphere of activity of the Holy Spirit to our own *subjectivity*, however powerful this may seem. It is one of the real achievements of the Pentecostalist movement has been to insist upon the objectivity of the Spirit and the Spirit’s action in the world. The new science of the human “in-between” offers us a parallel understanding of ourselves, in our deep sociality, as objective, rather than being purely subjectivity. There is potentially then some kind of alignment between this discovery of the “in-between,” with its surprising and even unsettling objectivity and the Pentecostal insistence on the objectivity of the Holy Spirit itself, rather than allowing a partial assimilation of the Holy Spirit into the human spirit. And surely both forms of “objectivity” give us a better chance of developing more robust forms of

theological realism. This brings us back to the primary theme of our conference: the question of New Birth and how we might make sense of this key term today and so be able to explain it better to ourselves theologically and to those around us.

New Birth

We have noted a process whereby the work of the Spirit is to enable the world to reach out to God the Creator, through the emergence of this new unparalleled level of interactive social complexity and its emergent properties of language and consciousness. The world—as it occurs in the complex spaces of our bodies’ interactivity—then becomes *capax dei* in the sense that it can receive the incarnation. The Spirit is attendant upon the conception of Jesus, and is “poured forth” upon us from his heavenly body.²¹ Pentecost shows us that the work of the Spirit in the formation of Church has something to do with our human language.

But what exactly is language? Firstly we need to say that language is difficult, if not impossible, to objectify since, through its power of naming and defining, language is the chief way in which we objectify anything at all. How can we objectify or understand what is itself the means of objectifying or understanding as such? It is here that the potential value of scientific *knowledge* can be so helpful as we seek to frame new understandings of what it *means* to be human. On the question of language, the deep science is quite clear (though again it is evident that it is not always what some influential scientists want to hear). Language is first and foremost material form. For Andy Clark, for instance, words are “material objects” that ground our “neural wet-ware.” Words “press the mind from the biological flux.”²² For James Hurford, on the other hand, the distinctive feature of human language is not the logical, rather technical or computer-like feature of “recursivity” (favoured by many), but rather the particularity of our words and the need not only to get these arbitrary symbolic forms into our heads in every generation, but also the need constantly to recalibrate them against other words, as we speak or write. Every time we refer to something in the world, we have to recalibrate our words against the way the world is, to make sure that we are not misunderstood. In line with Hurford, we could call this a species-wide hyper-

²¹Acts 2:33.

²²Clark, A., *Supersizing the Mind. Embodiment, Action and Cognitive Extension* (New York: Oxford University Press), 2011, 44-60.

bolic training in human particularity: in being this person in this space and time, and doing so of course together with other human beings with whom we share our language. No other creature remotely does that. Within a sea of continuities, this is a very striking area of separation between ourselves and other species.²³

But it is one that comes at a cost. If our language, which gives us modern linguistic consciousness, grants us the possibility of particularity (which is to say being this person at this place and time who thinks and does *this*), and if being particular is also being properly who I am (as both body and mind together), then our particularity also makes us recognizable and identifiable. It makes us potentially vulnerable. How quickly we recognise the vulnerability of the particular other (someone disabled, someone out of place), and how uncomfortable we feel when something forces us to “stand out.” It is so much easier to be part of the crowd. Corrupt power always conceals itself, shunning the sharing and openness of particularity.

And to the extent that it is material, we have to be able to say also that language is in a certain sense also *place*. Now there is something arresting about describing language, which is so *temporal*, in its generation of discursive meanings, as place. Surely, language belongs to our conscious subjectivity, with its hopes, memories, and arguments, all of which presuppose time. But we are not suggesting that language—this internalized materiality—can cease to be temporal sequence as we begin and end our sentences, not in this life at least. The question is rather whether it can also become place. And it seems that there is some quality of place already in play in certain kinds of language use. We can think of the signature on the contract, or words of open-ended and unconditional commitment, as in marriage vows or indeed baptismal vows. Here the flow of time is in a certain sense arrested. We are able to inhabit our words on such occasions—often involving witnesses—in such a way that they can stand the test of time. When we solemnly give our word, in the presence of, or in exchange with, others, we are in time, but are not subject to time (except of course through death and frailty). This does not mean that we share the Lordship of Christ, but it might mean that Christ’s Lordship is imaged in us at that point of truthfulness since we are—as Christians—

²³Hurford, J. R., “Human Uniqueness, Learned Symbols and Recursive Thought,” *European Review*, 12(4), 2004, 551-565.

already before the face of Christ (as David Ford has it²⁴). In Christ, God has already entered our human interfacial space, our “in-between.” This is the most intimate place of revelation possible. In fact, we need to say that every human being is already before the face of Christ in this wholly inclusive sense. But of course, Christian identity requires something more. It means that we need also to share a language which commits our self-aware, conscious self to freely choose him there, where he comes to meet us. And it is perhaps here, at the point of the interaction of our discriminating, freely choosing, linguistic consciousness and the inclusivity of our social embodiment that we can see something of deep significance about the human.

In truth, we human beings find it difficult to be deeply inclusive in more than a few cases: with those relatives or friends to whom we are close and with whom we have genuinely equal and caring relationships. Most of the time, we just get on with people, passing them by. Our deep inclusivity, our demanding convergence between body and mind is shelved for when we need it. That surely is why it can be so difficult to live within a ministerial vocation, when every human contact has to promise the presence of Christ.

And yet still there is something in us that wants to come ever closer to life. Life begets life. But language, which is such a powerful way of accessing our internal life, truth, and freedom, where we embrace and work with the in-between in encounter with the other, is also what stands between us and the in-between. Linguistic consciousness is designed in no small part to cope with the complexity of the world, which rushes into the capacious human brain. Language allows us to reduce the complexity of the real, making it manageable for us. And to embrace the other, on those occasions when we do truly embrace the other, is to set aside this characteristic function of consciousness, choosing rather to multiply the human resource we have for coping with the world's complexity together. There is nothing in our environment as unpredictable and complex as the human other (those closest to us inevitably complicate our lives), and yet there is something in us that can miraculously “let the other in,” even while being linguistic consciousness. Here language ceases to be an objectifying tool and becomes the source of a common experience of being in the world: of sharing the world, in that very special relational aspect of

²⁴Ford, D. F., *Self and Salvation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1999.

world which comes into existence between us. Paul Ricoeur talks of “the paradox of the exchange at the very place of the irreplaceable.”²⁵

But too much miracle is hard for us. The reality is that we have just enough miracle to want more. But it is in the very nature of miracle that it comes from God and is pure grace. And that is our problem. To be fully human then in this sense of being more than human, we need to turn to grace and to the work of the Holy Spirit. What Pentecost shows is that language can be transformed in powerful ways that allow it to become a pathway for ourselves and others into that depth of holiness and life. The very particularity of language itself contains radical community since the capacity to be particular is what we most share as human beings. Particularity (being this person in this time and place) is how we are all most human. And there is no community more powerful than a community of those who are both in their own truth and in their own freedom. The Holy Spirit who is poured forth from the Christ of Pentecost communicates the truth and freedom of his limitless though identifiable body, communicates his particularity and identifiability, in the flowing life of a community that is so deep that it constitutes a shared world.

What this means perhaps is that we cannot be fully human unless we have the creation itself on our side. We must become the place of God. God's place of light. *That* linguistic consciousness is re-born, its world is made new, where it gives assent to the Spirit's action, allowing itself to become the Spirit's place, through acts of love, through grace and light.

And so we return at the end to the hyper-realism of the Christian religion. To be humanly particular is to be humanly real. And we cannot make ourselves real. Rather we become real in response to another's reality, where we respond, as human material cause, to the real needs of the other. The reality of one is conferred upon the other. The “in-between” which is the place of God's dwelling holds us together, in the renewal of world. Human reality then is a project of community. But it is also the way we are caught up into God's own becoming real, through the Holy Spirit, in the body of Christ. His is a transformed and transforming body. Above all, it is a real body in that it bestows reality upon all who receive it; and who breathe the Spirit's life, poured forth upon us.

²⁵Ricoeur, P., *Oneself as Another*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1992, 193.

**CONFLICTING VIEWS OF THE NEW BIRTH
BETWEEN JOHN AND CHARLES WESLEY
WITH A TIMELINE NARRATIVE EXPLAINING
HOW AND WHY THE DISTINCTION
BETWEEN JUSTIFYING FAITH AND
ENTIRE SANCTIFYING GRACE FIRST DEVELOPED**

by

Laurence W. Wood

“That we ‘must be baptized with the Holy Ghost,’ implies this and no more, that we cannot be ‘renewed in righteousness and true holiness’ any otherwise than by being over-shadowed, quickened, and animated by that blessed Spirit.”¹

—John Wesley to William Law

Nothing is more striking than the difference in the meaning of the new birth between the co-founders of Methodism. John Wesley defined it as the initial point of sanctification, whereas Charles Wesley defined it as the end point of entire sanctification. This paper will consider the timeline of their developing idea of the new birth. In so doing, it will present narrative explaining how and why the distinction between justifying faith and entire sanctification was developed. It will conclude with an examination of the way that John Fletcher drew from the Wesley brothers’ idea to define the new birth in terms of being born again of water and Spirit. The significance of this discussion is based on the fact that John Fletcher, together with John and Charles Wesley, formed the triumvirate of Methodism. It will be seen here that John Fletcher’s view of the new birth was similar to Charles Wesley and the early view of John Wesley. Fletcher’s primary correspondent, consultant, and dear personal friend was Charles Wesley, although he, like Charles Wesley, derived his primary theological ideas from John Wesley. The conclusion will briefly suggest that the new United Methodist liturgy on baptism/confirmation may be a

¹*The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1872): 9:495, “Extract of a Letter to the Rev. Mr. Law (January 6, 1756).”

way to reconcile these differences that will avoid the campmeeting-nuanced individualism that sometimes characterized the evangelistic preaching of nineteenth century American Methodism and the Wesleyan Holiness Movement, which lacked the ecclesiology of the Wesley brothers and John Fletcher.

William Law as the Wesley Brothers' Mentor

William Law's two books, *A Practical Treatise upon Christian Perfection* (1726) and *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (1728) virtually contained the mirror image of John Wesley's idea of holiness. William Law (1686-1761) lived in Putney in the home of Edward Gibbons where he often consulted privately with those who were sincere about pursuing a holy life. John and Charles Wesley were among those who often consulted with him in his home when they were students at Oxford. William Law said that he had functioned as "a sort of oracle to John Wesley."² During the later years of his life, John Wesley acknowledged: "These [two books] convinced me more than ever of the absolute impossibility of being *half a Christian*; and I determined, through his grace (the absolute necessity of which I was deeply sensible of) to be *all-devoted* to God, to give him *all* my soul, my body, and my substance."³ John Wesley admitted that in a qualified sense that William Law was a "parent" of Methodism.⁴ This is a fair assessment considering that John Wesley derived the term, Christian Perfection, primarily from William Law. Charles Wesley also said of William Law in his October 17, 1736, diary: "While I was talking at Mr. Chicheley's on spiritual religion, his wife observed that I seemed to have much the same way of thinking with Mr. Law. Glad I was and surprised to hear that good man mentioned, and confessed, all I knew of religion was through him."⁵

²Alexander Whyte, *Characters and Characteristics of William Law, Nonjuror and Mystic* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1893), xxvi.

³John Wesley, "Preface," *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1740), *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II*, eds. Paul Wesley Chilcote and Kenneth J. Collins, *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013), 13:137.

⁴John Wesley, *Sermons III*, ed. Albert C. Outler, in *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976-), 3:504, "On God's Vineyard."

⁵*The Manuscript Journal of the Reverend Charles Wesley, M.A.*, ed. S. T. Kimbrough, Jr and Kenneth G. C. Newport (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2008) 1:57-58.

John Wesley first visited William Law in July 1732 at Putney.⁶ Undoubtedly they discussed Law's idea of perfection, which was incorporated into John Wesley's sermon delivered at St. Mary's (Oxford University) on January 1, 1733, entitled, "The Circumcision of Heart." Even as late as September 1, 1778, John Wesley wrote in his journal: "I know not that I can write a better [sermon] on *The Circumcision of Heart* than I did five and forty years ago."⁷ In May 1765 John Wesley said to John Newton that this sermon "contains all that I now teach concerning salvation from *all sin*, and loving God with an *undivided heart* . . . This was then, as it is now, my idea of perfection."⁸

John Wesley's opening sentence in his sermon on "The Circumcision of Heart" referred to William Law,⁹ and it employed his same categories, including his definition of Christian perfection as (1) loving God with all one's heart, mind, and soul and one's neighbor as oneself, (2) purity from all "inbred" "corruption,"¹⁰ (3) being "born again of the Holy Spirit,"¹¹ (4) having the inner and abiding assurance of the Holy Spirit that one is a

⁶"Review of *The English Church in the Nineteen Century (1800—1833)* by John H. Overton (Longmans, 1894)," in *The London Quarterly and Holborn Review*, 82 (April, July, 1894): 352.

⁷John Wesley, September 1, 1778, *Journals and Diaries VI (1735-38)*, ed. W. Reginald Ward and Richard Heitzenrater, of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 23:105.

⁸John Wesley, *Letters III (1756-1765)*, ed. Ted A. Campbell, of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), 27:428, "To John Newton," May 14, 1765).

⁹Cf. William Law, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (Suffolk: Richard Clay and Sons, 1906), 98, with Albert Outler, "The Circumcision of Heart," *Sermons*, 1:401.

¹⁰William Law, *A Practical Treatise upon Christian Perfection* (London: William and John Innys, 1726), 250; cf. Wesley, "Unless his heart is circumcised . . . of that inbred 'corruption of his nature.'" Outler, "The Circumcision of Heart," *Sermons*, 1:409.

¹¹William Law, *A Serious Call*, 112. Outler, "The Circumcision of Heart," *Sermons*, 1:406. Wesley equates "born of God" with Christian perfection.

child of God,¹² and (5) the only source of happiness.¹³ The inclusion of humility, along with faith, hope, and love as characteristics of Christian perfection also reveals Law's influence.¹⁴

On January 1, 1734, John Wesley received a letter from his mother Susanna Wesley, noting he had complained that William Law "could not be so explicit as you could have wished in speaking of the presence of God."¹⁵ On June 26, 1734, John Wesley wrote a letter to William Law seeking his advice on what to do about a friend who had read his *Treatise on Christian Perfection* and *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* but who was struggling with being holy. This friend may have been none other than John Wesley himself or his brother, Charles, or perhaps one of his students. The means for becoming holy had become too burdensome for this friend who had for a period of time followed Law's rules scrupulously, including receiving Holy Communion at St. Mary's Church at Oxford University, fasting, and not reading too much from "secular authors" during the lent season. Unwilling to maintain this strict rule of spiritual discipline because of dissatisfaction with the spiritual results, this friend said he no longer had any desire "to please God alone." John Wesley admitted that he was "entirely at a loss what step to take" to help his friend whose decision "appears to me quite incomprehensible." So he pleaded with William Law to pray for his friend and to advise him what to tell this friend.¹⁶

¹²Wesley said "'circumcision of heart' implies . . . the testimony of their own spirit with the Spirit which witnesses in their hearts, that they are the children of God." Outler, *Sermons*, 1:406. Similarly Law wrote regarding the definition of Christian perfection and assurance: "But when the Temper and Taste of our Soul is entirely changed, when we are renewed in the Spirit of our Minds, and are full of a Relish and Desire of all Godliness, of a Fear and Abhorrence of all Evil, then, as St. John speaks, *may we know that we are of the Truth, and shall assure our Hearts before him, then shall we know, that he abideth in us by the Spirit, which he hath given us.*" *A Treatise upon Christian Perfection*, 51, 534.

¹³The language of being "happy in God" in early Methodism as a euphemism for Christian perfection can be traced back to William Law's numerous references linking holiness and happiness.

¹⁴Outler, "The Circumcision of Heart," *Sermons*, 1:403.

¹⁵John Wesley, *Letters I (1721-1739)*, ed. Frank Baker, *The Works of John Wesley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980): 25:363-364, "From Mrs. Susanna Wesley" (January 1, 1734).

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 25:386-388, "To the Revd. William Law" (June 26, 1734).

William Law was unable to help John Wesley or his unnamed friend to achieve Christian perfection through his mystical approach of fasting, meditation, and attending to the ordinances of the Church. However, John Wesley came to learn a new way to be holy from a new friend who explained to him the evangelical doctrine of justification by faith alone. This new friend was Peter Böhler who introduced him to the idea of the full assurance of faith that could be had in an instantaneous moment of belief. This idea of immediate faith was something new to him but being convinced by the testimonies of others and a fresh look at the book of Acts, he became completely convinced. His new friendship with Peter Böhler terminated his reliance upon William Law as his spiritual director. The long drawn-out process of Law's mystical faith was readily exchanged for Böhler's doctrine of an instantaneous evangelical faith—except that John and Charles Wesley did something with it that Böhler had not intended, namely, they equated Böhler's doctrine of justification by faith alone with Law's idea of Christian perfection.¹⁷

Just fourteen days before his Aldersgate conversion, John Wesley complained to William Law that “for two years . . . I have been preaching after the model of your two practical treatises. And all that heard have allowed that the law is great, wonderful, and holy.” But the problem was, John Wesley said, “no sooner did they attempt to follow it than they found that it is too high for man, and that by doing the works of the law shall no flesh living be justified.” John Wesley castigated William Law for telling him that he had to live “under this heavy yoke,” but he said he had now come to see that there is a simple way to be holy after having met Peter Böhler who had advised him: “Believe, and thou shalt be saved. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ with all thy heart, and nothing shall be impossible to thee. This faith, indeed, as well as the salvation it brings, is the free gift of God.” John Wesley thus asked William Law: “Now, Sir, suffer me to ask, How will you answer it to our common Lord, that you never gave me this advice? Did you never read the manner wherein Peter, John, and Paul answered those who cried out, ‘What must we do to be saved?’” John Wesley admitted that the only faith that he personally had was a “speculative, notional, airy shadow, which lives in the head, not in the heart.” Implying that he had equated Peter Böhler's idea of justifying faith with Christian perfection, John Wesley said to Law: “What is this to

¹⁷Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Mirror and Memory* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1989), 106-149.

the living, justifying faith in the blood of Jesus? The faith cleanseth from sin, that gives us to have free access to the Father, to rejoice in hope of the glory of God, to have the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us; and the Spirit itself bearing witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God?"¹⁸

To be sure, Wesley's earlier sermon on "Circumcision of Heart" used categories from Law, including "by faith alone." He had heard this directly from Law and read it in his book, *Practical Treatise on Christian Perfection*: "And he is only of God, or born of God in Christ Jesus, who has overcome this world, that is, who has chosen to live by faith, and govern his actions by the principles of a wisdom revealed from God by Christ Jesus."¹⁹ Echoing these words of Law, John Wesley had said that it is "implied in 'circumcision of heart' . . . that faith . . . alone is able to make them whole."²⁰ He wrote: "Our gospel . . . knows no other foundation . . . than faith, or of faith than Christ."²¹ Law also said the Holy Spirit will "assure our hearts" and "we know, that he abideth in us by the Spirit, which he hath given us."²² Wesley also had spoken of the direct witness of the Spirit in his sermon on "The Circumcision of Heart" in 1733 saying, "that none is truly 'led by the Spirit' unless that 'Spirit bear witness with his spirit, that he is a child of God.'"²³ Yet, until he met Böhler this idea of faith alone was apparently only "notional" for John Wesley.

This letter shows that Wesley was hurt and disappointed that William Law had advised him on many occasions and had properly defined Christian perfection but failed to help him as his spiritual director to know how to attain it experientially. Now that he had met Peter Böhler, Wesley came to believe he would achieve Christian perfection, freedom

¹⁸Ibid., 25:540-542, "To the Revd. William Law" (May 14, 1738).

¹⁹William Law, *A Practical Treatise upon Christian Perfection*, 222.

²⁰Outler, "The Circumcision of Heart," *Sermons*, 1:404.

²¹Ibid., 1:411.

²²William Law, *A Practical Treatise upon Christian Perfection*, 51.

²³Outler, "The Circumcision of Heart," *Sermons*, 1:411. Subsequently in 1748 he published an addition to this idea of the witness of the Spirit to make it even more personal with words very similar to his diary comments that "I felt I did trust in Christ." This addition in 1748 included this clarification that one can have "a sure confidence in His pardoning mercy, wrought in us by the Holy Ghost; a confidence, whereby every true believer is enable to bear witness, 'I know that my Redeemer liveth.'" See. E. H. Sugden, *Wesley's Standard Sermons* (London: Epworth Press, 1951), 1:269-270.

from fear and doubt, the full assurance of faith through the testimony of the Holy Spirit with his spirit, and be cleansed from all sin in an instant moment of personal faith rather than through the long, legalistic, and self-defeating process of perfection proposed in the will-mysticism of William Law.²⁴

John Wesley's new expectation of Christian perfection included the idea of being "born of God" in an instant moment of justification by faith alone. Ironically, in his letter to William Law on May 14, 1738 (noted above), John Wesley suggested that Law himself was not "born of God" and thus had not attained Christian perfection because he had not yet understood the evangelical meaning of justification by faith alone. Wesley expressed his deeply felt disappointment by saying to Law: "I shall grieve for you."²⁵

William Law responded to John Wesley's letter, defending himself against the charge that he never properly advised John Wesley about the nature of justifying faith. John Wesley replied again denying this assertion, saying that Law never advised him to seek or pray for it, and the books that Law recommended to him to read said nothing about the true meaning of a personal faith in the blood of Christ for salvation alone. Their relationship was largely strained after his introduction to Peter Böhler.

On the very same day that John Wesley had written to William Law on May 14, 1738, complaining that Law had failed to explain being "cleansed from sin" was through "justifying faith in the blood of Jesus," he also preached a sermon on "Salvation by Faith" at St. Ann's Church on Aldersgate Street.²⁶ This was two weeks before his Aldersgate experience. This sermon served as the Methodist manifesto and later became the first of the forty-four standard sermons required of all his preachers. This sermon also shows that John Wesley linked Law's idea of Christian perfection with justification. John Wesley defined "justification" to mean "salvation from sin" and it frees believers from "from all their sins: from

²⁴William Law urged the pursuit of holiness in his concluding chapter: "I exhort the reader to labour after this Christian perfection." He writes: "Here therefore I place my first argument for Christian perfection. I exhort thee to labour after it, because there is no choice of anything else for thee to labour after, there is nothing else that the reason of man can exhort thee to." *A Practical Treatise upon Christian Perfection*, 512.

²⁵*Letters I (1721-1739)*, ed. Frank Baker, 25: 540.

²⁶Sugden, *Wesley's Standard Sermons*, 1:36.

original and actual.” In this sermon in agreement with William Law, John Wesley equated being “born again of the Spirit” with Christian perfection and with being cleansed from all sin.²⁷

It should be kept in mind that the conversion experiences of Charles Wesley and John Wesley were initially assumed by them to be their moment of Christian perfection because they had linked Peter Böhler’s concept of justifying faith with William Law’s idea of Christian perfection. The immediate self-interpretation of John Wesley’s own personal Aldersgate experience was: “I have *constant peace*;—not one uneasy thought. And I have *freedom from sin*;—not one unholy desire.”²⁸ When he was tempted to doubt, he felt reassured that he had a “true heart in full assurance of faith.”²⁹ Likewise, Charles Wesley took his spiritual and theological clues from his older brother John and together they were instructed by William Law on this topic, and now they both had shifted their allegiance to Peter Böhler. This self-understanding of Charles Wesley’s moment of justifying faith as entailing Christian perfection is confirmed in that he preached his brother’s sermon, “Salvation by Faith” (noted above) on September 3, 1738, which identified justification with entire sanctification.³⁰ So it would be anachronistic to think of the Wesley brothers’ conversion experiences as constituting an instantaneous moment of justifying faith as distinct from a subsequent experience of full sanctifying grace. In the words of William Law, their expectation was: “Our whole nature must be changed, we must have put off the old man, we must be born again of God, we must have overcome the world, we must live by faith, be full of the Spirit of Christ, in order to exercise this charity.”³¹ Law insisted that the “imitation of Jesus Christ . . . is as necessary to salvation, as it is necessary to believe in his name. This is the sole end of all the . . . doctrines of Christ, to make us like himself, to fill us with his *Spirit*.”³² So when John and Charles Wesley were taught by Peter Böhler that justification is the full assurance of faith, it was only natural that they would filter their idea of Christian perfection through the notion of an instantaneous faith.

²⁷Outler, “Salvation by Faith,” *Sermons*, 1:121–124.

²⁸John Wesley, May 29, 1738, *Journals and Diaries I (1735–38)*, ed. W. Reginald Ward and Richard Heitzenrater, 18:253.

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰*The Manuscript Journal of Charles Wesley*, 1:146.

³¹William Law, *A Practical Treatise upon Christian Perfection*, 520.

³²*Ibid.*, 463.

Where Did John Wesley Learn to Make the Distinction between Justifying and Entire Sanctification?

Eventually John Wesley developed the idea of two distinct moments of saving faith—justifying faith preceding a subsequent moment of full sanctifying grace. Where did he get this idea? An indication is seen in John's journal entry for February 1, 1738, on the day of his return to England from Georgia. He wrote that he had "*a sort of faith*" equivalent to the faith of the disciples of the earthly Jesus who "had not then 'the faith that overcometh the world.'" He then described his quest for Christian perfection by combining components of William Law with the Moravian idea of justification when he further explained: "The faith I want is, 'a sure trust and confidence in God.' . . . I want that faith which none can have without knowing that he hath it. . . . For whosoever hath it is 'freed from sin'; 'the whole body of sin is destroyed' in him. He is freed from fear. . . . And he is freed from doubt, 'having the love of God shed abroad in his heart through the Holy Ghost which is given unto him.'" ³³ Here in this journal entry John Wesley distinguished between "the faith of the disciples of the earthly Jesus" and the full assurance of faith that frees one from all sin "through the Holy Ghost which is given unto him."

This twofold distinction was more explicitly developed as a result of his visit to Herrnhut, Germany after his Aldersgate experience. He had gone there to visit hoping that "those holy men . . . would be a means, under God, of so stablishing my soul."³⁴ Up to that point in his theological pilgrimage he was still confused about his experience with God because he continued to struggle with doubt and fear. So his visit to the source of the Moravian movement was based on his need to find answers to what had happened to him at Aldersgate. He left England for Herrnhut on June 13, 1738, and he returned to England on September, 16, 1738. Upon his return, he began to distinguish clearly between justifying faith (which he defined as being "born of God in the lowest sense") and Christian perfection (which he defined as being "born of God in the full sense").

His diary entries explicitly reveal exactly where he got this idea of two temporally distinct stages of faith. On August 3, 1738, John Wesley

³³John Wesley, February 1, 1738, *Journals and Diaries I (1735-38)*, ed. W. Reginald Ward and Richard Heitzenrater, 18:215-216.

³⁴John Wesley, June 7 – June 13, 1738, *Journals and Diaries I (1735-38)*, ed. W. Reginald Ward and Richard Heitzenrater, 18:254.

met a lay preacher at Herrnhut by the name of Christian David. Throughout the following week, John Wesley heard him preach four times, and held extended conversations with him. He said Christian David discussed the exact issues that he was trying to resolve in his own mind.³⁵

He heard Christian David explain about the varying degrees of assurance, consoling him that those “weak in the faith” may still be believers with some measure of assurance, though not full assurance. John particularly liked Christian David’s threefold distinction among (1) those in bondage, (2) those in an intermediate state of faith, and (3) those with the fullness of faith. John Wesley gave a comprehensive explanation from the teaching of Christian David showing that the distinction between justifying faith and being cleansed from all sin (full sanctifying grace) is patterned on the basis of the disciple’s pre-Pentecost and Pentecost experience:

Thrice he described the state of those who are “weak in faith,” who are justified, but have not yet a new, clean heart; who have received forgiveness through the blood of Christ, but have not received the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. This state he explained once . . . when he showed at large from various Scriptures that many are children of God and heirs of the promises long before their hearts are softened by holy *mourning*, before they are *comforted* by the abiding witness of the Spirit . . . before they are “pure in heart” from all self and sin. . . .

A second time he pointed out this state from those words, “Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God, Jesus Christ our Lord.” “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.” Hence also he at large both proved the existence and showed the nature of that intermediate state which most experience between that bondage which is described in the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, and the full glorious liberty of the children of God described in the eighth and in many other parts of Scripture.

This he yet again explained from the Scriptures which describe the state the apostles were in from our Lord’s death (and indeed for some time before) till the descent of the Holy Ghost at the day of Pentecost. They were then “clean,” as Christ

³⁵John Wesley, August 8, 1738, *Journals and Diaries I (1735-38)*, ed. W. Reginald Ward and Richard Heitzenrater, 18:270.

himself had borne them witness, “by the word which he had spoken unto them.” They then *had faith*. . . . Yet they were not properly *converted*; and they were not *delivered from* the spirit of fear; they had not *new hearts*; neither had they received “the gift of the Holy Ghost.”³⁶

In a private conversation with John Wesley, Christian David explained that he himself struggled with feelings of assurance concerning his own salvation, but finally through increasing degrees of assurance he came to experience the full assurance of faith. John recorded Christian David’s struggle moving from fear to faith:

Neither saw I then that the “being justified” is widely different from the having the “full assurance of faith.” I remembered not that our Lord told his apostles before his death, “ye are clean”; whereas it was not till many days after it that they were fully assured, by the Holy Ghost then received, of their reconciliation to God through his blood.³⁷

Christian David says this full assurance of faith comes through “the indwelling of the Spirit.” He said the pre-Pentecost disciples of Jesus lacked this full assurance, although they were justified and forgiven before Pentecost. Because of the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, one can, like the disciples, be cleansed from all sin.³⁸ The disciples’ experience is thus cited as a pattern for all subsequent believers. What is noteworthy is the statement: “The state the apostles were in from our Lord’s death (and indeed for some time before) till the descent of the Holy Ghost at the day of Pentecost” included a degree of faith. Christian David compared “being justified” with the experience of the disciples of the earthly Jesus prior to Pentecost, whereas the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost meant they were “fully assured” and “cleansed from all sin.”³⁹

³⁶Ibid., 18:270-271 (August 8, 1738). It is noteworthy that Henry Moore, in quoting this passage from John Wesley’s journal, added the word “fully” before the phrase, “[fully] received *‘the gift of the Holy Ghost.’*” Cf. Henry Moore, *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley* (London: John Kershaw, 1825), 1:394.

³⁷Ibid., 18:274, (August 10, 1738).

³⁸Christian David equated “full assurance” and being “cleansed from all sin.” Cf. Ibid, 18:272, (August 10, 1738).

³⁹The Moravians did not all agree about being “cleansed from all sin.” Christian David affirmed this doctrine, but John learned three years after his Aldersgate experience that Peter Böhler rejected it, as he told John on May 16, 1741. *Journals and Diaries II (1735-38)*, in *Works*, 19:195.

This temporal distinction between justifying faith and being cleansed from all sin derived from Christian David became the hallmark of John and Charles Wesley's soteriological distinction between justifying faith and full sanctifying grace. This distinction is nowhere explicitly seen in the Wesley's brothers until after John Wesley received it from Christian David. Having learned to make this temporal distinction explains why John Wesley acknowledged in his journal on October 14, 1738,⁴⁰ and in a letter to his brother Samuel on October 30, 1738, that his Aldersgate expectation of Christian perfection (defined in terms of being delivered from all fear and doubt, freed from all sin, the seal of the Spirit, the indwelling Spirit, and receiving the fullness of faith) was not fulfilled. He explained that he was justified ("accepted in the Beloved") and sins no longer "reigned over me," but he did not have "the love of God shed abroad in my heart" and he was only a "Christian in that imperfect sense." Here is a portion of that letter:

By a Christian, I mean one who so believes in Christ as that sin hath no more dominion over him. And in this obvious sense of the word, I was not a Christian till May the 24 last past. For till then sin had the dominion over me, although I fought with it continually; but surely then, from that time to this, it hath not. Such is the free grace of God in Christ. What sins they were which till then reigned over me, and from which by the grace of God I am now free, I am ready to declare on the house-top, if it may be for the glory of God.

If you ask by what means I am made free, (though not perfect, neither infallibly sure of my perseverance,) I answer, by faith in Christ; by such a sort or degree of faith as I had not till that day. . . .

Some measure of this faith, which bringeth salvation, or victory over sin, and which implies peace and trust in God through Christ, I now enjoy by his free mercy, though in very deed it is in me but as a grain of mustard-seed: for the *pfa pste*—"the seal of the Spirit," "the love of God shed abroad in my heart," and pro-

⁴⁰He wrote: "Yet, upon the whole, although I have not yet that joy in the Holy Ghost, nor that love of God shed abroad in my heart, nor the full assurance of faith, nor the (proper) witness of the Spirit with my spirit that I am a child of God, much less am I, in the full and proper sense of the words, in Christ a new creature; I nevertheless trust that I have a measure of faith am 'accepted in the Beloved.'" Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries II*, 19:19, (October 14, 1738).

ducing joy in the Holy Ghost, “joy which no man taketh away,” “joy unspeakable and full of glory”—this witness of the Spirit I have not, but I patiently wait for it. I know many who have already received it, more than one or two in the very hour we were praying for it. And having seen and spoken with a cloud of witnesses abroad, as well as in my own country, I cannot doubt but that believers who wait and pray for it will find these scriptures fulfilled in themselves. My hope is that they will be fulfilled in me. I build on Christ, the Rock of Ages; on his sure mercies, described in his Word, and on his promises, all which I know are yea, and amen. Those who have not yet received joy in the Holy Ghost, the love of God, and the plerophory of faith, (any or all of which I take to be the witness of the Spirit with our spirit that we are the sons of God,) I believe to be Christians in that imperfect sense wherein I may call myself such; and I exhort them to pray that God would give them also “to rejoice in hope of the glory of God,” and to feel his love shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto them.⁴¹

The first clear temporal distinction between justifying faith and full sanctifying grace appeared in their published works in 1739 when John and Charles Wesley jointly published a volume entitled, “Hymns and Sacred Poems.” One of the hymns was entitled, “Justified, but not Sanctified.”⁴² In their preface to “a second volume of Hymns” (1740) the Wesley brothers wrote:

Neither therefore dare we affirm . . . that this full salvation is at *once* given to true believers. There is indeed an *instantaneous* (as well as a *gradual*) work of God in the souls of his children. And there wants not, we know, a cloud of witnesses, who have received *in one moment*, either a clear sense of the forgiveness of their sins, or the abiding witness of the Holy Spirit. But we do not know a single instance, in any place, of a person’s receiving, *in one and the same moment*, remission of sins, the abiding witness of the Spirit, and a new, a clean heart.⁴³

⁴¹*Letters I* (1721-1739), ed. Frank Baker (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 25:575-578, (A letter to Samuel Wesley, October 30, 1738).

⁴²John and Charles Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (London: Strahan, 1739), 151.

⁴³John Wesley, “Preface,” *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1740), *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II*, eds. Paul Wesley Chilcote and Kenneth J. Collins, *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013): 13:46.

Only after his return to England from Herrnhut on September 16, 1738,⁴⁴ is there an explicit focus on the two time-sensitive stages of faith, and the biblical basis for this distinction was the pattern of the “justifying faith” of the disciples before Pentecost and subsequently the disciples being “cleansed from all sin” as a result of the outpouring of the Spirit on them on the day of Pentecost granting to them a full and abiding assurance of faith. This connection is stated in their joint publication of *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1740).

Come, Holy Ghost, my heart inspire,
Attest that I am born again!
Come, and baptize me now with fire,
Or all Thy former gifts are vain.
I cannot rest in sin forgiven;
Where is the earnest of *my* heaven?

Where thy indubitable Seal
That ascertains the kingdom mine?
The powerful stamp I long to feel,
The signature of love divine:
O, shed it in my heart abroad,
Fulness of love,—of heaven—of God!⁴⁵

John Wesley also defended this idea of entire sanctification as distinct from justification in his debate with Zinzendorf in September 1741. John Wesley argued that there was a difference between the justifying faith of the disciples before Pentecost and their entire sanctification after Pentecost when they were filled with the Holy Spirit.⁴⁶

However, John Wesley did not only hear about this idea of being cleansed from all sin through the indwelling of the Spirit from Christian David. John Wesley had already learned from William Law that Christian perfection meant the “Spirit dwelling within the heart” and that Christian perfection was received through being “full of the Spirit.” Law wrote: “Our whole Nature must be changed, we must have put off the *old man*, we must be *born again* of God, we must have overcome *the World*, we

⁴⁴Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries II*, 19:19, (September 17, 1738).

⁴⁵John and Charles Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (London: Straham, 1740), 131-132.

⁴⁶*John Wesley, A Library of Protestant Thought*, ed. Albert Outler (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 367ff.

must live *by Faith*, be full of the Spirit of Christ, in order to Exercise this Charity.”⁴⁷ Law writes: “This teaches us, how we are to *invite* the good Spirit of God to dwell in us: We are to *prepare* ourselves for the abode of this Divine Guest, by loving Christ and keeping his Commandments. Whence we also learn, that the Spirit of God does not *equally visit* all persons in all ways of life, but that we must *prepare* ourselves for his presence.”⁴⁸ Law said: “All instances therefore pride are to be avoided, all sorts of humility to be practiced, not only for their own sakes, but as necessary *preparation* for divine grace, that we may be *fit temples* for the Holy Ghost to do well in.”⁴⁹ Law writes: “This is the rule of perfection . . . we are called by God to a state of purity and holiness” which “proves that the Spirit of God dwelleth in me.”⁵⁰

John Wesley also had heard of this distinction between the ante-Pentecostal and Pentecostal state of believers from John Heylyn who preached a Pentecost sermon on the very Whitsunday that Charles Wesley had felt the assurance of saving faith on May 21, 1738, and this was only three days before John Wesley’s Aldersgate experience.⁵¹ John Wesley reported that Heylyn did “preach a truly Christian sermon on ‘They were all filled with the Holy Ghost’—and so, said he, may *all you* be.”⁵² Heylyn was the first rector of St. Mary-le-Strand (1724–59) and became prebendary of Westminster Abbey (1743–59). Wesley was highly indebted to Heylyn and knew him well. Wesley noted in his diary that he assisted Heylyn in administering Holy Communion following the sermon. John Wesley had already used Heylyn’s devotional writings extensively while he was in Georgia, and he later included them in his recommendations to his preachers. He was also later to use Heylyn’s *Theological Lectures* (1749) as a source of his *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (1755).⁵³ John Wesley reported in his diary that John Heylyn was a preacher he would make a point to hear whenever he could.⁵⁴

This Pentecost sermon is contained in Heylyn’s *Theological Lectures* and has had significant influence in the Methodist interpretation of sanc-

⁴⁷William Law, *A Practical Treatise upon Christian Perfection*, 520.

⁴⁸William Law, *A Practical Treatise upon Christian Perfection*, 287.

⁴⁹William Law, *A Practical Treatise upon Christian Perfection*, 288.

⁵⁰William Law, *A Practical Treatise upon Christian Perfection*, 291.

⁵¹John Wesley, May 21, 1738, *Journals and Diaries I* (1735–38), 18:241.

⁵²Wesley, May 19, 1738, *Journals and Diaries I* (1735–38), 18:241.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 18:241n15.

⁵⁴John Wesley, January 28, 1776), *Journals and Diaries VI* (1735–38), 23:3.

tification. Heylyn highlighted what Pentecost meant personally. He noted that “to enlighten, to purify, and to warm, are the properties of fire. Now if we transfer these to the spiritual world, the light of the soul is truth, the purity of the soul is holiness, the warmth or heat of the soul is an active, vigorous ardour to surmount obstacles.”⁵⁵ He showed that the Holy Spirit is called “holy” because He is “the hallowing, i. e. sanctifying Spirit.”⁵⁶ He further explained: “When it is said that the Holy Ghost sanctifies Christians, the meaning is, that He infuses this generous motive, extinguishing the narrow principles of covetousness, pride, and sensuality, and exalting our nature to the noble disinterested purpose of glorifying our Maker.”⁵⁷

Heylyn then said that a Christian believer is sanctified through the “baptism with the Spirit,” “purging away . . . carnal desires,” producing “perfect Purity.” The following citation from Heylyn’s Pentecost sermon is also quoted word-for-word by John Fletcher⁵⁸ and Thomas Coke⁵⁹ to explain the meaning of Pentecostal sanctification:

To wash, cleanse, baptize, and sanctify, are commonly synonymous in Scripture hence the Phrase of being baptized with the Holy Ghost, which is elsewhere called being baptized with Fire, to signify the universal and intimate Purification of the inmost Springs of Action thereby. With this View the Prophet Malachi [Mal iii.3] compares the Spirit to Refiner of Gold or Silver destroying the Dross, and separating all heterogeneous Particles from those Metals by force of Fire, till they are reduced to perfect Purity. Thus the Spirit sanctifies the Soul by abolishing all sordid Inclinations, by purging away the multiplicity of carnal Desires, and reducing all the Powers of the Mind to one simple constant Pursuit, viz. that of God’s Glory. This renders the Soul holy, i. e. pure, all of kind, concenter’d in the End of its Creation, even the Glory of its Maker.⁶⁰

⁵⁵John Heylyn, “Discourse XV. On Whitsunday,” *Theological Lectures at Westminster-Abbey* (London: Printed for J. and R. Tonson and S. Draper in the Strand, 1749), 114

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 116.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 118.

⁵⁸See the discussion in Laurence W. Wood, *Meaning of Pentecost in Early Methodism* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2002), 264.

⁵⁹Thomas Coke, *A Commentary on the New Testament* (London: G. Whitfield, 1803), 2:942-957.

⁶⁰Heylyn, *Theological Lectures*, 118.

If there is any doubt that John Wesley was right when he said the Methodist doctrine of holiness was “the religion of the Church of England,”⁶¹ the above definition of Pentecostal sanctification ought to be convincing. Nothing that ever has been written by John Wesley or John Fletcher more clearly defined it. Heylyn showed how the sanctifying baptism of the Spirit transformed the disciples after Pentecost. This description is similar to the way that John Wesley later explained the weakness of the disciples prior to Pentecost because the day of Pentecost had not yet happened.⁶²

Heylyn said “to show how the Apostles were thus sanctified” would require him “to relate their history, which is but one continued narrative of their holiness. They were purified from all corrupt principles of action. . . . They rejoiced that they were accounted worthy to die. . . . Such was the holiness of the Apostles, was the purity of their hearts, the unity of their desires all meeting in one point, the glory of their Maker.”⁶³

John Wesley recorded in his diary that at the end of Heylyn’s sermon he encouraged believers today to be filled with the Holy Spirit. An examination of this sermon shows that this call to receive the sanctifying baptism with the Spirit could not be more direct. Heylyn showed that Pentecost was not a single past event that marked a new stage in the history of revelation, but it marked the beginning of the very possibility of a personal Pentecost that all subsequent believers were to expect. Here is what Heylyn’s published sermon on Pentecost said: “The same Holy Spirit, which then descended upon the Apostles, does still descend upon all the living members of Christ, according to his gracious Promise.”⁶⁴ He then offered these instructions on how to be filled with the Spirit:

It remains only that I add a word or two concerning the disposition by which we must prepare our hearts to receive him: and this, as our Lord teaches us, is earnest and persevering prayer. We have his direction, *Luke xi. Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.— If a Son shall ask Bread of any of you that is Father, will he give him Stone? how much more shall your heavenly Father give his*

⁶¹Outler, “On Laying the Foundation of the New Chapel,” *Sermons*, 3:585.

⁶²Outler, “The Mystery of Iniquity,” *Sermons*, 2:454.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 119–120.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 112.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 121.

holy Spirit to them that ask him? The terms you see are very easy, are highly reasonable: if we do not perform them we shall be without excuse. But if by humble, fervent, incessant prayer we seek from our heavenly Father the Gift of his Spirit, we shall infallibly receive it, we shall be enlightened, purified, and confirmed in all goodness, we shall advance from strength to strength, till we *become meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light*.⁶⁵

This sermon on Pentecost contains virtually everything that Wesley and Fletcher had explained about the connection between Pentecost and sanctification, including the idea that the baptism with the Spirit will sanctify and cleanse one who is already a Christian believer from all impurity if one prays and will receive “the Gift of his Spirit.” This Pentecost sermon by Heylyn supplemented what John Wesley had learned from William Law. As noted above, he had heard Heylyn preach it just three days before his Aldersgate experience, but he heard this sermon on the very same day that Charles Wesley prayed for his own personal Pentecost at Mr. Bray’s house. In his journal, Charles Wesley described his expectation of saving faith in reference to Jesus’ promise: “I will send the Comforter to you. My Father and I will come unto you, and make our abode with you.”⁶⁶

The main difference is that this Anglican idea of Pentecostal sanctification⁶⁷ was nuanced by John and Charles Wesley to occur suddenly in a moment of faith—a nuance that they obtained from the Moravians. Although John Wesley and Charles Wesley interpreted their initial experience of saving faith in accordance with the categories derived from William Law and Peter Böhler, it is clear after John Wesley had come back from Herrnhut that they had downsized their interpretation to the idea of justifying faith as distinct from full sanctifying grace, expressed in Charles Wesley’s hymn, “Justified but not Sanctified” (1739).

As we shall point out below, Charles Wesley continued to link Christian perfection and Pentecost with the new birth, whereas John Wesley eventually linked the new birth with the initial moment of justifying faith as distinct from Christian perfection. John Tyson thinks that Charles

⁶⁶*The Manuscript Journal of the Reverend Charles Wesley*, MA, 1:106.

⁶⁷Pentecostal sanctification is also contained in the writings of Jeremy Taylor, who also profoundly influenced John Wesley. Cf. Laurence W. Wood, *The Meaning of Pentecost in Early Methodism* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2002), 341-345.

Wesley's identification of Pentecost with Christian perfection in his hymns was a contradictory interpretation to his own Pentecost experience, which Charles had interpreted as his justification. Actually it was not inconsistent because both John Wesley and Charles Wesley initially interpreted their "evangelical conversion" as their moment of Christian perfection, and both subsequently downsized it to their moment of justification. Rattenbury says that although he was justified, "Charles did not believe that at his conversion he was re-born of God, because one who is does not sin."⁶⁸ So it was on Pentecost Sunday that Charles Wesley experienced his evangelical conversion (justifying faith), but later he did not interpret it as his fully sanctifying moment.

However, John Fletcher interpreted John Wesley's Aldersgate experience as Christian perfection and insisted that John Wesley was "truly converted" before he went to Georgia despite John Wesley's negative assessment of his own spiritual state after his return from Georgia. Fletcher believed that John Wesley's harsh self-assessment was based on his early theological development when he had not yet properly understood the distinction between justifying and full sanctifying grace.⁶⁹ Interestingly enough, Fletcher also made a similar comment two years earlier in 1774 in his *Essay on Truth* that Wesley did "sometimes unguardedly assert, that none have any faith, but such as have the faith of assurance."⁷⁰ John Wesley placed his approving asterisk in front of Fletcher's critical comment, and that was the very same year that John Wesley corrected himself in the new edition of his journal (1774), saying he no longer believed he was "a child of wrath," and that "I had even then the faith of a *servant*, though not that of a son."⁷¹ John Fletcher thus insisted that John Wesley was already justified before he went to Georgia (although he lacked an assurance of his faith) and that his Aldersgate experience constituted his "Pentecostal conversion."⁷² John Fletcher also in a letter to his very dear friend Charles Wesley linked his Pentecost Sunday conversion of 1738 to Chris-

⁶⁸J. Ernest Rattenbury, *The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley's Hymns* (London: Epworth Press, 1941), 303.

⁶⁹John Fletcher, "The Language of the Father's Dispensation," *The Asbury Theological Journal*. 53.1 (Spring, 1998): 77.

⁷⁰Fletcher, *An Equal Check* (Wesley's special edition), 154, "Essay on Truth."

⁷¹John Wesley, February 1, 1738, *Journals and Diaries I (1735-38)*, 18:215, Notes i. j, k.

⁷²John Fletcher, "The Language of the Father's Dispensation," *The Asbury Theological Journal*. 53.1 (Spring, 1998): 77.

tian perfection, apparently without any disagreement from Charles Wesley.⁷³

In 1741, after the bishop of London told John Wesley to preach to the world his idea of Christian perfection,⁷⁴ he wrote his sermon on “Christian Perfection.” This sermon contained some of the same emphases found in John Heylyn’s Pentecost sermon. It also contained some of the same ideas that he heard from Christian David. John Wesley said the possibility of being cleansed from all sin and made perfect in love became a possibility for the world only *after Jesus was glorified* when *the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost*. Like John Heylyn, John Wesley explained “the wide difference” between a pre-Pentecost and Pentecost experience in terms of sanctifying grace. He writes:

The Holy Ghost was not yet given in his sanctifying graces, as he was after Jesus was glorified. . . . And “when the day of Pentecost was fully come,” *then first it was* ⁷⁵ [in the history of salvation], that they who “waited for the promise of the Father” were made more than conquerors over sin [a common phrase for Christian perfection] by the Holy Ghost given unto them. . . . That this great salvation from sin [a common phrase for Christian perfection] was not given till Jesus was glorified, St. Peter also plainly testifies.⁷⁶

Attached to this sermon is the hymn by Charles Wesley, “The Promise of Sanctification,” which highlights the instantaneous sanctifying work of the Spirit of Pentecost to occur “now.” Here are two verses:

Thy sanctifying Spirit pour,
To quench my thirst, and wash me clean:
Now, Father, let the gracious shower
Descend, and make me pure from sin.

Within me Thy good Spirit place,
Spirit of health, and love, and power:

⁷³‘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), 258, (Dec. 16, 1770).

⁷⁴John Wesley, “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection,” *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II* in *Works*, 13:146.

⁷⁵Italics mine.

⁷⁶Outler, “Christian Perfection,” *Sermons*, 2:110-111.

Plant in me Thy victorious grace,
And sin shall never enter more.⁷⁷

This development in John Wesley's ideas of two temporarily distinct stages of salvation is also the background for understanding Charles Wesley's focus on the Holy Spirit. The two brothers mostly functioned with a unified perspective at this early stage, and Charles Wesley was quite willing to follow the lead of his brother. John edited Charles' hymns, and Charles preached John's sermons as his own sermons.⁷⁸

The Meaning of Being Born Again

As shown above, John Wesley initially linked the new birth to Christian perfection. Rattenbury has noted that both "Wesleys taught two new births."⁷⁹ His sermon on "The Circumcision of Heart (written in 1733) identified Christian perfection with the new birth,⁸⁰ 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 derived from William Law combined with his Moravian interpretation of being saved from "actual" and "original" sin.⁸¹ 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."⁸² He referred to those who are born again in the lowest sense as being "justified."⁸³ In "The Principles of a Methodist," (1742), John Wesley defined Christian perfection as "born again in the full and perfect sense."⁸⁴ He explained that Christian perfection entails the idea that one has attained "the last and highest state of perfection in this life. For then are the faithful born again in the full and perfect sense. Then have they the indwelling of the Spirit."⁸⁵

⁷⁷"Pleading the Promise of Sanctification," HSP 1742, 261-262.

⁷⁸Cf. Kenneth G. C. Newport, *The Sermons of Charles Wesley, A Critical Edition with Introduction and Notes* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 71-90. Cf. John Tyson, *Charles Wesley on Sanctification* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 17, 32.

⁷⁹Rattenbury, 83.

⁸⁰Outler, "The Circumcision of Heart," *Sermons*, 1:406.

⁸¹John Wesley, Sermon 17, "Circumcision of Heart," § 2, in *Works*, 1:124.

⁸²John Wesley, Sermon 40, "Christian Perfection," in *Works*, 2:105.

⁸³*Ibid.*, 2:106.

⁸⁴John Wesley, "The Principles of a Methodist" (1742), in *The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design*, ed. Rupert E. Davies, Wesley, *Works*, 9:64.

⁸⁵Davies, "The Principles of a Methodist," *Societies*, 9:64-65.

William Law published a treatise on the new birth in 1739 in which he said through Christ everyone can be “born again into its first state of inward . . . perfection.”⁸⁶ Charles Wesley read portions of William Law’s *Treatise on Regeneration* on October 19, 1739, to the Fetterlane Society, noting: “How promising the beginning! How lame the conclusion!” Charles Wesley then regretted that Law’s doctrine of “the new birth is mostly in theory.”⁸⁷ Charles Wesley agreed with Law’s definition of the new birth that it means being “renewed in the likeness of God” and being “reinstated in paradise,” but disagreed with its assumption that it is not actualized in experience.⁸⁸ Law also said that “regeneration, or the renewal of our first birth and state, is something entirely distinct, from this first sudden conversion, or call to repentance; that it is not a thing done in an instant, but is a certain process, a gradual release from our captivity and disorder, consisting of several stages and degrees, both of death and life, which the soul must go through, before it can have thoroughly put off the old man.”⁸⁹ This equation of the new birth with Christian perfection which entails a “process” and “suffering”⁹⁰ was to become a point of difference between the two brothers after 1749. Charles held to a higher view of perfection (an ideal perfection similar in content to William Law) than John Wesley. Charles Wesley’s hymns linked the new birth to perfection.⁹¹ For example, in the hymn book that the Wesley brothers’ jointly published in 1740, Charles Wesley’s hymn, “There Remaineth a Rest for the People of God,” described the meaning of “perfect love” and Christian perfection as the same as being born again.

Our sp’rit is right, our heart is clean,
Our nature is renew’d;
We cannot now, we cannot sin,
For we are born of God.⁹²

⁸⁶William Law, *The Grounds and Reasons of Christian Regeneration, Or, The New Birth* (London: Printed for J. Richardson, in Pater-noster-Row 1739), 21.

⁸⁷*The Manuscript Journal of the Reverend Charles Wesley, M.A.* (October 19, 1739), 1:216.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*

⁸⁹William Law, *The Grounds and Reasons of Christian Regeneration, Or, The New Birth* (London: J. Richardson, 1739), 40-41.

⁹⁰Cf. William Law, *A Practical Treatise upon Christian Perfection*, 167.

⁹¹Cf. Tyson, *Charles Wesley on Sanctification*, 221, 261-268.

⁹²John and Charles Wesley, “There Remaineth therefore a Rest for the People of God,” *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (London: Strahan, 1740), 205.

Charles agreed with Law's definition of the new birth that it "is a recovery of the divine image; and a Christian is a fallen spirit restored and reinstated in paradise; a living mirror of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost." Yet, Charles noted: "He supposes it is possible for him to be insensible of such a change; to be happy and holy, translated into Eden, renewed in the likeness of God, one with Father, Son and Holy Ghost, and yet not know it." Charles rejected "his wretched inconsistency" to define the new birth as a reality which one could not have an assurance of. John Wesley, on the other hand, objected to Law's idea that the new birth included the whole process of sanctification, whereas Charles agreed with Law's equation of the new birth with entire sanctification.⁹³ Rattenbury put it this way: "It is only when the carnal mind which remains is destroyed and the mind of Christ substituted, thus bringing about a total reconstruction of character, that Charles speaks of new birth."⁹⁴

According to the Sermon Register, John Wesley's first sermon on the new birth was the morning of May 29, 1743, which was the day that he opened up His West Street Chapel. E. H. Sugden said the sermon register shows that John Wesley preached on the new birth more than fifty times from 1747 until 1760.⁹⁵ Outler noted that in 1760 Wesley gave "an updated version of his doctrine of the 'new birth'" as "tensions in the Revival mounted" as "the whole problem of regeneration in relation both to justification and sanctification became more and more urgent."⁹⁶ John Wesley placed this sermon on "The New Birth" as Sermon 45 in the Standard Sermons. This sermon explained that justification by faith is what God does for us in the act of forgiving our sins, whereas the new birth is what God does for us in renewing our fallen nature. Justification and the new birth are distinguished from each other logically, but they occur simultaneously. The new birth is also explained as different from sanctification, although initial sanctification begins with the new birth. John Wesley criticized William Law in this sermon for equating new birth with full sanctification. Wesley's point is that the new birth happens in a completed instant, while the process of sanctification begins. However, having noted John Wesley's later definition of the new birth, the language of the

⁹³See John Tyson, *Charles Wesley on Sanctification*, 218-219.

⁹⁴Rattenbury, 308.

⁹⁵Sugden, *Wesley's Standard Sermons*, 2:226

⁹⁶Outler, "The New Birth," *Sermons*, 2:186.

new birth, or being born again, was not prominently used in early Methodist preaching.⁹⁷

On the other hand, Charles Wesley retained the view of William Law who equated the new birth with Christian perfection. Two of the most significant Charles Wesley scholars, J. Ernest Rattenbury⁹⁸ and John Tyson,⁹⁹ have pointed out that Charles consistently used the concept of being born again with full sanctification. John Tyson points out this distinction between John and Charles Wesley: "John placed the new birth at the beginning of the process of sanctification, but Charles located it at the end, at the realization of faith's goal."¹⁰⁰ Likewise, John Rattenbury said that Charles Wesley "almost invariably . . . uses the term 'new birth' for an experience" of Christian perfection.¹⁰¹ Charles Wesley's identification of the new birth with Christian perfection can be seen in this verse:

While one evil thought remains
I am not born of God.¹⁰²

Rattenbury and Tyson also have pointed out that after John Wesley had limited the meaning of new birth to the moment of justifying faith, his practice was to delete those verses in Charles Wesley that equated new birth and Christian perfection.¹⁰³ For example, when Charles Wesley composed "A Hymn to the Trinity," Come, Lord, and make me pure within, O let me now be born of God, Live to declare I CANNOT SIN!"¹⁰⁴ Wesley changed this verse to "O let me now by full of God."¹⁰⁵

Rattenbury also raised the possibility that John Wesley might have reverted back to his original idea of the new birth in 1780 when he published the final version of *A Collection of Hymns for the People Called Methodists* because he equated hymns of full redemption with the new birth. Rattenbury asked: "Does this mean that, notwithstanding his corrections of the early hymns of Charles which equated the new birth with full redemption, he came to the conclusion in 1780 that Charles was right

⁹⁷Cf. John Tyson, *Charles Wesley on Sanctification*, 214.

⁹⁸J. Ernest Rattenbury, 260-264.

⁹⁹John Tyson, *Charles Wesley on Sanctification*, 214-225.

¹⁰⁰John Tyson, *Charles Wesley on Sanctification*, 219.

¹⁰¹John Rattenbury, 260.

¹⁰²Cited by J. Ernest Rattenbury, 261.

¹⁰³Cf. Tyson, *Charles Wesley on Sanctification*, 221, 261-268.

¹⁰⁴*Hymns and Sacred Poems* (Bristol: Farley, 1742), 123.

¹⁰⁵Rattenbury, 261.

after all, or does he mean that there were two new births?"¹⁰⁶ As noted above, John Wesley shortly after his return from Herrnhut in 1738 held to the idea of two new births because he distinguished between born "in the lowest sense" from being "born in the perfect sense." In his journal for January 25, 1739, Wesley recorded these words: "Of the adults I have known baptized lately, one only was at that time born again, in the full sense of the word; that is, found a thorough, inward change, by the love of God filling her heart. Most of them were only born again in a lower sense; that is, received the remission of their sins. And some . . . neither in one sense nor the other."¹⁰⁷

Rattenbury has also pointed out that Charles Wesley focused on the expectation for a personal Pentecost.¹⁰⁸

Assembled here with one accord,
Calmly we wait the promised grace,
The purchase of our dying Lord—
Come, Holy Ghost, and fill the place!¹⁰⁹

This expectation entailed the idea of being born again, and being "baptized with [the Holy Spirit and] fire," and both phrases mean "power to conquer inbred sin" and receive the "fullness of love."

I want the spirit of power within, (2 Tim. 1:7)
Of love, and of a healthful mind:
Of power to conquer inbred sin,
Of love to thee and all mankind,
Of health, that pain and death defies,
Most vig'rous when the body dies.

When shall I hear the inward voice
Which only faithful souls can hear?
Pardon, and peace, and heavenly joys
Attend the promised Comforter.
O come, and righteousness divine,
And Christ, and all with Christ is mine!

O that the Comforter would come!
Nor visit as a transient guest,

¹⁰⁶Rattenbury, 262, 308.

¹⁰⁷Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries II*, 19 (January 25, 1739).

¹⁰⁸Rattenbury, 177, 185-187.

¹⁰⁹John and Charles Wesley, "Hymn for the Day of Pentecost," (Bristol: Farley, 1742), 165. See Rattenbury, 178.

But fix in me his constant home, (John 14:16)
And take possession of my breast;
And fix in me his loved abode, (1 Cor. 3:16)
The temple of indwelling God!

Come, Holy Ghost, my heart inspire!
Attest that I am born again! (John 3:3)
Come, and baptize me now with fire, (Matt. 3:11)
Nor let thy former gifts be vain.
I cannot rest in sins forgiven;
Where is the earnest of my heaven? (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:14)

Where the indubitable seal (Eph. 4:30)
That ascertains the kingdom mine?
The powerful stamp I long to feel,
The signature of love divine!
O shed it in my heart abroad, (Rom. 5:5)
Fullness of love—of heaven—of God!¹¹⁰

Rattenbury cited another of Charles Wesley's hymns to show that personal Pentecosts are to be expected today in this prayer to the Holy Spirit:

Refining fire, go through my heart,
Illuminate my soul,
Scatter Thy life through every part,
And sanctify the whole.

Charles Wesley was John Fletcher's most frequent correspondent, and their friendship was intimate.¹¹¹ He once said to Charles Wesley in a

¹¹⁰John and Charles Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (London: Straham, 1740), 131-132.

¹¹¹Peter Forsaith rightly shows that Fletcher's relationship with Charles Wesley was an intimate friendship, but his minimizing Fletcher's friendship with John Wesley might be overdone, although Forsaith is certainly right that Fletcher retained his own personal individuality and would not allow John Wesley to control his decisions. See Peter Forsaith, "The Long Fletcher Incumbency," *Religion, Gender, and Industry: Exploring Church and Methodism in a Local Setting*, ed. Geordan Hammond and Peter S. Forsaith (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 216-217. Nowhere does Fletcher show anything but respect for John Wesley, whom he considered his mentor and whom he intended to defend against his critics, as reflected in his *Checks to Antinomianism* and his "A Vindication of the Rev Mr. Wesley's 'Calm Address to our American Colonies'" (London: R. Hawes, 1776). Yet, Fletcher's defense of John Wesley was motivated by his belief that his theology was essentially correct.

humorous way that he should “Awake” out of his sleep (a reference to Charles’ sermon on “Awake Thou that Sleepest) and have another day of Pentecost. Fletcher wrote:

But new baptisms are necessary from time to time. Compare Acts 2 and Acts 4. The more the magnet rubs the needle the more magnetized it becomes. Why did you not follow the Lord for another Baptism, and by his Spirit dwelling within you, when he once gave you an earnest of that happy day of Pentecost that you have not forgotten. Well then, Jonah, sleeper, why do you not cry to your God for the Spirit of Resurrection and of life which must enter again in the witnesses who are dead, or sleeping [an allusion to Charles’ sermon, “Awake thou, that Sleepeth].”¹¹²

On September 26, 1740, Charles Wesley preached on “Christian perfection—that is, utter dominion over sin; constant peace, and love and joy in the Holy Ghost; the full assurance of faith, righteousness, and true holiness.”¹¹³ He once said to John Fletcher: “Christian perfection is nothing but the full kingdom in the Holy Ghost.”¹¹⁴ Charles Wesley scholars have noted that Charles Wesley functionally equated the language of the Spirit with Christian perfection. John Tyson showed in particular that Charles Wesley’s “Hymns for Whitsunday” virtually equated the Pentecostal sending of the Spirit with Christian perfection.¹¹⁵ Tyson also showed that Charles Wesley’s Pentecost “hymns do not merely recount the story of Pentecost, they re-create the event in the lives of contemporary Christians.”¹¹⁶ As it was true with John Fletcher, so Charles Wesley always linked the Holy Spirit to Christ and hence his pneumatology is inextricably linked to the Trinitarian persons. The frequent correspondence between John Fletcher and Charles Wesley reveals also that they agreed on the connection between Pentecost and Christian perfection.¹¹⁷

¹¹²‘Unexampled Labours,’ *Letters of the Revd John Fletcher to leaders in the Evangelical Revival*, 258.

¹¹³*The Manuscript Journal of the Reverend Charles Wesley*, 1:279.

¹¹⁴‘Unexampled Labours,’ *Letters of the Revd John Fletcher to leaders in the Evangelical Revival*, 319.

¹¹⁵John Tyson, *Charles Wesley on Sanctification*, 195.

¹¹⁶Tyson, *Charles Wesley on Sanctification*, 193.

¹¹⁷Cf. Laurence W. Wood, “Charles Wesley’s Influence on John Fletcher: The Role of the Holy Spirit in Sanctification,” *Proceedings of the Charles Wesley Society*, 18 (September, 2014): 41-58. Cf. ‘Unexampled Labours,’ *Letters of the Revd John Fletcher to Leaders in the Evangelical Revival*.

Charles Wesley's hymns specifically made this Pentecost connection, as expressed in these words which uses the Pentecostal phrases "is given", "seal," and "sent" in reference to the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost:

The cleaning blood t'apply,
The heavenly life display,
And wholly sanctify,
And seal us to that day,
The Holy Ghost to man is given;
Rejoice in God send down from heaven.¹¹⁸

One of the best known hymns of Charles Wesley is his Pentecost hymn, "Love Divine, All Love's Excelling," which highlights the purpose of Pentecost was to pour out perfect love in the hearts of believers "suddenly" (=instantaneously) as "that second rest." This hymn could well be called, "The Holiness Hymn of Methodism."

Love divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of heaven to earth come down,
Fix in us thy humble dwelling,
All thy faithful mercies crown;
Jesu, thou art all compassion,
Pure unbounded love thou art,
Visit us with thy salvation,
Enter every trembling heart.

Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit
Into every troubled breast,
Let us all in thee inherit,
Let us find that second rest:
Take away our power of sinning,
Alpha and Omega be,
End of faith as its beginning,
Set our hearts at liberty.

Come, Almighty to deliver,
Let us all thy life receive,
Suddenly return, and never,
Never more thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,

¹¹⁸John and Charles Wesley, "Hymn IV," *Hymns for Whitsunday* (Bristol: Felix Farley, 1746), 6. See Rattenbury, 176.

Serve thee as thy hosts above,
 Pray, and praise thee without ceasing,
 Glory in thy perfect love.

Finish then thy new creation,
 Pure and sinless let us be,
 Let us see thy great salvation,
 Perfectly restor'd in thee;
 Chang'd from glory into glory,
 Till in heaven we take our place,
 Till we cast our crowns before thee,
 Lost in wonder, love, and praise!¹¹⁹

John Fletcher's Evangelical, Anglo-Catholic Concept of "Born Again of Water and of the Spirit"

In his classic biography of John Fletcher, Patrick Streiff pointed out that "in his personal life and in his theological works Fletcher was greatly pre-occupied with the question of the outpouring of the Spirit." Streiff then noted that around 1776/77 Fletcher was working on *An Essay on the Birth of the Spirit*. Streiff observed that in this essay Fletcher "intended to demonstrate the connection between Christian perfection and the filling, or baptism, of the Spirit."¹²⁰ Fletcher noted in a letter to Mary Bosanquet that he had left his manuscript of this later sermon in London just before his second Continental trip.¹²¹ Mary Bosanquet obtained this manuscript and passed it on to Joseph Benson.¹²²

This essay has often been confused with a much earlier sermon that Fletcher had written, entitled, "The New Birth," probably written in the late 1750s or early 1760s, and it was translated by Henry Moore. This earlier sermon on the new birth was written before Fletcher had developed his soteriological doctrine of dispensations, or stages, of saving grace. Streiff believed that Fletcher's later essay on the new birth "has not been preserved." However, while I was once browsing through the Fletcher

¹¹⁹Charles Wesley, *Hymns for Those that Seek and Those that have Redemption in the Blood of Jesus Christ* (London: Straham, 1747), 11-12.

¹²⁰Patrick Streiff, *Reluctant Saint? A Theological Biography of Fletcher of Madeley*, trans. G. W. S. Knowles (London: Epworth Press, 2001), 233.

¹²¹Tyerman, *Wesley's Designated Successor* (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1883), 449-450.

¹²²Streiff, *Reluctant Saint*, 233. Cf. Tyerman, *Wesley's Designated Successor*, 447-448.

archival collection at the John Rylands Library, I discovered this essay buried in a box of other manuscripts by Fletcher. It 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." This document circulated among key leaders in Methodism, including Thomas Coke, from whom Mary Bosanquet got it. Fletcher had intended to publish it after he had broadened its theme to include other related themes as well, but his failing health and other demanding issues prevented him from finishing this task.

As Streiff rightly gathered from secondary sources, this essay on the new birth was an essay on Christian perfection. It was also consistent with Charles Wesley's theology of new birth. Fletcher said that "this very doctrine contended for in this Essay [on the New Birth]" is "that the way to attain . . . Christian perfection, is to pray . . . that we may be filled with the Holy Ghost, or that God would send his Holy Ghost and pour into hearts the most excellent gift of perfect love."¹²³

John Fletcher noted in this essay that Wesley's idea of Christian perfection was a mirror reflection of William Law's doctrine, except that Law failed to embrace the evangelical (i.e., an experiential) meaning of faith. Fletcher particularly noted that Law said that "Christ . . . open [ed] a new dispensation of God, and baptize mankind with the Holy Ghost and fire from heaven. On *the day of Pentecost* this *new dispensation* of God came forth, which on God's part was the operation of the Holy Spirit in gifts and graces upon the whole church. . . . where the love that reigns in heaven reigned, where divine love broke down all selfish fences."¹²⁴

This essay distinguished between being "born of water" and "born of the Spirit." Fletcher quoted from the Early Church Fathers, including Origen, pseudo-Macarius, and Chrysostom, to show that they taught there are "two sorts of children of God, namely those who have the Holy Spirit, according to the *ante-Pentecostal* measure of it, and those who have been endued with it according to its *Pentecostal* measure."¹²⁵

He also quoted from John Wesley's earlier view on the new birth, as well as the hymns of Charles Wesley to show that being born again through the baptism with the Spirit entailed the idea of Christian perfec-

¹²³Fletcher, *An Essay on the Doctrine of the New Birth*, *The Asbury Theological Journal*. 50.1 (Spring, 1998), 53.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*, 50.

¹²⁵*Ibid.*, 35.

tion.¹²⁶ Fletcher also cited hymns by Charles Wesley, linking being baptized by the Holy Spirit with fullness of love and being born again of the Spirit and being made pure from all sin.¹²⁷

Fletcher cited the two Anglican rites of water baptism (based on Easter signifying forgiveness of sins) and confirmation (based on Pentecost signifying sanctifying grace through the laying on of hands) as the liturgical basis for Wesley's idea of two stages of saving faith. He also cited the Anglican liturgy and sermons, especially the "Discourse on Whitsunday" by John Heylyn that was cited above.¹²⁸

Like John and Charles Wesley, John Fletcher was an "Evangelical High Churchman"¹²⁹ who honored the liturgical practices and polity of the Church of England, and he believed there was nothing new in the distinction between being born again of water and of the Spirit.¹³⁰

In his subsequent work to his *Essay on the New Birth*, which was entitled *The Portrait of St. Paul*, John Fletcher defended the link between being "born of the Spirit" and Christian perfection: "When a Christian is filled with *charity*, he is then regenerate and born of GOD. Christ is then formed in his heart, the Holy Spirit rests upon him, and he is *filled with all the fulness of God*. Eph. iii. 16, 19. He keeps the first commandment of the law, by making a full surrender of his heart to GOD, from a consciousness that he is in himself the *sovereign good*; but he chiefly loves him in the person of Christ, through whom the Father is pleased peculiarly to shine forth, as a GOD of love."¹³¹

Fletcher quoted a homily by the Early Church Father, Origen, on Matthew 8:23, 28 to show that the pattern of the apostles' faith provided an understanding of all subsequent believers. Origen noted that before the day of Pentecost the apostles were perplexed with doubt and fear because they had not yet "attained but to a small degree of strength" until "the descent of the Holy Spirit . . . filled us with full assurance." Drawing from Origen's sermon, Fletcher equated being "born of the Spirit" with

¹²⁶John Fletcher, *The Last Check*, in *The Works of the Rev. John Fletcher* (London: Richard Edwards, 1807), 6:182.

¹²⁷Fletcher, *An Essay on the Doctrine of the New Birth*, *The Asbury Theological Journal*. 50.1 (Spring, 1998), 38-39.

¹²⁸Fletcher, *The New Birth*, 54, 56.

¹²⁹George Lawton, *Shropshire Saint* (London: The Epworth Press, 1960), 28.

¹³⁰Fletcher, *An Essay on the Doctrine of the New Birth*, *The Asbury Theological Journal*. 50.1 (Spring, 1998): 35.

¹³¹"Portrait of St. Paul," in *The Works of the Rev. John Fletcher*, 9:253.

the full assurance of Pentecost.¹³² Fletcher also insisted that the dispensational distinctions, “between *two sorts of children of God*, namely those who have the Holy Spirit according to the *ante-Pentecostal* measure of it, and those who are endued with it according to its *Pentecostal measure*,” is contained in the liturgy and teaching of The Church of England.¹³³

An Evangelical “Anglo-Catholic” Interpretation of “Born of the Spirit”

Although Fletcher does not quote directly from Jeremy Taylor, his “Discourse on Confirmation” is the theological background for the Anglican distinction between water baptism and confirmation. Taylor often spoke of the gift and reception of the Spirit as a subsequent event in the life of the baptized believer: “The necessity of confirmation, or receiving the Holy Ghost after baptism, is imitation of the divine precedent of our blessed Saviour.”¹³⁴ He specifically describes the inner meaning of confirmation as signifying: “perfection,”¹³⁵ and as speaking of the sanctification of believers subsequent to their baptism with water.

Taylor said the work of the Spirit “begins in one [water baptism] and finishes and perfects in another [confirmation].”¹³⁶ Taylor makes it clear that “baptism with water is . . . something distinct from it [baptism of the Spirit].”¹³⁷ He writes: “St. John tells of another baptism which was Christ’s peculiar; ‘He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire’; that these words were literally verified upon the apostles in Pentecost . . . who besides the baptism of water distinctly had the baptism of the Spirit in confirmation.”¹³⁸ Taylor said: “Unless a man be born of water and of the Holy Spirit, he shall not enter into the kingdom of God.” These words mean: “Unless a man be baptized into Christ and confirmed by the Spirit of Christ, he cannot enter into the kingdom of Christ; that is, he is not perfectly adopted into the Christian religion, or fitted for the Christian warfare.”¹³⁹

Jeremy Taylor explained the distinction between water baptism and confirmation in a reference to Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus: “First,

¹³²Fletcher, *Works*, 9:275.

¹³³Fletcher, *The New Birth*, 53.

¹³⁴Jeremy Taylor, “A Discourse on Confirmation,” *The Whole Works of the Right Reverend Jeremy Taylor* (London: Henry G. Bohm, 1867), 5:622.

¹³⁵*Ibid.*, 5:616, 642.

¹³⁶*Ibid.*, 5:615-616.

¹³⁷*Ibid.*, 5:624.

¹³⁸*Ibid.*, 5:624.

¹³⁹*Ibid.*, 5:623.

our blessed Saviour was catechizing of Nicodemus and teaching him the first rudiments of the gospel, and like a wise master builder first lays the foundation, the doctrines of baptism and laying on of hands." He further explained: "baptism is the first mystery, that is certain; but that this of being born of the Spirit is also the next, is plain in the very order of the words."¹⁴⁰ Fletcher's intention in his *Essay on the New Birth* was to show that John and Charles Wesley's idea of Christian perfection is an evangelical interpretation of the significance of the Anglican rites of water baptism and confirmation.

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.*"¹⁴¹ Fletcher cited 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.'"¹⁴²

We noted earlier that John Wesley's temporal distinction between justifying faith and full sanctifying grace grew out of his conversations with Christian David's distinction between the justification of the disciples of Jesus before Pentecost and the full assurance of faith and cleansing from all sin experienced after Pentecost. We also noted this emphasis in John Heylyn's Pentecost sermon, which John Wesley heard on the same day that Charles Wesley experienced his evangelical conversion. We noted above that in 1741 (the same year as his debate with Zinzendorf, noted above, over the difference between the disciples before Pentecost and their entire sanctification after Pentecost), John Wesley preached a sermon on "Christian Perfection," saying that the first instance of anyone being fully sanctified was the disciples on the day of Pentecost. In his sermon "The Mystery of Iniquity" (1783), John Wesley said the weakness of the disciples before Pentecost was a "plain proof that the sanctifying

¹⁴⁰Ibid.

¹⁴¹Fletcher, *New Birth*, 54.

¹⁴²Ibid.

‘Spirit was not’ then ‘given.’”¹⁴³ This corresponds to the often used theme of the power of the Spirit to live the Christian life (cited above) in Charles Wesley’s hymn: “I want the Spirit of power within, (2 Tim. 1:7), Of love, and of a healthful mind: Of power to conquer inbred sin.”

In 1756, John Wesley said to William Law: “That we ‘must be baptized with the Holy Ghost,’ implies this and no more, that we cannot be ‘renewed in righteousness and true holiness’ any otherwise than by being over-shadowed, quickened, and animated by that blessed Spirit.”¹⁴⁴ Yet, John Wesley did not develop a consistent interpretation of the meaning of Pentecost, as John Fletcher acknowledged and which he was intending to correct with his theology of dispensations.¹⁴⁵ This inconsistency in John Wesley may also possibly explain why he left out the rite of confirmation in the *Sunday Service*. John Wesley also did not follow through with his earlier distinction between born again “in the lowest sense” and being “fully born of God” and hence his idea of Christian perfection is not linked to the liturgy of baptism/confirmation and it is thus sacramentally deficient.

The Pentecostal Addition in the United Methodist Church Liturgy of Christian Baptism

John Fletcher’s advocacy of the rite of confirmation has been ignored by the Wesleyan tradition. However, only in recent years does his defense of confirmation become particularly relevant for the Wesleyan tradition. As a clergyman in the Church of England, Fletcher promoted confirmation as a significant means of grace, believing that it was scriptural. Fletcher defended the idea that confirmation was a necessary qualification for receiving the Lord’s Supper, as taught by the Church of England. He believed that “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.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³Outler, *Sermons II*, 2:454, “The Mystery of Iniquity.”

¹⁴⁴*The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1872): 9:495, “Extract of a Letter to the Rev. Mr. Law (January 6, 1756).”

¹⁴⁵See a letter published for the first time in Tyerman, *Wesley’s Designated Successor*, 182-183.

¹⁴⁶Fletcher, *New Birth*, 60.

John Wesley also was confirmed, but apparently it was not a meaningful experience for him,¹⁴⁷ and without any explanation he deleted it from *The Sunday Service*, which he had prepared for the American Methodists. This surely would have disappointed Fletcher. If he had still been living at the time that Wesley revised *The Book of Common Prayer*, it would be interesting to speculate if Wesley would have included it, especially since Wesley normally consulted with Fletcher on matters of supreme importance to Methodism, as Wesley acknowledged in the preface to his biography of Fletcher.¹⁴⁸ Even more significant, it would have been interesting to speculate if Fletcher's suggestion to John Wesley would have been acted upon, namely, that the archbishop incorporate "the growing body of the Methodists in Great Britain, Ireland and America . . . into a general society—a daughter church of our holy mother, the Church of England," including the request that John Wesley be allowed to confirm Methodists.¹⁴⁹ In which case, the rite of confirmation would certainly have been retained for Methodism.

Interestingly enough, there is some evidence to imply that John Fletcher could have been appointed the bishop in North America if he had been willing to accept King George's offer of a preferment in the church as a reward for his tract, "A Vindication of the Rev. Mr. Wesley's 'Calm Address to Our American Colonies.'" ¹⁵⁰ If Fletcher had not died prematurely and if he really had been offered and would have accepted it, there may have been no United Methodist Church today with the likelihood that Methodism may have been integrated into the Episcopal Church of North America, and confirmation may have been linked to Wesley's doctrine of entire sanctification. This eventuality would certainly

¹⁴⁷Albert C. Outler, *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage*, ed. Thomas C. Oden and Leicester R. Longden (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 123, 147.

¹⁴⁸*Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson, 11:275, "A Short Account of the Life and Death of the Reverend John Fletcher."

¹⁴⁹Fletcher's letter to Wesley (August 1, 1775), *The Asbury Theological Journal*, 53.1 (Spring 1998): 94; 'Unexampled Labours,' *Letters of the Revd John Fletcher to leaders in the Evangelical Revival*, 324-330.

¹⁵⁰See John Fletcher, "A Vindication of the Rev Mr. Wesley's 'Calm Address to our American Colonies'" (London: R. Hawes, 1776); Telford, *Letters*, 6:197, (cf. Telford's comments). Cf. Peter Forsaith, "The Long Fletcher Incumbency," *Religion, Gender, and Industry: Exploring Church and Methodism in a Local Setting*, ed. Geordan Hammond and Peter S. Forsaith (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 220.

have pleased Charles Wesley who abhorred John Wesley's authorization of the Methodist Episcopal Church and who desired Fletcher to take over the responsibility of the Methodist movement, fearing that John Wesley had outlived his usefulness.¹⁵¹

Charles Wesley's and John Fletcher's larger definition of the new birth corresponded more closely with the new baptismal liturgy of the United Methodist Church which affirms 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 never adequately showed how his doctrine of perfection was connected sacramentally to the life of the Church.

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 mainstream 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."¹⁵²

The reason for this pneumatological addition to the sacrament of baptism 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 fifth century and was postponed for a later time when the bishop could be present. The *Apos-*

¹⁵¹A letter of Charles Wesley to Fletcher (June 21, 1784) contained and bound up in a large volume in the John Rylands Library entitled, *Letters Relating to the Wesley Family*. Here are the relevant parts of the letter: "I have always feared for myself that I should live a little too long. Now I have it for my brother also. . . . This side [of the note] is for you *both* [John and Mary Fletcher]. Trust you are prepared (after mine and my brother's departure) to gather up the wreck. Be sure the sheep will be scattered. All the beasts of the forest are watching for them. Many will find shelter among the Moravians. Many will turn to the Calvinists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and Quakers. Most, I hope, will turn to the bosom of their Mother The Church of England. . . . *And Methodism will be broken into 1000 pieces.*"

¹⁵²*Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper no. 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 4-6. Cf. Gerard Austin, *Anointing with the Spirit, The Rite of Confirmation* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1985), 84.

tolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus (dating back to 215 A.D.) was one of the reconstructed documents that had a major influence in this revision.¹⁵³ This document showed that catechumens were baptized 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 and yet inseparable. After baptism was split up into two parts in the fifth century, the Pentecost bestowal of the Spirit with the laying on of hands came to be called "Confirmation," although one Anglo-Catholic liturgist, Gregory Dix, thinks it should have been called the rite of "sealing" because the laying of hands signifies to be sealed, sanctified, and imprinted with God-likeness, which entails more than just being strengthened.¹⁵⁴ Now by universal agreement in the modern ecumenical renewal movement, baptism as Christian initiation into the church entails being born of water (Easter) and being born of the Spirit (Pentecost).

The Faith and Order Commission issued a request 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.¹⁵⁵ The bishops noted with regret that its baptismal liturgy made no mention "of the giving of the Holy Spirit in baptism, [or] confirmation."¹⁵⁶

These liturgical reforms became officially part of the liturgy of the United Methodist Church when 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

¹⁵³*The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. 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), p. xi.

¹⁵⁴Gregory Dix, *The Theology of Confirmation in Relation to Baptism* (Westminster [London]: Dacre Press, 1946), 25.

¹⁵⁵*Churches Respond to BEM: Official Response to the "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" Text*, ed. Max Thurian, 6 vols. (Geneva: W.C.C., 1986-88), 2:181-182.

¹⁵⁶*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.

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 when 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, 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.

In the case of those who were baptized as infants, the United Methodist *Book of Worship* specifies that they are subsequently to be confirmed with the laying of hands for the renewing of the Spirit when they are older. The ceremony for confirmands excludes water baptism because Jesus died and rose again only once, but the ceremony does include a repetition of Pentecost through the laying on of hands indicating the work of the Spirit to renew what transpired in their infant baptism.¹⁵⁷ So there are now two “Pentecosts” in the liturgical life of United Methodists, and in

¹⁵⁷Cf. John Rattenbury view that Pentecost cannot be repeated over against the current United Methodist Church practice. *The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley’s Hymns*, 186. Baptism and Eucharist, *Ecumenical Convergence in Celebration*, eds. Max Thurian and Geoffrey Wainwright (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1983), 65.

fact, “confirmation can and should be repeated whenever a person has made a new, deeper, clearer commitment.”¹⁵⁸

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 appropriated through one’s lifelong process of being born of the Spirit that is punctuated with many crisis moments of being filled with the Spirit.

¹⁵⁸*Follow Me: Handbook for Pastors, Parents, and Congregations*, an official resource for the United Methodist Church prepared by the General Board of Discipleship (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1993), 27.

THE NEW BIRTH IN THE EARLY WESLEY

by

Mark K. Olson

Studies on John Wesley's doctrine of the new birth usually address the post-1738 Wesley.¹ The reason is simple: in 1738 Wesley became an evangelical by adopting a Pietistic version of the Reformation's message of justification by faith alone, witnessed directly to the believer by the Spirit of Christ in an experience of assurance known among early evangelicals as the "new birth."² It was this message that informed Wesley's experience on May 24, 1738, at a religious society in Aldersgate Street, London. So, from 1738 and thereafter the message of the new birth became a staple in Wesley's evangelical preaching and a core element in early Methodist spirituality.

But what has not received sufficient attention is that Wesley was already preaching the new birth *before* 1738, during his periods at Oxford (1730–35) and Georgia (1736–1738). In this study we will explore Wesley's doctrine of the new birth during this period, identifying those sources and influences that shaped his beliefs, and attempt to map out developments in his views on the new birth leading up to 1738. One of the central lessons we will learn is that Wesley was trending towards an evangelical understanding of the new birth for several years prior to 1738. Therefore, to better understand the pivotal changes that took place in Wesley's soteriology in 1738, we first need to see how his views on the new birth developed during his Oxford period. And the place to begin is with his Anglican heritage.

¹E.g., see Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007); Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994). Henry Rack does comment on Charles Wesley's 1737 views on regeneration in *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, 3rd edition (London: Epworth Press, 2002), 143, 394.

²For one of Wesley's earliest descriptions of the new birth, see his journal (JWJ) entry for April 22, 1738 (W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, eds. *The Works of John Wesley*, vols. 18–24 [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984–Present], 18:234 [Hereafter: *Works*]). In early 1738 other terms Wesley used as synonyms for the new birth were "regeneration," "born again," and "new creature" (*Works*, 25:534).

Wesley's Anglican Context

As the son of a clergyman, the religious milieu of Wesley's upbringing was in the high church tradition of the Church of England. Both of his parents, Samuel (1662–1735) and Susanna (1669–1742), converted from Nonconformity to the Church of England during the late seventeenth-century High-Church Anglican renewal and became devout high churchmen in their convictions.³ Wesley acknowledged his High Church upbringing to the Earl of Dartmouth, "I am an High Churchman, the son of an High Churchman, bred up from my childhood in the highest notions of passive obedience and non-resistance."⁴ On another occasion Wesley explained he had been taught as a child to "love and reverence" the scriptures, the church fathers, and the Church of England, including "all her doctrines" and "Liturgy."⁵ So Wesley's earliest thoughts and impressions on the new birth came from his upbringing in the Established Church, passed on to him from his parents.

In keeping with the historic faith of the church catholic, the Church of England taught that regenerating and justifying grace is granted in the sacrament of baptism. The baptismal liturgy for infants defined the sacrament as "the mystical washing away of sin" to "sanctify with the Holy Ghost; that *he*, being delivered from thy [God's] wrath, may be received into the ark of Christ's Church."⁶ The priest would declare after the child was baptized that the "Child is regenerate and grafted into the body of Christ's Church" and has become God's "own Child by adoption."⁷ In the liturgy the terms "regeneration," "new birth," "born anew," and "born again" are used interchangeably, with the primary marks drawn from pneumatological and horticultural images (i.e., gift of the Spirit and grafting into Christ). The conditional character of baptismal grace was suggested when the priest prayed that as the baptized child is "made partaker of the death of thy Son, *he may* also be partaker of his resurrection" and

³On the late seventeenth-century High-Church revival, see Brent S. Sirota, *The Christian Monitors: The Church of England and the Age of Benevolence, 1680-1730* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 26-32.

⁴John Telford, ed. *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, 8 vols. (London: Epworth Press, 1931), 6:156.

⁵*Farther Thoughts on Separation from the Church* §1 (*Works*, 9:538).

⁶*The Book of Common Prayer*, 1662 Edition (London: Everyman's Library, 1999), 268, 270 (hereafter: BCP).

⁷BCP, 273.

"may be an inheritor of thine everlasting kingdom."⁸ The same language and themes are found in the liturgy for those of "riper years."⁹ So the baptismal liturgy of the Established Church clearly taught that the gifts of justification, new birth, adoption, and union with Christ are granted in the sacrament of baptism.

That the young Wesley was nurtured in a high church view of the baptismal liturgy is evident from his father's treatise on baptism, published three years before John's birth. In his discourse, Samuel echoed the language of the liturgy that baptism represented the "laver of regeneration" but stated in more explicit terms that the "damning Guilt of original sin is washt [sic] away" and "Remission of sins" is received by "the application of the merits of Christ's death."¹⁰ He then spelled out more specifically the conditional character of baptismal grace:

We say not that Regeneration is always completed in the Sacrament, but that it is begun in it: a Principle of Grace is infused . . . which shall never be wholly withdrawn, unless we quench God's Holy Spirit by obstinate habits of Wickedness: There are Babes as well as strong Men in Christ. A Christin's Life is progressive, as in the natural Life . . . the Renovation of the new Man is begun, that by going on it may be perfected . . . Baptism doth now save us, if we live answerable thereunto, repent, believe, and obey the Gospel.¹¹

According to Samuel, the Christian life mirrors the natural life in that life begins at birth and progresses toward adulthood. Thus, in baptism the renovation of the "new Man" begins with an infusion of regenerating and justifying grace, and then progresses toward adulthood and perfection as long as the Christian repents, believes, and obeys the gospel covenant. So, for Samuel regeneration involved both gift and process. Anthony Horneck, a contemporary of Samuel, agreed. In baptism the recipient was "set apart for God's service" having been "sanctified by having a principle of holiness infused into their souls," but this gift had to be followed up with further discovery of "the life, the fire, the activity, and

⁸BCP, 273 (emphasis mine).

⁹See BCP, 281-88.

¹⁰Samuel Wesley, *The pious communicant rightly prepar'd, or, A discourse concerning the Blessed Sacrament . . . to which is added, a short discourse of baptism* (London: Charles Harper, 1700), 189, 200-01.

¹¹Samuel Wesley, *Pious Communicant*, 205, 207.

the power . . . by the actual exercises of those graces which must make like that Savior that died for them.”¹² For High Church Anglicans like Horneck and the Wesleys, regeneration as a progressive work could be stressed over its initial gifting. When John’s mother Susanna wrote to him in 1734, she pointed out that “the great work of regeneration is not performed at once, but proceeds by slow and often imperceptible degrees.”¹³

By contending that the new birth includes both gift and process, Horneck and the Wesleys were mirroring the mainstream position of the Church of England on the new birth and its *ordo salutis* (order of salvation). According to this *ordo* the Christian life begins in baptism with an infusion of regenerating and justifying grace, progresses through life with the sanctification the believer, and culminates at the believer’s final justification and entrance into the eternal kingdom (i.e., baptism — sanctification — justification — glory). This led mainstream Anglicans to not only affirm baptismal regeneration but to emphasize in a variety of ways the progressive nature of the new birth as the believer’s sanctification. Archbishop John Tillotson (1630–1694) taught that sanctification signified the “continuance and progress” of regenerating grace, sacramentally given in baptism.¹⁴ Drawing on scripture passages like John 3:5 (“born of water and of the Spirit”) and Titus 3:5 (“washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost”), Bishop William Beveridge (1637–1708) accented the progressive work of the new birth by noting it is through the Spirit, received in baptism, that believers “mortify the deeds of the body” and “live continually in ‘newness of life’” (Rom. 6:4; 8:13).¹⁵ Speaking in terms of the believer’s final justification, Richard Lucas (1648–1715) referred to the moment when a person is “ingrafted by baptism into Christ, and receiving the Holy Ghost” is thereby given an “earnest of their justification or acceptance with God, and their future glory.”¹⁶

¹²Quoted from Scott Thomas Kisker, *Foundation for Revival: Anthony Horneck, the Religious Societies, and the Construction of an Anglican Pietism* (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, INC., 2008), 181. Kisker showed that Horneck also taught a Pietist version of a second, post-baptism infusion of grace (182).

¹³Charles Wallace, Jr. ed. *Susanna Wesley: The Complete Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 164.

¹⁴John Tillotson, *Fifteen Sermons on Various Subjects*, 2nd edition (London, 1704), 194, 225–26, 238.

¹⁵William Beveridge, *The Theological Works of William Beveridge, DD*, vol. 1 [Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1842], 443, 446.

¹⁶Richard Lucas, *Religious Perfection: Or a Third Part of the Enquiry after Happiness*, 3rd edition (London: W. Innys and R. Manby, 1735; orig. 1685), 35.

For mainstream Anglicans, the new birth encompasses the Christian's entire journey, from the initial granting of forgiveness at baptism to their final justification and entrance into the eternal kingdom. In terms of the believer's justification before God, faith and good works were not seen as meritorious, but conditional, and salvation assurance was grounded on a rational deduction of fulfilling the conditions of the gospel covenant.¹⁷ It was in reference to final justification that Anglicans claimed sanctification to precede justification. Jeffrey Chamberlain explained their rationale, "Since justification is not completed until it is determined that a person has met the conditions of faith and works, it could be said that sanctification preceded justification. That is, a person has to be made holy before his justification is complete and final."¹⁸ Therefore, in the Anglican *ordo* the twin moments of initial and final justification served as bookends to the work of regeneration.

Baptismal grace, it was believed, could also be lost through flagrant sin. We already saw that Samuel Wesley cautioned against quenching the Spirit by "obstinate habits of wickedness."¹⁹ William Beveridge concurred that a constant breach of one's baptismal vows could so grieve the Spirit that he would withdraw his saving presence.²⁰ Likewise, Jeremy Taylor (1613–1667) warned against estranging oneself from the covenant of grace by renouncing one's baptism.²¹ However, it was John Wesley's mentor, William Law (1686–1761), who raised the ante by declaring in response to the baptismal pledge that candidates renounce the world that "whenever we yield ourselves up to the Pleasures, Profits, and Honours of this Life, that we turn *Apostates*, break our Covenant with God, and go back from the express Conditions, on which we were admitted into the Communion of Christ's Church."²² With this one bold stroke Law declared that his fellow Anglicans who had

¹⁷Lucas, *Religious Perfection*, 37–38, 61; S. Wesley, *Pious Communicant*, 207.

¹⁸Jeffery S. Chamberlain, "Moralism, Justification, and the Controversy over Methodism," in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 44, no. 4 (October, 1993), 671.

¹⁹S. Wesley, *Pious Communicant*, 205.

²⁰Beveridge referred to Eph. 4:30 in his remark (*Theological Works*, vol. 1, 445).

²¹Jeremy Taylor, *Holy Living and Dying: With Prayers Containing the Whole Duty of a Christian* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007), 490.

²²William Law, *A Practical Treatise upon Christian Perfection* (Eugene: WIPF and Stock Publishers, 2001), 24, emphasis his. Note, Law quoted the liturgy right before the above quote (see, BCP, "The Ministration of Baptism to Such as are of Riper Years," 285)

what he deemed a nominal faith had lost their salvation, no matter how faithful they had remained to the sacramental life of the Church. He added that in order to be saved these members had to renew their baptismal vow of complete devotion to God. According to Law, "Christianity requires a Change of Nature, a new Life perfectly devoted to God."²³ Christianity is "not therefore any Number of moral Virtues, no partial Obedience, no Modes of Worship, no external Acts of Adoration, no articles of Faith, but a new Principle of Life, an entire Change of Temper, that makes us true Christians."²⁴ This *re*-dedication he called the "new birth," becoming a "new Creature" (referring to 2 Cor. 5:17), and the "Conversion of the Heart to God."²⁵ As we will see, Law's shadow will loom large over Wesley's doctrine of the new birth leading up to 1738 and beyond.

Wesley's Early Letters

In the extant letters there are only three specific references to the new birth, and each one reflects his Anglicanism. The first one appears in a letter to his mother Susanna in mid-June 1725 and is the earliest reference to regeneration in the Wesley corpus. Seeking his mother's counsel about what Wesley perceived was a contradiction in Jeremy Taylor's teachings on whether the sacrament of the Lord's Supper "confers on us the graces we pray for," Wesley responded:

Now surely these graces are not of so little force as that we can't perceive whether we have'em or not; and if we dwell in Christ and Christ in us, which he will not do till we are regenerate, certainly we must be sensible of it.²⁶

From this remark two points follow. The first one concerns the correlation between the new birth and the indwelling presence of Christ: to be born again is to enter into spiritual union with Christ—"we dwell in Christ and Christ in us." That Wesley would stress this point when mentioning the believer's regeneration should not surprise us given his Anglican context. As we saw, this was a core tenet in the baptism liturgy of the Church

²³Law, *Christian Perfection*, 25. In this work Law made many similar statements that accented the single intention.

²⁴Law, *Christian Perfection*, 25.

²⁵Law, *Christian Perfection*, 25-27, 35. Other synonyms Law used were "born of God" (26-27), "born again of the Spirit" (35), true Christians" (25, 34), "truly turned to God" (35), and "new life perfectly devoted to God" (25).

²⁶June 18, 1725 (*Works*, 25:169-70).

of England and was clearly taught by Anglican divines. Probably more significant for the interests of this study, Wesley affirmed that believers are conscious of this union; that grace is perceptible to those who are born again, and only to those who have experienced regeneration. This insight is crucial to understand developments in Wesley's soteriology because of the importance he later attached as an evangelical to perceptible assurance. What the above quote demonstrates is that the basic concept was already inherent in his soteriology long before 1738; that early Wesley already associated regeneration to the rebirth of the spiritual senses.

The next two references to the new birth appeared in 1734, first to Richard Morgan, Sen., and later that year to his father Samuel. In an *apologia* for Oxford Methodism, Wesley presented to Morgan a succinct definition of religion as a "constant ruling habit of the soul; a renewal of our minds in the image of God; a recovery of the divine likeness; a still-increasing conformity of heart and life to the pattern of our most holy Redeemer."²⁷ This definition was inspired from his reading of different divines in the holy living tradition, like Richard Lucas (holiness as a habit) and Thomas à Kempis (Christ as our pattern).²⁸ Towards the end of the letter Wesley offered a series of appeals regarding the importance of pursuing with diligence a holy life in light of the final judgment and eternity. Probably borrowing the phrase "new born soul" from Henry Scougal,²⁹ he then asked Morgan:

Will you complain to the ministering spirits [i.e. angels] who receive your new-born soul that you have been 'over-zealous' in the love of your Master?³⁰

He affirmed the same truth in the 1735 sermon, *The Trouble and Rest of Good Men*:

Let us view . . . the state of a Christian at his entrance into the other world . . . [he] sees the body of sin lying beneath her, and is new born into the world of spirits.³¹

²⁷Date: January 15, 1734 (*Works*, 25:369).

²⁸Lucas, *Religious Perfection*, 1-16; Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*.

²⁹*The Life of God in the Soul of Man* (London: J. Downing, 1726), 7.

³⁰*Works*, 25:370. The phrase "new-born soul" comes from Scougal's classic, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007), 36.

³¹*Works*, 3:540. In this sermon Wesley repeatedly affirmed that sin is finally vanquished at death ("Who then will deliver us from the body of this death? Death will deliver us" [*Works*, 3:534]).

By referring to the transition from this life to the next as a new birth, Wesley was expressing a core tenet in the Anglican *ordo*: only at the end of life is the new birth completed. These statements give context to Wesley's 1739 remark that during his time in Georgia he openly confessed, "I am not a Christian; I only follow after, if haply I may attain it."³² For the early Wesley, the new birth is never fully completed in this life, but remains conditional as the believer progresses in their sanctification toward perfect holiness at the end of life when eternity opens up. It was in this sense that Wesley spoke of the believer's soul becoming "new born."

The final reference to the new birth is found in a letter to his father in December 1734.³³ Samuel's health had been failing and he desired John to follow him in the ministry at Epworth. This letter represents John's *apologia* for remaining at Oxford and offers a number of insights into Wesley's early views on religion, evangelism, and the Christian life. We see, once again, the imprint of the holy living tradition on his definition of holiness as a "complex habit," and in his remarks on the single intention, self-denial, and rejection of the world.³⁴ A central motif running through much of the letter is Wesley's philosophy of evangelism. One of his main arguments for not accepting the position at Epworth was his firm belief that Oxford presented a more conducive environment for cultivating holiness in himself and in others, "If God be the sole agent in healing souls, and man only an instrument in his hand . . . [then] the more holy a man is, he [God] will make use of him the more."³⁵ A corollary of this evangelism philosophy was the expectation that true Christians will face persecution. After quoting the words of Jesus that Christ's followers will be hated because they are not of this world (John 15:19), Wesley declared, "The hated are all that are not of this world, that are born again in the knowledge and love of God."³⁶ As Wesley saw it, only those that are regenerated are on the path of renewal, having renounced the world they have "wholly, absolutely, devoted themselves to God."³⁷

Although specific references to regeneration are few in the early letters, in each instance important insights into his doctrine of the new birth

³²Letter dated March 28, 1739 (*Works*, 25:614).

³³Date: December 10, 1734 (*Works*, 25:397-409).

³⁴*Works*, 25:398-99.

³⁵*Works*, 25:403.

³⁶*Works*, 25:407.

³⁷*Works*, 25:399.

can be seen. Several points are worth noting. First, Wesley's comments suggest an Anglican *ordo* to his understanding of regeneration. As he prayed in his 1733 *Collection of Forms of Prayers*, he thanked God for "washing me in thy baptism" (an allusion to regenerating and justifying grace) and later petitioned God to "circumcise my heart, and make me a new creature" by mortifying his sin and "corrupt nature."³⁸ Second, by the mid-1730s the influence of the holy living tradition had become quite pronounced in Wesley's theology, including his doctrine of the new birth. The language of Lucas, Law, Scougal, and à Kempis show up repeatedly in his descriptions of the new birth and the holy life. Third, Wesley's understanding of regeneration was deeply informed by his belief in the perceptibility of grace, which will later inform his evangelical doctrine of assurance and the Spirit's direct witness to the believer. Each one of these points will leave an indelible mark on his doctrine of the new birth.

Wesley's Early Sermons

When we turn to the early sermons we see that from 1730 and thereafter the subject of the new birth increasingly appears in Wesley's preaching. The first reference is found in the sermon "On the Sabbath," in which he pronounced that everyone "born of a woman must be born again."³⁹ His reason was that every child of Adam is helpless to save themselves due to the debilitating effects of original sin on their moral nature. This argument would remain a staple in Wesley's preaching on the new birth.⁴⁰ Towards the end of 1730 Wesley preached his first university sermon in which he spelled out his position on humanity's creation, loss, and renewal in the image of God (*imago Dei*).⁴¹ Although the new birth is not specifically mentioned, Wesley's explication throughout the sermon presupposes the Anglican view of the progressive nature of the new birth. The path of renewal was further delineated the following year (1731) in a sermon on conversion ("The Wisdom of Winning Souls"). In keeping with his Anglican perspective, conversion is defined as a progressive

³⁸Thomas Jackson, ed. *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd edition, 14 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 11:207, 222 (Hereafter: *Works*, Jackson).

³⁹*Works*, 4:274. On the debilitating effects of Adam's sin in Wesley's early sermons, see "Death and Deliverance" §14, "One Thing Needful" I.2 (*Works*, 4:212, 354), and *The Trouble and Rest of Good Men* (*Works*, 3:533-34).

⁴⁰"The New Birth" I.2-4 (*Works*, 2:189-90).

⁴¹"The Image of God" (*Works*, 4:292-303).

work, summarized as a “deliverance from misery, and advancement in happiness;”⁴² yet his explanation of three steps in the conversion process bears the imprint of his Arminianism and of the holy living tradition. The first step involves the awakening of the sinner to their spiritual need for holiness in their salvation. The next step involves a determined commitment (“resolution”) to purify one’s heart from its “darling lusts” and to “run the race set before [them].” The final step is to “fix” the convert in their resolution, in case they relapse and their “last state should be worse than the first.”⁴³

During his Oxford period Wesley preached a number of sermons from well-known Anglican divines. One of those sermons was “On Grieving the Holy Spirit” by William Tilly (b. 1675). As many mainstream Anglicans taught, Wesley cautioned his listeners against provoking the Spirit with their “willful and presumptuous sins” so that he withdraws from them.⁴⁴ Such a person is an “unfaithful professor who has known his pardoning love”—surely a reference to baptismal grace—but now “grieves his Holy Spirit” by the “baseness” of their sins. The consequence, Wesley pointed out, is a loss of assurance regarding one’s relationship with Christ and their “title to eternal life.”⁴⁵ Regeneration is now defined as a “new nature”—a term Scougal and Law also employed—which is infused by the Spirit, and grows by degrees in “the image of Him that created us.”⁴⁶ Wesley then appealed to Romans 8:15 and the Spirit’s witness, which he now defined as an “inward testimony” of holy aspirations and sensations, giving the devoted Christian a “taste of the bliss to which he is going.”⁴⁷

⁴²“The Wisdom of Winning Souls” (*Works*, 4:308).

⁴³“The Wisdom of Winning Souls” (*Works*, 4:311-14).

⁴⁴*Works*, Jackson, 7:488.

⁴⁵*Works*, Jackson, 7:488.

⁴⁶*Works*, Jackson, 7:489, 491

⁴⁷The importance of the Spirit’s inward testimony in Wesley’s later soteriology calls for including his full statement in this sermon, “And in order that this inward testimony may be lively and permanent, it is absolutely necessary to attend carefully to the secret operation of the Holy Spirit within us; who, by infusing his holy consolations into our souls, by enlivening our drooping spirits, and giving us a quick relish of his promises, raises bright and joyous sensations in us, and gives a man, beforehand, a taste of the bliss to which he is going. In this sense, God is said, by the Apostle to the Corinthians, to have ‘sealed us, and to have given the earnest of his Spirit in our hearts’; and that earnest, not only by way of confirmation of our title to happiness, but as an actual part of that reward at present, the fullness of which we expect hereafter” (*Works*, Jackson, 7:492).

The same pneumatological understanding of the new birth was carried over into Wesley's next sermon, preached only two months later at St. Mary's Church, Oxford, on January 1, 1733. "The Circumcision of the Heart" is well-known as Wesley's first landmark sermon, but seldom has it been examined to delineate at the time his doctrine of the new birth. For the first time Wesley pronounced we are by faith "born of God." It is by faith that the believer "sees what is his calling, even to glorify God;" and "feels what is 'the exceeding greatness of his power' . . . to quicken us" that are "dead in sin . . . by his Spirit which dwelleth in us."⁴⁸ Several paragraphs later he appealed to Romans 6 to make his point:

Such a faith as this cannot fail to show evidently the power of him that inspires it, by delivering his children from the yoke of sin, and . . . by strengthening them so that they are no longer constrained to "obey sin in the desires thereof"; but instead . . . they now "yield" themselves entirely "unto God, as those that are alive from the dead."⁴⁹

Thus to be born again by faith is to be freed from the enslaving power of sin by the Spirit who "alone can quicken those who are dead unto God, [and] breathe into them the breath of Christian life."⁵⁰ Wesley then backed up his teaching by appealing to Romans 8:14—"As many as are thus led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God"—and verse 16, "None is truly 'led by the Spirit' unless that 'Spirit bear witness with his spirit, that he is a child of God.'"⁵¹

The strategic importance of "The Circumcision of the Heart" is seen in that it incorporates many of the core elements of Wesley's evangelical doctrine of the new birth. These include an emphasis on the conditionality of faith, on the Holy Spirit as its source and power, on deliverance from the power of sin as its fruit, and in his use of human breathe to explain the nature of spiritual life.⁵² However, subtle but important differences remain. The early Wesley did not yet espouse an evangelical understanding of salvation by faith alone, nor did he yet grasp the Reformation's message of present justification as the foundation for a perceptible assurance of salvation in Christ. When the sermon is read with a critical

⁴⁸"The Circumcision of the Heart" I.7 (*Works*, 1:405).

⁴⁹"The Circumcision of the Heart" I.8 (*Works*, 1:406).

⁵⁰"The Circumcision of the Heart" II.4 (*Works*, 1:411).

⁵¹"The Circumcision of the Heart" II.4-5 (*Works*, 1:411).

⁵²"The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God" I.8 (*Works*, 1:434).

eye it becomes clear that its vision of the Christian life reflects an Anglican perspective, yet infused with the motifs of the holy living tradition.⁵³ This explains why Wesley added an updated definition of faith and assurance when he published the sermon in 1748.⁵⁴

Two more sermons from his Oxford and Georgia periods reflect the maturation of Wesley's early doctrine of the new birth. In mid-1734 Wesley wrapped up another sermon that highlighted the progressive nature of the new birth. Taken from a phrase in Luke 10:42 ("one thing is needful"), Wesley explained that the great work of redemption is "the renewal of our fallen nature." Adam had been created in the image of God, with a nature that was "perfect, angelical, divine." But with his sin the human race fell and "sin hath now effaced the image of God."⁵⁵ Therefore, the "one thing now needful" is to

re-exchange the image of Satan for the image of God, bondage for freedom, sickness for health. Our one great business is to rase out of our souls the likeness of our destroyer, and to be *born again*, to be formed anew after the likeness of our Creator. It is our one concern to shake off this servile yoke and to regain our native freedom; to throw off every chain, every passion and desire that does not suit an angelical nature.⁵⁶

The new birth is to recover the image of God, the angelical nature that Adam lost when he sinned. Framed in these terms, regeneration is a progressive work that involves the entire sanctification of human nature. Drawing on therapeutic images, Wesley described fallen human nature as "distempered, as well as enslaved; the whole head is faint, and the whole heart is sick."⁵⁷ Nevertheless, Christ came that "he might heal every disease, every spiritual sickness of our nature."⁵⁸ All the "internal dispensations of God, all the influences of the Holy Spirit" are to "restore us to health, to liberty, to holiness," and to "recover his [God's] love."⁵⁹ But

⁵³E.g., the mark of humility was inspired by William Law (*Works*, 1:403 n16) and assurance was grounded on holy lifestyle (à Kempis, Law, Lucas, and Taylor).

⁵⁴See "The Circumcision of the Heart" I.7 (*Works*, 1:405).

⁵⁵"The One Thing Needful" I.2 (*Works*, 4:354).

⁵⁶"The One Thing Needful" I.5 (*Works*, 4:355, emphasis mine).

⁵⁷"The One Thing Needful" I.4 (*Works*, 4:354).

⁵⁸"The One Thing Needful" II.3 (*Works*, 4:356).

⁵⁹"The One Thing Needful" II.5 (*Works*, 4:357).

Wesley went further and added a strong appeal at the end of the sermon. Not satisfied to stress only a progressive, ongoing work of renewal, Wesley pressed his audience to make a decisive turn in their religious lives. "Let us fix our single view, our pure unmixed intention," implored Wesley, "For as while our eye is single our whole body is full of light, so, should it ever cease to be single, in that moment our whole body would be full of darkness."⁶⁰ The single intention had now become the crisis moment when regenerating, sanctifying grace flows into a person's heart and life. The analogy of the eye as the point of access for light to flood the body shows that Wesley understood the single intention as the portal for the infusion of grace.

There is no clearer statement of this development in Wesley's thought regarding the single intention than in his inaugural sermon for his Georgian mission. Titled "A Single Intention,"⁶¹ the sermon is essentially a restatement of William Law's message in his twin publications, *A Practical Treatise upon Christian Perfection* (1726) and *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (1729). At the outset Wesley called upon his listeners to "choose whether ye will serve God or not," followed with a strong reminder to "give God your whole heart, or none at all."⁶² In his exposition of the text (Matthew 6:22-23) Wesley made the point that the "intention is to the soul what the eye is to the body." Just as the body is directed by the eye, "so every power of the soul is in all its motion directed by the intention."⁶³ He then warned that if the intention has more than one end in view, spiritual darkness would engulf the person, leaving them in "ignorance, sin, and misery" till "thou fall headlong into utter darkness."⁶⁴ The salvific importance of the single intention could not be put in more stark terms. It had become for Wesley the portal for grace to illuminate the Christian's heart and mind, leading them to "improve in holiness, in the love of God and thy neighbour."

The second half of the sermon moves to application in which Wesley argued that the single intention is essential to pleasing God and growing in holiness in the everyday activities of religious devotions, business, and personal life.⁶⁵ Appealing to one of the more popular biblical texts on the

⁶⁰"The One Thing Needful" III.2 (*Works*, 4:358).

⁶¹Preached at Frederica, Georgia, in the forenoon of March 14, 1736.

⁶²"A Single Intention" §1 (*Works*, 4:372).

⁶³"A Single Intention" I.1 (*Works*, 4:373).

⁶⁴"A Single Intention" I.4 (*Works*, 4:374).

⁶⁵"A Single Intention" II.2-6 (*Works*, 4:374-75).

new birth, 2 Corinthians 5:17 (“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new”), Wesley implored his listeners to become *new creatures* in Christ:

Give him [God] your hearts; love him with all your souls; serve him with all your strength . . . Behold, all things about you are become new! Be ye likewise *new creatures*! From this hour at least let your eye be single: whatever ye speak, or think, or do, let God be your aim, and God only!⁶⁶

He then followed up by listing the benefits of the consecrated life: the Spirit’s indwelling presence will shine “more and more upon your souls unto the perfect day . . . He shall purify your hearts by faith” and “establish your souls” with a “lively . . . hope.” “He shall fill you with peace, and joy, and love!” Even that love which is “the brightness of his glory, the express image of his person!” The single intention had now become the crisis moment of the new birth for adults. It was the moment of conversion, when a person became a true Christian. This represented a significant development in Wesley’s thought and represented an adjustment in his High Church *ordo*. Whereas before Wesley accepted the Anglican *ordo* of baptism – sanctification – justification – glory, he now inserted the single intention into the *ordo*, thereby introducing the element of adult conversion in his understanding of salvation: baptism – single intention – sanctification – justification – glory

Although the primary inspiration for this modified *ordo* was Wesley’s mentor William Law, other holy-living divines, like Henry Scougal, contributed by reinforcing the point that saving grace is perceptible and transformative in the life of the true Christian. Presupposed by these divines, including Wesley, was that the vast majority of Anglicans had *lost* their baptismal regeneration through wilful sin, and that the single intention represented the renewal of their baptismal vows and therefore their regeneration. These changes in Wesley’s soteriology were significant because they paved the way for him to embrace an evangelical view of the new birth in early 1738.

Wesley’s Georgian Period

The *Journal* represents Wesley’s time in Georgia as a period of transition from Oxford to his career as a revivalist. This was equally true in

⁶⁶“A Single Intention” II.9 (*Works*, 4:376-77, emphasis mine).

regard to developments in his doctrine of the new birth. Even though he continued to preach regeneration according to his Anglican holy living convictions, during his time at Georgia Wesley found himself unexpectedly drawn to a different gospel message through his contacts with the *Unitas Fratrum*, better known as the Moravians. Still, the published journal references the new birth on only two occasions during this period. The first was in mid-April 1737 when Wesley discoursed on 1 John 5:4 (“Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world”), which was the epistle reading for that Sunday, and the second occurred in early-February 1738 when he expounded on becoming a “new creature” in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17).⁶⁷ Both of these texts suited his holy living gospel and reflected the imprint of the holy living tradition on his soteriology.⁶⁸ It should be added that during this same period Charles Wesley expressed deep interest in the subject, which can be seen in his letters,⁶⁹ sermons,⁷⁰ and journal notations.⁷¹ So, both of the Wesley brothers were proclaiming the new birth *before* they embraced the evangelical gospel in 1738.

One of Wesley’s primary motivations for going to America was to use the pristine environment of the new world to serve as a laboratory to implement his vision of a restored primitive Christianity. In a groundbreaking study on Wesley’s Georgian period, Geordan Hammond went into great detail explaining how Wesley, with his high church principles, sought to restore the practices of the primitive church with liturgical

⁶⁷*Works*, 18:179, 223. The editor’s comment that part of the sermon in early February 1738 was probably incorporated into Wesley’s 1763 sermon *On Sin in Believers* is mistaken (for editor comment see *Works*, 18:223 n12).

⁶⁸JW continued to promote Law’s gospel of holy living during this entire period (*Works*, 18:160, 25:540–41).

⁶⁹E.g., see letters dated October 19, 1735; February 5, 1736; January 2, 1738 (Kenneth G.C. Newport and Gareth Lloyd, eds. *The Letters of Charles Wesley: A Critical Edition, with Introduction and Notes*, vol. 1 [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013], 45, 51, 66).

⁷⁰Charles preached several of John’s early sermons on the new birth, including “A Single Intention” and “The One Thing Needful” (Kenneth G.C. Newport, ed. *The Sermons of Charles Wesley: A Critical Edition with Introduction and Notes* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001] 306, 360).

⁷¹Charles expressed increased interest in the subject towards the end of 1737, e.g. see September 11 and 29, October 30, November 10 and 30 (ST Kimbrough, Jr. and Kenneth G.C. Newport, eds. *The Manuscript Journal of the Reverend Charles Wesley, M.A.* vol. 1 [Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2008], 88, 90, 94, 95).

exactness. Heavily influenced by the Manchester Nonjurors, like Thomas Deacon, Wesley insisted on trine immersion for baptism and adhered to the position of Saint Cyprian (d. 258) that baptism must be received within the communion of the one true church to be valid.⁷² For Wesley, of course, the one true church meant communions like the Church of England, who maintained episcopal ordination in keeping with apostolic succession. Therefore, Wesley insisted on the rebaptism of Dissenters⁷³ and continued to adhere to his Church's teaching on baptismal regeneration and the washing away of the guilt of original sin.⁷⁴

But during this period Wesley was exposed to a radically different gospel message that grounded the new birth on a direct encounter with the crucified and risen Christ. Awakened by his fears of imminent death during his voyage to America in late 1735 and early 1736, Wesley later reminisced that it was God's "free mercy to give me twenty-six of the Moravian brethren . . . to show me a more excellent way" of attaining an assurance of righteousness before God.⁷⁵ This "more excellent way" pierced through Wesley's High Church armor when the Moravian leader August Spangenberg (1704–1792) probed, "Do you know Jesus Christ? . . . Do you know he has saved you?" In response Wesley could only muster a feeble "I do," but later added, "I fear they were vain words."⁷⁶ With the seed planted Wesley perused the pietistic classic *True Christianity* by Johann Arndt (1555–1621) that March. In this work Arndt presents the new birth as an inward work of the Spirit whereby a person changes from a "child of wrath and damnation" to a "child of grace and salvation."⁷⁷ The nature of the change is further explained as the renewal and enlightenment of "all the powers of the soul" including the "understand-

⁷²Geordan Hammond, *John Wesley in America: Restoring Primitive Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 70, 112. See Wesley's comments on baptism and his belief in the power of sacramental grace in his journal entry on March 21, 1736 (*Works*, 18:150).

⁷³Hammond, *John Wesley in America*, 70–71.

⁷⁴Geordan Hammond, *John Wesley in America: Restoring Primitive Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 73. On Wesley's later views on baptismal regeneration, see his 1756 treatise on baptism, which is an excerpt of his father's tract on the subject (*Works*, Jackson, 10:188).

⁷⁵JWJ, May 24, 1738 (*Works*, 18:246).

⁷⁶JWJ, February 7, 1736 (*Works*, 18:146).

⁷⁷Johann Arndt, *Of True Christianity*, 2 vols. (London: D. Brown, 1712), 1:24, 26.

ing, will, and affections,” so that the person becomes “sanctified in Christ” and a “new creature.”⁷⁸ Even more influential with Wesley was the Reformed work *The Memoirs of the Life of the Reverend Mr. Thomas Halyburton* (1714), which Wesley devoured over a two week period in early January 1737 and shared with his brother Charles and friends upon his return to England in 1738. In this systematic analysis of evangelical conversion, Halyburton presented his pilgrimage as a series of stages. Beginning with the natural state when he was a child, Halyburton went into great detail describing his awakening under the law and the moment when he finally broke through to evangelical faith in Christ under the gospel.⁷⁹ As would Wesley later describe in his testimony at Aldersgate, Halyburton told of the assurance he received in regard to his justification before God and how he had been set free from the “power of sin,” giving him a newfound sense of peace.⁸⁰ “Thus,” Halyburton wrote, “all things were in some measure made new.”⁸¹

Halyburton’s testimony resonated with Wesley in his search to find a faith that would give him an “assurance of acceptance with God.”⁸² Upon his return voyage to England Wesley found the time to reflect on his spiritual state in a series of confessions regarding his unbelief and pride, and concerning his need for conversion:

I went to America to convert the Indians; but Oh! Who shall convert me? Who, what is he that will deliver me from this evil heart of unbelief? I have a fair summer religion.⁸³

I want that faith which none can have without knowing that he hath it (though many imagine they have it who have it not). For whosoever hath it is “freed from sin” . . . He is freed from fear . . . And he is freed from doubt . . . which [the] “Spirit itself beareth witness with his spirit, that he is a child of God.”⁸⁴

John Wesley was now open to receive a different gospel, one that’s grounded the new birth on faith in Christ crucified, with the Spirit wit-

⁷⁸Arndt, *True Christianity*, 26.

⁷⁹Joel R. Beeke, ed. *Memoirs of the Rev. Thomas Halyburton* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 1996), Parts 1-3.

⁸⁰Beeke, *Thomas Halyburton*, 96, 109.

⁸¹Beeke, *Thomas Halyburton*, 112.

⁸²§6 (*Works*, 18:245).

⁸³JWJ, January 24, 1738 (*Works*, 18:211).

⁸⁴JWJ, February 1, 1738 (*Works*, 18:216).

nessing to his acceptance as a child of God. This became the “new gospel”⁸⁵ that informed his experience of assurance at Aldersgate and it was this gospel that he proclaimed for the next sixty-three years as an evangelical field preacher.

Conclusion

In this study we have traversed through a large amount of material in order to ascertain Wesley’s doctrine of the new birth and its development from 1725 to 1738. The salient points of his doctrine can now be stated.

First and foremost, we learned that the early Wesley was thoroughly Anglican in his sentiments on the new birth. Following in the steps of his parents’ high churchmanship, the early Wesley consistently maintained during his Oxford and Georgian periods that regeneration begins in the sacrament of baptism, and in keeping with the tradition of the Church of England he administered it to infants and small children. Wesley would continue to teach baptismal regeneration and practice infant baptism throughout the remainder of his life. This is evident from his 1756 tract on baptism (which was an abridgment of his father Samuel’s discourse on the subject).⁸⁶ So even though he became an evangelical in 1738, Wesley remained a high churchman throughout his life (as did Charles). This fact is often lost by contemporary evangelicals who have not studied his life in sufficient detail.

Moreover, the early Wesley adhered to his Church’s teachings that the new birth was progressive in nature and only completed (perfected) at death, when the faithful saint transitions into the presence of Christ. Like other Anglicans of the era, when commenting on the subject Wesley usually focused more on the progressive nature of the new birth over its initial gifting in baptism. We saw above that this insight into his new birth doctrine gives context to his later remarks that during his time in Georgia he did not yet consider himself a Christian.⁸⁷ In truth, the mainstream Anglican viewpoint of the new birth put the accent on the end of life, when the work of renewal was complete and the believer fully sanctified. What many students of Wesley do not realize is that he continued to teach

⁸⁵JWJ, May 24, 1738, §12 (*Works*, 18:248).

⁸⁶*Works*, Jackson, 10:188. See note 10 above.

⁸⁷See note 32 above.

the progressive view up till the 1750s when he began to formally distinguish the new birth from the progressive work of sanctification.⁸⁸

We further saw that in regard to his views on regeneration the early Wesley came increasingly under the influence of the Anglican holy living tradition in the 1730s. This led him to modify his views by putting more of an emphasis on the single intention as the crisis moment of new birth. His primary source for this adjustment was William Law, with Richard Lucas and Henry Scougal making important contributions. What was significant about this new soteriological emphasis on the single intention was that it led Wesley to modify the standard Anglican *ordo salutis*, thus preparing him for the fundamental changes that would take place in 1738. These developments can be plotted for easy reference. Whereas from his childhood up to about 1730 Wesley held to the standard Anglican *ordo* of baptism – sanctification – justification – glory, from 1730 to 1738 he adjusted this by incorporating the single intention as the crisis moment of adult new birth: baptism – single intention – sanctification – justification – glory. As we saw above, the reason for making this adjustment was the firm belief that most, if not all, baptized Anglicans had forfeited their salvation by reneging on their baptismal vows to live a life of full devotion to God. This would later become a core premise in Wesley's evangelical message, evident from his own conversion testimony in the *Journal* account on May 24, 1738.⁸⁹ In 1738 Wesley embraced the evangelical message of new birth by justifying faith in Christ, and this led to the gift of present justification replacing the single intention as the crisis moment of evangelical new birth. So that from 1738 till his death Wesley maintained the basic *ordo* of baptism – present justification – sanctification – final justification – glory.

Two lessons stand out at this point. First, even as an evangelical Wesley continued to maintain a modified Anglican *ordo* throughout his life;

⁸⁸On this point see my book *John Wesley's Theology of Christian Perfection: Developments in Doctrine & Theological System* (Fenwick: Truth In Heart, 2007), 429-36. JW formally distinguished the new birth from progressive sanctification in the 1759 sermon, *The New Birth* IV.3 (*Works*, 2:198). See Wesley's comments in his treatise on original sin (*Works*, 12:300). Cf. Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), 215-16.

⁸⁹"I believe, till I was about ten years old I had not sinned away that 'washing of the Holy Ghost' which was given me in baptism" (*Works*, 18:242-43). Confirming evidence can be seen in Wesley's 1738 tract *The Doctrine of Salvation, Faith and Good Works* I.2 (*Works*, 12:32).

that is, Wesley's soteriology continued to be informed by his deeply held Anglican beliefs. Second, as an evangelical Wesley never did reverse the order of justification and sanctification as is commonly believed. Instead, like other mainstream Anglicans Wesley continued to affirm the doctrine of final justification preceded by a progressive work of sanctification, but as an evangelical he inserted into his *ordo* another crisis moment of justification prior to the work of sanctification. This meant that Wesley's evangelical *ordo* recognized two moments of justification, one present and one future, with the new birth associated to the first gift of righteousness (present justification).

Our study also clarified in a great degree what the new birth signified to the early Wesley. Several of his statements we have already looked at reveal what the new birth meant to him:

"We dwell in Christ and Christ in us"⁹⁰

"New nature"⁹¹

"Quickens us . . . by his Spirit which dwelleth in us"⁹²

"Breathe in them the breath of Christian life"⁹³

"Formed anew after the likeness of our Creator"⁹⁴

"New creatures"⁹⁵

"Single eye . . . singleness of intention"⁹⁶

These statements suggest that for the early Wesley the new birth represented a fundamental change within a person's dispositional proclivity (i.e., new nature), producing a series of alterations in the inner and outer life: an awareness of personal union or connection with Christ, a new-found mindfulness and sensitivity toward God, a new spirit animating the mind and heart, a bubbling up from deep within of holy aspirations and longings after God, a reinvigorated focus in one's devotion. Such a rich repository of terms surely reflects the depth of meaning that the early Wesley attached to the new birth, and confirms that much of Wesley's theology of regeneration was already formed long before the changes in 1738.

⁹⁰See note 26 above.

⁹¹See note 46 above.

⁹²See note 48 above.

⁹³See note 52 above.

⁹⁴See note 56 above.

⁹⁵See note 66 above.

⁹⁶"A Single Intention" II.2, 3 (*Works*, 4:374). See notes 61, 66 above.

In the spring of 1738 Wesley became an evangelical and his doctrine of the new birth evolved once more. Regeneration now became linked to the Reformation's message of justification by faith alone, conjoined with a Pietist emphasis on the new birth as a gift of free grace. Faith in Christ replaced the single intention as the primary condition for the new birth.⁹⁷ While he continued to teach until the 1750s a progressive view of regeneration, his core belief that the new birth is received in a salvific moment of perceptible assurance witnessed directly by the Holy Spirit became a central tenet in his message to the masses.⁹⁸ And, over time this became the legacy of Wesley's doctrine of the new birth within Methodism and beyond.⁹⁹

⁹⁷The other condition Wesley stressed was repentance (e.g., *Salvation by Faith* III.4 [Works, 1:126-27]). By 1739 the single intention became associated with his new teaching on Christian perfection as a second, post-justification blessing (*Hymns and Sacred Poems*, 1740, §11 [Works, 13:48]).

⁹⁸Although Wesley began by 1747 to distinguish between justifying faith and perceptible assurance (letter to Charles Wesley, July 31, 1747 [Works, 26:254-55]), his later sermons confirm that he continued to hold that the new birth is conjoined to the gift of perceptible assurance, meaning the direct and indirect testimonies of the Spirit (e.g., "The Witness of the Spirit, II," [Works, 1:285-98]; *On the Discoveries of Faith*, §14 [Works, 4:35-36]).

⁹⁹On this point, see Mark K. Olson, "Exegeting Aldersgate: John Wesley's Interpretation of 24 May 1738." PhD Thesis (University of Manchester, 2015), 214-29.

WESLEY'S DOCTRINAL DISTINCTIONS IN DEVELOPING THE FAITH THAT MARKS THE NEW BIRTH

by

Natalya Cherry

“‘Now faith is the evidence of things not seen.’ Heb. 11:1 (sic). Many times have I thought, many times have I spoke, many times have I wrote upon these words; and yet there appears to be a depth in them which I am in no wise able to fathom.”¹ Thus begins the final sermon John Wesley preached and printed, seven weeks before his death in his 88th year. The sentence encapsulates a lifelong development of the concept of faith as he practiced, preached, adjusted, preached, practiced, adjusted, and preached it. His important developments over the course of nearly seventy years arose from a merciful concern for too high a standard of faith leading people (including himself) to despair and the need to disentangle faith from assurance and justification from sanctification. This disentangling leads logically to his 1760 assessment of the doctrine of justification and the doctrine of the new birth as “properly termed fundamental.” Faith is the first mark of the fundamentally Wesleyan doctrine of the new birth, so an understanding of Wesley’s lifelong development of faith is crucial to understanding the enduring legacy and possible course corrections necessary in today’s understanding of this doctrine.

By looking at John Wesley’s treatment of faith in the canonical sermons and in two later, extra-canonical sermons, against the backdrop of his life, letters, and journals, this paper traces his development of how faith operates in the life of the believer, including in himself. In light of what Rex Matthews has identified as Wesley’s three “temporal shifts” between three distinct conceptions of faith,² we focus specifically on

¹John Wesley, “Sermon 122, ‘On Faith’” 17 January 1791 in *The Sermons of John Wesley* of the Wesley Center Online, <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-122-on-faith/> accessed March 16, 2015. Cited hereinafter parenthetically as (Sermon 122.x).

²Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology*. (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 127.

seven specimens: “The Circumcision of the Heart” (1 January 1733), “Salvation by Faith” (7 or 11 June 1738),³ “Justification by Faith” (6 October 1739 or 1746), “Scriptural Christianity” (1744), “The Marks of the New Birth” (1741 or 1748), and finally “On Faith” on Hebrews 11:6 (9 April 1788) and “On Faith” on Hebrews 11:1 (17 January 1791).

The shifts as Matthews identifies them, together with nuances provided by Randy Maddox, Richard Heitzenrater, and William Abraham enable us to see in the canonical sermons these different concepts of faith in operation, coming to full maturity in his final sermons “On Faith.” Wesley’s first, earliest concept of faith is merely “*assent to truth claims*” with little attention to the operation of faith in the life of the believer. Then around Wesley’s Aldersgate experience, it shifts to “*trust in God’s love*,” which Maddox identifies as “central to his deeper appropriation of the theme of justification by faith in 1738.”⁴ By the mid-1740s, Wesley has arrived at the most mature of the three concepts of faith, “*spiritual experience of God’s love*,” and a notable shift away from language of “assurance” toward “evidence,” which is upheld by Abraham’s epistemological insights.⁵ While this paper’s organizational flow is along the lines of these three concepts and their shifts, it is heavily nuanced by Heitzenrater’s insights into the influence of the Moravians on Wesley, his struggle with this influence, and into the effects of Wesley’s hearers on Wesley, particularly in the open air.⁶

Earliest Concept of Faith: Assent and Little More

Faith in Wesley’s young adulthood was “primarily . . . assent to the truth of a proposition based on its rational credibility.”⁷ Wesley’s parents

³Timothy L. Smith and Albert C. Outler frequently differ on the dates of preaching/publication for Wesley’s sermons. Whenever there is disagreement, Smith’s date is listed first, followed by Outler’s.

⁴Maddox, 127.

⁵William J. Abraham sees three sources of Wesley’s confidence and boldness in claims to know God surrounding his Aldersgate experience: promises of God fulfilled, experience of God that involves personal awareness of divine forgiveness/pardon (the one Wesley addressed most), and power of God in human lives (*Aldersgate and Athens: John Wesley and the Foundations of Christian Belief* [Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010], 5-6).

⁶Richard Heitzenrater, “Great Expectations: Aldersgate and the Evidences of Genuine Christianity” in Heitzenrater, *Mirror and Memory, Reflections on Early Methodism*. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), 106-149.

⁷Maddox, 124.

attempted at this point to persuade him to avoid what they perceived to be deistic devotion to rational credibility, which to them amounted to subordinating divine revelation to it.⁸ Nevertheless, Abraham perceives it as Wesley's peculiar empiricism, rather than cold rationalism, and potential for his faith to develop beyond assent.⁹ A June 1725 letter from John to his mother, Susannah, shows his hope that assurance is possible, saying, "If we can never have any certainty of our being in a state of salvation, good reason it is that every moment should be spent, not in joy, but fear and trembling."¹⁰

How prescient those words, as Wesley will struggle with lack of joy over the next decade, even after his Aldersgate experience, being more troubled than assured by the self-examination his mother urged.¹¹ He finds little assurance from the counsel he offers a friend in 1731, which is to rely upon the "typical Anglican response" to matters of faith and doubt that sincerity is sufficient.¹²

By the late 1720s and early 1730s, Wesley is convinced that inward holiness will lead to total happiness, which is reflected in his 1733 sermon on "The Circumcision of the Heart." In it, Wesley describes "circumcision of the heart" by adding "humility" to the theological virtues of "faith, hope, and charity."¹³ Faith in this sermon already means more than mere assent but not yet the trust or spiritual experience of God's love that it will come to be in Wesley's later understanding (at which point he will add it back into this sermon!¹⁴).

A foreshadowing of future understandings of faith is found in this sermon, such as in the following quotes: "faith which is not merely an

⁸Maddox, 125.

⁹Abraham, 61.

¹⁰"Letter from John Wesley to Susannah Wesley" 18 June 1725, quoted in Heitzenrater, 110 (*Works*, 25:169-70).

¹¹Heitzenrater, 110.

¹²*Ibid.*, 114.

¹³John Wesley, "Sermon 13, 'Circumcision of the Heart'" 1 January 1733 in *Sermons on Several Occasions*, ed. William J. Abraham and Heather M. Oglevie. (Dallas: Highland Loch Press, 2013), 110. Throughout this paper, quotations from and references to canonical sermons are from this edition, which includes updated language. Parenthetical references will follow the format established in footnote 1 above.

¹⁴According to Wesley's own editorial notation to 13.I.7, Heitzenrater comments that more of the sermon than Wesley let on may be later interpolations (Heitzenrater, 244 n. 47).

unshaken assent to all that God has revealed in Scripture” (13.I.7) and “such a faith as this (which) cannot fail to produce evidence of the power of Him who inspires it . . . (such that) . . . they now ‘give themselves’ entirely ‘over to God as those that were dead but now are alive’” (13.I.8). This language of “evidence” will become much richer later on in his preaching life. For now, his conclusion includes more language from Hebrews 11:1, “Another truth . . . is that no one shall obtain the honor that comes from God unless his heart is circumcised by faith; namely the ‘faith which is from God’: . . . not unless . . . he ‘lives and walks by faith; directs each step, as ‘seeking Him who is invisible,’” drawing on Hebrews 11:27 (13.II.2).

Throughout the mid- and late-1730s, Wesley’s understanding of faith as *trust* in God’s love begins to emerge. Maddox attributes seeds of the shift to Wesley’s father, Samuel, who on his deathbed insists on the epistemological proof of the Holy Spirit’s inward witness, which puzzles John at the time.¹⁵ On Wesley’s ship aboard with the Moravians, he writes sermons that gives increasing attention to the Holy Spirit.¹⁶ Once in Georgia, he is reminded by his father’s emphasis on the Spirit’s witness as he reads Macarius and other Eastern writers.¹⁷ Meanwhile, German Moravian August Spangenberg pressures Wesley to attend to this assurance—or lack thereof—in himself, and Wesley finds himself to have faith, just not “enough” faith.¹⁸

Upon his miserable return from his failed mission in Georgia, while his fellow Methodists assure him that his doubts and fear of death at sea do not signify a lack of faith, English Moravian Peter Böhler is more than happy to declare Wesley faithless and to advance what Wesley unfortunately will consider “a new gospel.”¹⁹ By March 1738, thanks to Böhler, Wesley expects, hopes, and prays for, in Heitzenrater’s words, “an experience of faith, inevitably attended by an assurance of pardon, which would necessarily result in freedom from sin, doubt, and fear, and be accompanied by a full measure of peace, joy, and confidence—all this in a moment. . . .”²⁰ What appears to be that “moment,” which is an attendant

¹⁵Maddox, 125.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸Heitzenrater, 120.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 120-1.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 122.

shift in Wesley's concept of faith, becomes evident in his preaching on 24 May 1738.

Transitional Concept of Faith: Trust in God's Love

The definition of faith that Wesley offers in the immediate wake of his Aldersgate experience is found in "Salvation by Faith," preached in June 1738. He now expands upon the faith previously described in "Circumcision of the Heart" as "not merely an unshaken assent":

Christian faith is then, not only an assent to the whole gospel of Christ, but . . . a *trust* in the merits of his life, death, and resurrection; . . . a definite *uniting with him, and cleaving to him*, as our "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption," or, in one word, our salvation. (1.I.5, bold mine)

He newly defines faith as trust in Christ's meritorious, atoning sacrifice for sin. Wesley attributes his freedom to Böhler's promised assurance that immediately comes with faith. The language of "uniting with" and "cleaving to" is worthy of the preaching of Augustine, who urged believers not merely to believe that Jesus is Lord, nor to believe that what Jesus says is true, but to "believe into" Christ in such a way that this faith causes the believer to "be incorporated in his (Christ's) members."²¹

There remains, however, room for the shift that is yet to come: While the "love of God is shed abroad in their hearts, through the Holy Spirit, which is given unto them" who are saved through this faith from sin and fear, and "whoever believes is born of God," such that "it is then God that works in us" (1.II.4, II.2, II.5, III.3), the *spiritual experience* of God's love still appears to be undefined, if not lacking entirely.

In reality, Wesley's misgivings about what he has received on Aldersgate Street arise almost immediately after the event. He feels himself, by comparison to Böhler each time they meet, to be devoid of the love of God and absent the promised joy and peace in believing.²² One thing of

²¹Augustine and Edmund Hill, trans. *Homilies on the Gospel of John: 1-40* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2009), 493. I translate the phrase "believe into" in order to emphasize the uniqueness of the construction of this phrase, *credere in* + accusative (literally "to believe into," as the accusative case that governs the translation of "in" as "into"), peculiar to Christian literature. Augustine takes pains to illustrate its unusual construction and implications here in *Sermo CXLIV* in a way that is then systematized by Bede and Lombard.

²²Heitzenrater, 124.

which he remains certain, however, is that he still has at least a degree of faith.²³

Noting that in the “testimony of Scripture: 1 Corinthians 3 speaks of ‘babes in Christ,’” Wesley seeks the counsel in Germany of “those holy men (sic) who were themselves living witnesses of the full power of faith and yet able to bear with those that are weak.”²⁴ Wesley is delighted to discover that these Moravians are not of one mind with Peter Böhler and the English Moravians. The head of their community, Nikolaus von Zinzendorf, allows assurance to be separate from justification, contending that the believer *may* have evidence of peace (note the subjunctive, not indicative, mood), but joy often is lacking.²⁵ After interviewing individuals about their experiences and hearing German Moravian Christian David preach about those who have “weak faith” of justification but not yet the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, Wesley can begin to address more precisely the concept of “justification.”

Continuing to preach publicly immediately following his post-Aldersgate, “salvation in a moment” and Böhlerian understanding of simultaneous faith and assurance, Wesley privately works out his new-found understanding of degrees of faith and distinctions among doctrines.²⁶ Transitional effects are detectable if Timothy L. Smith is correct in the dating of canonical sermon “Justification by Faith” in October of 1739, rather than Outler’s date of 1746. Coming as it would at the end of a year of serious self-examination and less than a year before Wesley’s official break with the English Moravians, the 1739 date might enable us to see “Justification by Faith” as a transitional sermon from this period toward the third/final shift in his concept of faith.

Upon returning to England from Germany in Autumn 1738, Wesley admits his lack of love, joy, and peace in October 1738 journal entries, but declares, “I nevertheless trust that I have a measure of faith, and am ‘accepted in the Beloved’; I trust . . . that I am ‘reconciled to God’ through his Son.”²⁷ He vacillates for the rest of the year between solace from sacra-

²³Maddox, 126.

²⁴Heitzenrater, 124.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 124-5.

²⁶Heitzenrater, 126. cf Maddox, 126. Maddox is clear that Wesley was not being duplicitous but just following the advice of Böhler to “Preach faith till you have it, and then, because you have it, you will preach it all the more,” until he had solid evidence that such preaching was harmful.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 128.

ments, while finding in the scriptures assurance against his doubts, and being bedeviled by increasing quietism and criticism from English Moravian friends about the necessity of full assurance.²⁸

Thus the German Moravians' distinctions, which he discovered during his visit to them, become increasingly crucial for Wesley. Hesitantly at first, but with increasing determination throughout early 1739, he begins to distinguish between faith and justification from assurance, and the beginning of sanctification from its fullness.²⁹ Heitzenrater notes an increasing clash between what is essentially a Lutheran view of faith that conflated justification and sanctification and Wesley's Anglican theological sensibilities, resurrected for him by his recent rediscovery of the Anglican *Homilies* on salvation, faith, and good works.³⁰ Heitzenrater says, "The English Moravians looked for marks of salvation that Wesley would more naturally understand (within his own tradition) as evidence of sanctification."³¹

If "Justification by Faith" indeed dates from 1739, then both Wesley's plain distinctions in response to the question "What is 'justification?'" (5.II.1) and his bold retort to opponents on the matter of "Who is justified?" (5.III.1) reflect his working out of this contrast in preparation for an impending break with the Moravians. Throughout part II of the sermon, Wesley is emphatic that nothing in the scriptures expands the definition of justification to include sanctification. "The one (justification) speaks of what God does for us through his Son; the other what he works in us by his Spirit. Although (rarely) 'justified' . . . (is) used in so wide a sense as to include 'sanctification,'" he says, "in general use they are sufficiently distinguished from each other both by St. Paul and the other inspired writers" (5.II.1).

Having defined justification simply and only as "pardon, the forgiveness of sins" (5.II.5), he also levels a rebuke to those who require sanctification to precede justification (5.III.1-2), likely provoked by Moravians' refusal to let him commune and their quietism.³² Wesley, who has come to understand faith as trusting in God's loving grace, is not going to let stand unopposed theological positions that threaten to cut people off

²⁸Ibid., 129-30.

²⁹Ibid., 125, 130-131.

³⁰Ibid., 130.

³¹Heitzenrater, 126.

³²Ibid., 124.

from the means of grace through which they might come to enjoy the spiritual experience of God's love.

Fully Developed Concept of Faith: Spiritual Experience of God's Love

Wesley's separation of justification from sanctification and assurance from both faith and justification prepare the way not only for his Summer 1740 complete break from the Moravians but also for the third shift in his concept of faith. Precipitating the break is his coming to understand the Holy Spirit to be absolutely central to faith. One other factor in his third and final conceptual shift is simply his seeing the results of his preaching on his hearers, particularly as he comes to embrace outdoor preaching.³³

The first factor, coming to see the Holy Spirit as central, is evident in "Scriptural Christianity," a canonical sermon from the Summer of 1744. Here he emphasizes the "ordinary fruits" of the Spirit over and against the "extraordinary gifts" in consideration of the filling with the Holy Spirit that Acts 4:31 records (4.0.5). "The mind which was in Christ" is seen as being given by the Holy Spirit (4.0.4), who is further charged with filling Christ's followers with the fruits of the Spirit as enumerated in Galatians, as well as "to endue them with faith," enable them to overcome sinful desires, and "to 'walk as Christ also walked,' in 'the work of faith, in the patience of hope, and in the labour of love' (1 Thess. 1:3)."³⁴

Wesley continues to describe an indwelling or a spiritual experience of God's love at the molecular level, a cell-change of sorts. Hebrews 11:1 and Romans 8:16 join a host of other scriptural references to describe faith as the "the operation of God, which was the very substance, or subsistence, of things hoped for (Heb. 11:1), the demonstrative evidence of invisible things" which involves reception of the Spirit of adoption (4.I.1). Furthermore, "This, then, was the very essence of this faith, a divine *elenchos* (*evidence* or *conviction*) of the love of God the Father, through the Son of his love, to him a sinner, now accepted in the Beloved" (4.I.2). He affirms the separation of faith from assurance, by which a child of God can be justified without yet being sanctified—which is the Holy Spirit's work to do.

In "this new period of (his) life," as he describes his April 1739 entrance into field preaching, he has seen his listeners' dispositions changed before his eyes as they gather by the thousands to hear his words,

³³Heitzenrater, 132.

³⁴Ibid.

which were not known to be expressed with any particularly stylistic flair.³⁵ Having so struggled himself, Wesley surely counts as evidence of a major transformation that, “during his sermon at the Bowling Green on ‘Free Grace,’ ‘one who had long continued in sin . . . received a full, clear sense of His pardoning love and power to sin no more.’ ”³⁶

Such changed dispositions may be what inspire him to incorporate the language of “disposition” more directly in pressing his definition of faith the farthest he has yet in canonical sermon, such as in “The Marks of the New Birth.”³⁷ Offering “faith” as the first mark of the new birth, he defines faith familiarly as “not a bare assent to the proposition ‘Jesus is the Christ;’ nor indeed to all the propositions in our creed, or in the Old and New Testaments” (14.I.2). He moves quickly on to proclaim, “The true, living Christian faith, which whoever has, he is born of God, is not only . . . an act of the understanding, but a disposition which God has formed in his heart; a ‘sure trust and confidence in God that, through the merits of Christ, his sins are forgiven and he is reconciled to the favour of God’ ” (14.I.3).

He describes, as he himself has experienced, the freedom from the power of sin that results. He goes on to describe other fruits, but it is clear that peace and happiness in God (14.I.7) flow from, rather than are immediately included with faith. Other marks of the new birth, such as hope and love, also come *after* faith. Characteristic of Wesley’s shift to the third and final concept of faith is this possibility for fruits to develop and grow *from* this spiritual experience of God’s love, *over time*, leaving room for those who do not yet exhibit these fruits nevertheless to be true Christians who have a degree of faith. He prays for all his hearers to receive “that Spirit of adoption and cry out, ‘Abba, Father!’ ” (14.IV.5).

Heitzenrater contends, “The story of Wesley’s quest for assurance takes an unexpected turn—it becomes less singularly personal as he begins to sense the work of the Holy Spirit in the midst of the people. . . .”³⁸ His own faith struggles are a helpful element in his recognizing the surprising

³⁵Heitzenrater, 132, 163.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 133.

³⁷The widest disparity in dates between Smith and Outler occurs here, as Smith dates the sermon to 3 April 1741 and Outler to 1748. Either date is long enough after his break with the Moravians and his move out-of-doors to preach with large crowd response for him to be encouraged in further development of his concept of faith.

³⁸Heitzenrater, 133.

response as the work of the Holy Spirit. His sense of imperfection likely hastened a humble willingness to attribute the amazing responses of his own hearers, once checked against the Law and the Testimony, to the Holy Spirit, as well.

Is this bolstering what Böhler expected with his “preach faith till you have it” advice? That the hearers’ response would inspire Wesley’s own faith? The climax of “Scriptural Christianity,” calls his hearers to envision a Christian world, starting with the faith that is in each person receptively “filled with the Holy Spirit,” the only true “scriptural Christianity” (Sermon 4.IV.11). With this filling facilitating the spiritual experience of God’s love, Wesley has now developed a concept of faith that can withstand or coexist with doubts and fears. In short, he is doing for his hearers what both the Moravians and the Church had failed to do for him, though at least he had been able to rely on the Anglican *Homilies* to get his resistant reflections started.

Conclusion: Beyond the Canonical Sermons

When first preaching these canonical sermons, Wesley had over half his life and ministry left before him. What became of his concept of faith beyond his shifts from faith as assent to truth claims to faith as trust in God’s love, and finally to faith as spiritual experience of God’s love? Maddox considers the last to have been fully developed by the mid-1740s, from which point it goes on to dominate Wesley’s later writings. This claim squares with Abraham’s identification of the epistemological source of “faith and personal experience of God” as the one that Wesley unpacked most explicitly, frequently, and enthusiastically.³⁹

Maddox goes on to explain that Matthews’s most important point is that this third concept becomes the foundational, “objective,” i.e., non-self-generated, ground of the other two human actions of assent and trust.⁴⁰ The development across the canonical sermons here considered, which never eliminate assent or trust but subordinate them to the experience of God’s love by indwelling of the Holy Spirit as divine evidence of the unseen, bears out this claim.

I agree with Maddox that it is no accident that this shift coincides with Wesley’s moves to separate assurance out as a free-standing possibility after—not a Böhlerian essential requirement to—justification. I also

³⁹Abraham, 24.

⁴⁰Maddox, 127.

notice across the trajectory of the sermons here considered that Wesley seems increasingly hesitant to use the word “assurance,” preferring instead “evidence.”⁴¹ Wesley made explicit his motivation of not wanting his hearers to abandon faith for lack of instant assurance in a 1747 letter to Charles.⁴² It is not that he does not still expect assurance to come, but that he no longer considers it *essential* to *justifying* faith.

For the rest of his life, Wesley will publicly encourage those despairing of a lack of full assurance as he once did.⁴³ He responds consistently by distinguishing between the faith of a servant (sufficient for salvation in its own right) and what that faith can develop into, the faith of a child of God.⁴⁴ He even adds clarifying footnotes to earlier publications, emphasizing positive aspects of nascent faith. For example, in a later edition of the 1733 sermon, “The Circumcision of the Heart,” he expands the statement that faith is more than consent with language of “the revelation of Christ in our hearts; a divine evidence or conviction of his love, his free, unmerited love to me a sinner; a sure confidence in his pardoning mercy created in us by the Holy Spirit . . .” (13.I.7). In these moves, Wesley does not reject assurance. On the contrary, he assures his Anglican colleague in 1788, “We preach assurance as we always did, as a common privilege of real Christians; but [now] we do not enforce it, under pain of damnation, denounced on all who enjoy it not.”⁴⁵

Consider his final two sermons “On Faith.” In Sermon 106, he presents in stark clarity the distinction between the faith of a servant and the faith of a child in defining “saving faith”:

But what is the faith which is properly saving; which brings eternal salvation to all those that keep it to the end? It is such a divine conviction of God, and the things of God, as, even in its infant state, enables every one that possesses it to “fear God and work righteousness.” And whosoever, in every nation, believes thus far, the Apostle declares, is “accepted of him.” He actually is, at that very moment, in a state of acceptance. But he is at present only a servant of God, not properly a son. Meantime, let

⁴¹Ibid., 128.

⁴²“Letter from John Wesley to Charles Wesley,” 31 July 1747, cited in Maddox, 126 (*Works* 26:254-5).

⁴³Maddox, 127.

⁴⁴Ibid. See this article’s ensuing treatment of Sermon 106.

⁴⁵Ibid. Originally recorded by Robert Southey in *The Life of Wesley* (NY: W.B. Gilley, 1820), 1:258.

it be well observed, that “the wrath of God” no longer “abideth on him.”⁴⁶ (106.I.10)

By now Wesley is well-established in this line of thinking and thoroughly encourages his hearers in a way not seen in the canonical sermons, saying that one may still be a true Christian even before one *fully* believes, because a spiritual experience of God’s love is the work of the Holy Spirit, and the same Spirit that helps one have justifying faith is eager to help one grow in assurance of faith at the loving Father’s behest.

This eagerness is evident in this same sermon’s preacher, as he openly confesses Methodism’s earlier error along these doctrinal lines, “Indeed, nearly fifty years ago, when the Preachers, commonly called Methodists, began to preach that grand scriptural doctrine, salvation by faith, they were not sufficiently apprized (sic) of the difference between a servant and a child of God” (106.I.11). The preachers, Wesley confesses, were apt to accuse people with doubts of being children of the devil, when in fact they should simply have said, “Hitherto you are only a servant, you are not a child of God. You have already great reason to praise God that he has called you to his honourable service. Fear not. Continue crying unto him, ‘and you shall see greater things than these.’”⁴⁷ This development is exemplified in the elderly Wesley’s detailed exegesis of Galatians and 1 John, complete with an admonition to “let no man discourage him” (sic) who receives the Spirit to cry “Abba” and as witness with his own spirit.

A great deal of discouragement still comes today from those who use the words “born again” merely to describe a preferred “type” of Christian in whom the Holy Spirit’s work is complete the moment he or she is justified by response to an altar call. Wesley, by contrast, as he discusses being born again in his 1760 sermon “The New Birth,”⁴⁸ distinguishes the new birth as the “gate” to sanctification, which is “the progressive work, carried on in the soul by slow degrees” (45.IV.3) that follows *after* justifica-

⁴⁶John Wesley, “Sermon 106, ‘On Faith’” 9 April 1788 in *The Sermons of John Wesley* of the Wesley Center Online, <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-106-on-faith/>, accessed March 16, 2015. (Citations using same format as established in footnote 1.)

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸John Wesley, “Sermon 45 ‘The New Birth’” in *John Wesley Sermons* GBGM <http://www.umcmmission.org/Find-Resources/John-Wesley-Sermons/Sermon-45-The-New-Birth> Accessed March 1, 2016.

tion, “that great work which God does *for* us” (45.0.1). This gate is “that great work which God does *in* us” (45.0.1), not a password one must present to enter “real” Christianity’s exclusive club. Wesley’s distinction is a merciful means of understanding the new birth as the “fundamental”—but not *fundamentalist*—Christian doctrine, alongside justification, which is separate from sanctification.

Whereas fundamentalists confusingly combine an assumption that the Holy Spirit’s work is complete with a heavy emphasis on going to heaven someday, a Wesleyan understanding of new birth as the distinct “entrance” to a progressive work of holiness seems apt for a life that is both now and ongoing into eternity. Sermon 122, delivered less than two months before Wesley’s death, includes numerous references to believers’ still ministering in heaven, perhaps even assisting angels unseen here on earth (122.6, 8). Furthermore, the righteous soul that on earth has the faith that is the spiritual experience of God’s love is still capable of growing in heaven, maturing, or ripening in knowledge, holiness, love, gratitude, benevolence, and perfection (122.11, 12). Thus faith, developed comprehensively over the course of Wesley’s earthly life, marks the new birth that accompanies justification as entrance to sanctification and grows into eternal life and beyond.

THE COMMUNAL DIMENSIONS OF BIRTHING IMAGERY IN PAUL'S EPISTLES

by

Mary K. Schmitt

I. Introduction

Paul never uses the phrase “new birth”; but, in his letters, the apostle Paul used birthing imagery to describe the formation of Christ in believers (groaning/pains of childbirth [ὠδίνω/συνωδίνω, Rom 8:22; Gal 4:19], begetting [γεννάω, 1 Cor 4:15; Phil 10], the womb [κοιλία, Gal 1:15], etc.). Paul’s birthing imagery operates metaphorically in ways that correspond to John Wesley’s phrase “new birth,” and careful examination of Paul’s metaphors indicates important avenues for reframing some of the conversation around new birth in the Wesleyan tradition. Recent Pauline scholarship has tended to focus on the gender implications of Paul’s birthing metaphors.¹ This paper, however, will focus on the communal dimensions of Paul’s birthing images. For example, Paul describes himself as birthing or begetting his churches—the Corinthians, the Galatians, and indirectly the Thessalonians. Even individual births—such as Philemon or Timothy becoming Paul’s children—are viewed ultimately as conversions for the sake of Pauline communities. Finally, in Rom 8, Paul speaks of Christians in labor together for the sake of God’s future revelation in the world. The birthing imagery in Paul’s letters suggests that “new birth” is not exclusively an individual experience, but is understood properly in the context of Christian community, the church. Furthermore, Paul’s birthing imagery supports a relational approach to “new birth” that is at the heart of Christian formation in the Wesleyan tradition.

II. Exegesis

The metaphor of birthing appears in almost all of Paul’s authentic letters (Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon). However, the imagery does not function the same way in each

¹E.g., Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007); Susan Eastman, *Recovering Paul’s Mother Tongue* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

of his letters. For this essay, I will divide Paul's birthing images into three general categories and examine these categories separately before drawing out some implications for the wider conversation about new birth: 1) Paul gives birth to communities, 2) individual births for the sake of community, and 3) communities in labor together.

A. Paul gives birth to communities

In Gal 4:19, Paul invokes the metaphor of himself as one in labor pains for the Galatians. He writes, "My children, with whom again I am in labor pains until Christ be formed in you."²

This verse until recently had been largely ignored in the commentary tradition. Now, biblical scholars frequently begin their commentary on this verse with the ubiquitous, if not passé, warning that this verse is fraught with numerous difficulties for any would-be interpreter.³ The three difficulties most commonly addressed are 1) the gender of the speaker, 2) Paul's claim to be in a labor again (or a second time) with the Galatians, and 3) the purported shift in metaphor from the first half of v. 19 to the second half of v. 19. The first difficulty is that Paul, who is male, describes himself as being in labor with the Galatians—a biological impossibility—which is mitigated by the realization that the metaphor is also found among the Dead Sea Scrolls (1 QH xi.6-13) and the Nag Hammadi texts (*Disc.* 8-9). Paul's second odd claim is that he is in labor "again" with the Galatians. Paul implies that the first "born again" experience did not take for the Galatians. The word "again" intimates that this additional experience is both unnatural and problematic. By using the phrase "born again," Paul admits that the metaphor is being stretched to cover this somewhat abnormal situation. The third unusual feature of Gal 4:19 that scholars often note is a shift in imagery. In the first half of the verse, Paul speaks of being in labor with the Galatians. However, in the second half of v. 19, Paul does not speak of the birth of the Galatians, but rather proclaims that the completion of his labor pains will result in the "formation of Christ in them." The claim often made is that Paul changes the metaphor at this point from the birthing of the Galatians to the

²All translations in this paper, unless otherwise noted, are my own translations.

³E.g., Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979); J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians* (AB33A; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 427; Susan Eastman, *Recovering Paul's Mother Tongue*, 89-126, esp. 94-95; Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul*, 29-39, 173-77, esp. 29-31.

birthing of Christ. However, this is not likely. Being “in Christ” and *vice versa* is central to Paul’s theology in Galatians. Paul describes his calling as Christ being revealed in him (1:16). Similarly, in Gal 2:20, Paul writes “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.” Furthermore, the purported two ancient parallels in Galen⁴ and Philo (*Spec. Leg.* 3.117), which supposedly use the word *μωφώω*—the same word that Paul uses in Gal 4:19—to describe the formation of an unborn child in the womb, actually use *μωφώω* to talk about bringing a fetus to viability. Thus, J. Louis Martyn is probably correct when he insists that the formation of Christ in the Galatians is not the birth of Christ, but rather the point at which in Christ the Galatians are made “viable for life apart from Paul’s presence among them.”⁵ Thus, the “shift” in imagery in 4:19 is not necessarily as problematic as often posited.

Despite all the attention these various difficulties have received, there is one difficulty in Gal 4:19 that has received less attention: namely, that Paul describes himself giving birth not to one or even two individuals but to a whole community of persons. Three times in Gal 4:19, Paul makes it clear that he is in labor not with an individual but with a community, a church—or if we take the greeting of the epistle seriously that he is in labor with several churches in Galatia at once (1:2). In 4:19, Paul addresses his children (plural), and he describes his children as those with whom (plural) he is again in labor until Christ is formed in y’all (southern plural—if Paul is addressing churches in southern Galatia; or “you all” if northern churches). Paul’s child to whom he is giving birth in Gal 4:19 is indeed a collective body, a community, a church.

In some of Paul’s other letters he makes a similar claim about becoming the father of churches. For example, in 1 Cor 4:15, Paul claims that “in Christ Jesus through the gospel, I beget you (pl).” He is the father of the Corinthian church. So also, Paul reminds the Thessalonians of how he and his fellow workers instructed and encouraged them “as a father would his children (pl)” (1 Thess 2:11-12). The image of Paul as parent is perhaps invoked in other instances where Paul refers to his converts as his children or as his beloved (e.g., 1 Cor 4:14; 1 Thess 2:7-8; cf. 1 Cor 17; 2 Cor 2:19; 6:13; 12:14; Phil 2:12; 4:1). However, the image of Paul as father of congregations does not present the difficulty inherent in the image of

⁴Galen, vol 19, p. 181, in the edition by C. G. Kühn as cited in Martyn, *Galatians*, 424.

⁵Martyn, *Galatians*, 430.

Paul giving birth to a congregation. Paul can invoke the image of being a father to multiple individuals, even congregations like the Corinthians and Thessalonians, and the image does not have to suggest that the individuals were beget at the same time. However, in Gal 4:19, the image of Paul giving birth draws attention to the fact that the community is being born together; this is a communal birth.

Now, granted, the image does not have to be belabored in quite this way. Paul may be envisioning the birth of a single corporate identity. Paul could have gotten such a metaphor from the Septuagint. In the Septuagint, the verb ὠδίνω (“to experience labor pains”)—another verb Paul uses in Gal 4:19—rarely has a direct object when used in the metaphorical sense. Nevertheless, Martyn cites one exception in the Septuagint text of Isa 45:7-11, where God is described metaphorically as being in labor and the object is identified as corporate Israel. The Isaiah text as Martyn notes is familiar to Paul given that he quotes Isa 45:9 about the clay questioning the potter in Rom 9:20 (cf. 1 Cor 14:25; Rom 14:11).⁶ Thus, a Septuagint passage which Paul knows provides a parallel example of exactly this kind of cooperate birthing metaphor. In addition, a corporate birth fits well the argument that Paul has made thus far in the letter to the Galatians. Paul has insisted in ch. 3 that the promise was given not to Abraham’s seeds or descendants but to the one “seed, that is Christ” (3:16). Thus, the birth of the Galatians in 4:19 seems to refer to their incorporation into the corporate body of Christ.

What have we learned thus far? Paul presents himself as a parental figure who has beget the Corinthian community and who is currently in the process of birthing the Galatian community. The image of Paul birthing the Galatians heightens the corporate dimensions of rebirth. Being “born again” in Gal 4:19 is not an individual, private experience; Paul anticipates the whole of the Galatian community being formed together in Christ.

B. Individual births for the sake of community

While Paul presents the birth of the Corinthians and the Galatians as a corporate experience, Paul also refers to individual conversions using birthing imagery. In particular, Paul refers to both Onesimus and Timothy as his sons. He insists that both men are extending Paul’s ministry to various churches. Thus, their individual births ultimately are viewed as

⁶Martin, *Galatians*, 426-31.

for the sake of Pauline communities. Likewise, Paul in his own autobiography refers to God's call on his life from before birth not as an individual conversion story but as a commissioning of his ministry to the Gentiles. Paul refers not merely to his natural birth but also to the birth of his role as apostle to the Gentiles. It is not for his own sake that Paul is born but for the sake of the community.

In Philemon, Paul claims that he beget an individual named Onesimus; however, the implications of Onesimus' new birth extend to the Christian community, affecting Paul, Philemon, and the church that meets at Philemon's house. Paul writes to Philemon on behalf of his "son Onesimus, whom he begot in prison" (v. 10). The conversion of Onesimus is often excluded from discussion about birthing because the verb here is "to beget" (γεννάω). The verb γεννάω occurs in the Matthean genealogy for the relationship between fathers and sons. However, it is also used frequently in the New Testament to refer to women giving birth (e.g., Matt 19:12; Luke 1:35; 23:2; John 1:13, etc.). For example, Elizabeth begets (γεννάω) John the Baptist (Luke 1:13, 57). In his conversation with Jesus, Nicodemus is confused because as a grown man he knows he cannot re-enter his mother's womb to be born (γεννάω) again (John 3:4). Thus, the verb γεννάω is used both for the role of men and the role women in bringing about new life. The implied gender of Paul in this metaphor is not as important as the relationship that is established between Paul and Onesimus, that of parent and child.

The individual conversion of Onesimus, which also afforded him status as Paul's son, is immediately set by Paul into the context of the usefulness of his conversion for other Christians. Verse eleven is a play on Onesimus' name. The name of Onesimus means "useful." Paul claims that previously Onesimus was the opposite of his name—he was useless. Now he is useful both to Paul and to Philemon. Paul contends that he would have liked to keep Onesimus with him, so that he could minister to Paul on behalf of Philemon (v. 13). This claim reinforces the new image of Onesimus as "useful." Despite this usefulness to Paul, he has sent Onesimus back to Philemon. Paul presents the newly begotten Onesimus as a gift to Philemon. Paul implies that Philemon is being given the opportunity to support Paul's ministry by freely sending Onesimus back to Paul. At the same time, Paul acknowledges that Onesimus now may be useful to Philemon in ways that he had not been useful previously (v. 11).

How exactly is Onesimus useful to Philemon? Onesimus is returning to Philemon forever (v. 15); however, he is returning "no longer as a slave,

but a more than a slave, a beloved brother" (v. 16). "Beloved" is one of the terms that Paul uses for his converted children in his churches (e.g., 1 Cor 4:14-15; Phil 2:12-15).⁷ Paul has already named Onesimus as a son. In describing Philemon and Onesimus as "beloved brothers," Paul declares both men to be his sons, and Paul seems to insist that it is for Philemon's benefit that Paul has acquired a son and Philemon a brother.⁸ Paul is not alone in thinking that relationships are more important for sons than monetary inheritance. Isocrates insists, "It is more fitting that a son should inherit his father's friendships even as he inherits his estate" (*To Demonicus* 2; trans. Norlin, LCL). Likewise, Musoinius Rufus claims that the best thing that parents can do for their children in to provide them with siblings. For, it is "better to have many brothers than many possessions." He continues, "I believe that each one of us ought to try to leave brothers rather than money to our children so as to leave greater assurance of blessings" (*Should Every Child* 100.2-3, 15-16).⁹ Presenting Onesimus as a brother, Paul thus presents him as a blessing to Philemon.

All of the positive statements about Onesimus could be viewed as a rhetorical strategy employed by Paul to get what he really wants—namely, for Philemon to allow Onesimus to minister to him in prison. However, a less cynical reading of the text might suggest that Paul actually does consider Onesimus valuable after his new birth both to Paul and to Philemon in a way that he had not been before. Moreover, it is important to remember that while Paul is writing directly to Philemon, he also is addressing the church that meets at Philemon's house. The church who listens to this letter being read aloud is profoundly affected by the begetting of Onesimus as Paul's son, and the subsequent realization that his new birth has altered relationships within the community. Onesimus as Paul's son is no longer a slave, but a brother and co-laborer with Philemon and Paul in the ministry of the gospel. Paul refers to Onesimus as a partner (κοινωνός) in Philemon's ministry (v. 17), just as Paul considers Philemon to be his coworker (συνεργός, v. 2). Paul praises Philemon for refreshing "the

⁷John L. White, "God's Paternity as Root Metaphor in Paul's Conception of Community," *Foundations and Facets Forum* 8 (1992), 278.

⁸In the letter's salutation, Paul refers to Philemon as "beloved" (v. 2), which may suggest that Paul describes Philemon as son from the beginning of the letter.

⁹O. Larry Yarbrough, "Parents and Children in the Letters of Paul," in *The Social World of First Century Christians: Essays in Honor of Wayne A. Meeks* (eds. L. Michael White and O. Larry Yarbrough; Minneapolis: Augsburg/Fortress, 1995), 133-34.

hearts (τὰ σπλάγχνα) of the saints" (v. 7); now, Paul is sending Onesimus whom Paul describes as his heart (τὰ ἐμὰ σπλάγχνα, v. 12). Paul, thus, further establishes the connection between Philemon's ministry and Onesimus. Paul never explicitly asks Philemon to manumit Onesimus.¹⁰ Nevertheless, Paul makes it clear that Philemon is to treat Onesimus not as a slave. Paul tells Philemon to accept Onesimus as a fellow-worker (v. 17) and to charge to Paul's own account any wrong that Onesimus had done (v. 18). Moreover, while Paul claims that he knows Philemon will do "even more that what [Paul says]" (v. 21), Paul still warns that he will be coming for a visit to ensure that Philemon follows through on Paul's instruction (v. 22). The inclusion of the community in the addressees of the letter raises the stakes; Philemon must follow through on Paul's instruction.¹¹ The implications for the community at Philemon's house are not preserved in the NT, but can only be assumed to be profound. Thus, Paul begets an individual son Onesimus but that birth has profound implications for others, namely Paul, Philemon, and the whole community that meets at his house.

A second individual whom Paul describes in the terms of a father-son relationship is Timothy. With regard to Timothy, Paul does not use any verb of or related to being born. However, he does twice refer to Timothy as a son. In 1 Cor 4:17, Paul refers to Timothy as his "beloved and faithful child in the Lord." And in Phil 2:22, he compares Timothy's participation in Paul's ministry to a son who cares for his father. Timothy appears to have special status with regard to Paul. Yet, his individual status is not separate from his serving Paul and Pauline communities. In 1 Cor 4, Paul is sending Timothy to serve the Corinthians and to remind them of Paul's teaching (v. 17). The Corinthian Christians have Paul as their father; but Paul is concerned that they are turning to other leaders. So, Paul is sending Timothy as an exemplary son, to be a living illustra-

¹⁰Several scholars have noted that manumission may not have really been freedom in Rome; thus, this might explain why Paul does not ask for manumission. E.g., see Keith Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves* (Sociological Studies in Roman History 1; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 118, 142-44; Jennifer A. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity* (2002; repr. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 10-38; Joseph Marchal, "The Usefulness of an Onesimus: The Sexual Use of Slaves and Paul's Letter to Philemon," *JBL* 130 (2011): 757.

¹¹Chris Frilingos, "For My Child, Onesimus': Paul and Domestic Power in Philemon," *JBL* 119 (2000): 91-104.

tion to his Corinthian offspring of how children should act.¹² Similarly, Paul in Philippians recounts Timothy's genuine concern for the Philippians' welfare, as well as his work on behalf of Paul and of the gospel. Moreover, in Philippians, Paul writes that he looks forward to sending Timothy to be with the Philippians and to minister to them in Paul's absence (Phil 2:22-24), a role which he fulfilled among the Corinthians (1 Cor 4:17) and the Thessalonians (1 Thess 3:1-5) as well. As Paul's son, Timothy stands in as the substitute for Paul when Paul is prevented from being present with a community. Thus, Timothy is described as Paul's singular son; but his role as the son is to be a minister to Pauline communities.

Paul alludes to one other individual birth in his letters: namely his own. In Gal 1:15-16, he writes, "But when God, who appointed me from my mother's womb and called me through his grace, was pleased to apocalyptically reveal his son in me, in order that I might spread the good news of him in the Gentiles . . ." This is the only passage examined in this essay which is not a metaphorical birth; Paul refers to his mother's actual womb. At first glance, this would not seem to fit the theme of "new birth." However, Paul does not allow us to draw so neat a distinction between his natural birth and what could be referred to as his "new birth" and calling to be an apostle to the Gentiles. From his mother's womb, Paul claims that he was appointed by God and called through grace. The claim is particularly surprising given what we know of Paul's life before Damascus. Paul offers an autobiographical account of his former way of life in the verses immediately preceding. In Gal 1:13, he writes that "I used to persecute the church of God excessively and (tried to) destroy it." Paul posits that the grace and calling of God came while he was still in his mother's womb, which would mean it precedes his persecution of the church. Paul's emphasis is on the grace of God which supersedes the trajectory of Paul's natural life. This is not a story about natural birth, but an account of God's supernatural grace by which God reaches out to Paul before even the possibility that Paul could reach back.¹³ Elsewhere Paul refers to his encounter with the risen Christ as an untimely birth (ἐκτρωμα, 1 Cor

¹²Eva Maria Lassen, "The Use of the Father Image in Imperial Propaganda and 1 Corinthians 4:14-21," *Tyndale Bulletin* 42 (1991), 136; Boykin Sanders, "Imitating Paul: 1 Cor 4:16," *HTR* 74 (1981): 356; Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Imitating Paul: A Discourse of Power* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991), 100.

¹³His opening description of his apostleship as "not from humans not through humans but through Jesus Christ" (v. 1) reinforces the same claim. Paul's apostleship is the result of supernatural calling, not natural means.

15:8). Paul's emphasis is not on the physical birth, but on the calling of God which is fulfilled in his life when he is born in Christ. Moreover, the grace which calls Paul also directs him into service of the Gentiles. Paul, like the prophets Isaiah (Isa 49:1-6) and Jeremiah (Jer 1:4-5), is set apart from the womb for ministry. Thus, Paul's story is best understood against the background of prophetic call narratives. Recent scholarship also has suggested that the inclusion of his autobiography in the letter to the Galatians is not incidental to the purpose of his ministry. According to John M. G. Barclay, Paul "weaves his story into that of his churches (Gal 4:12-19) and into the story of Israel (Rom 9-11)."¹⁴ Paul references his birth not for its historical value, but for the purpose of fulfilling his calling to proclaim the gospel of God's faithful act of redemption through Christ.

Paul's autobiography highlights two key points pertinent to our discussion about new birth. First, Paul, who is born by God's miraculous grace and calling, is not born for himself but for others; his life is to be lived in service to others. This is an individual birth for the purpose of creating Gentile communities through the gospel message. Second, whereas "new birth" is sometimes described as a position to be attained, Paul's account of his "miraculous" birth by God's calling is not a static identity; it is calling to ministry. Paul is called by God even before birth in order to preach Jesus among the Gentiles. To use etic terminology, Paul's account of his birth is a call narrative, not a conversion narrative. The same could be said concerning the birth of Paul's sons Onesimus and Timothy. Like Paul, their conversions are individual "birth narratives," but their births are also callings that carry the corresponding responsibility of serving Gentile churches.

C. Communities in labor together

Finally, Paul uses the metaphor of birthing in Romans 8. Paul did not birth the Roman congregations, nor has he yet been to visit Rome. The image of birthing is thus slightly different in Romans than in Paul's other letters. In Rom 8, Paul describes not only a corporate birth, but he also envisions multiple entities in labor together toward the same common

¹⁴John M. G. Barclay, "Paul's Story: Theology as Witness," in *Narrative Dynamics in Paul: A Critical Assessment* (ed. Bruce W. Longenecker; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 133-56 (quotation on pg. 135); cf. Beverly Roberts Gaventa, "Galatians 1 & 2: Autobiography as Paradigm," *NovT* 28 (1986): 318; G. Lyons, *Pauline Autobiography: Toward a New Understanding* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985).

goal. All creation is the subject of the birth pangs, and “we” believers groan alongside the creation’s birth pangs. The new element of multiple people giving birth together is a surprising addition to the birthing motif. With the shift in subject from Paul to all creation, the Christian community also is challenged to recognize its present role alongside and within creation.

In Rom 8, the whole creation groans and is in labor. According to Rom 8:32, the whole creation groans together (συστενάζω) and is in labor (ὠδίνω). The verb ὠδίνω (“be in labor”) in v. 22 is the same verb that Paul uses in Gal 4:19 to describe his birthing of the Galatians. Elsewhere in Paul’s letters the other verb συστενάζω (“groan together”) refers to eschatological expectation (e.g., 2 Cor 5:2, 4); here eschatological expectation is portrayed by the metaphor of birthing and the groans refer to the sounds accompanying birth pains.¹⁵ The subject of both verbs is the whole creation. To whom does Paul refer when he says the *whole* creation? “The creation” is clearly a collective noun in Romans. That Paul refers to the whole creation (πᾶσα ἡ κτίσις) confirms that this is a corporate entity in labor. Paul in Rom 1 described both human and non-human creation. He specifically mentions four groups of created beings: humans, birds, four-footed animals, and crawling creatures (1:23). Given the considerable verbal parallels between Rom 1 and Rom 8 and that humans are part of the created order in Rom 1, humans should also be viewed as part of the creation in Rom 8.¹⁶ Contrary to those who might suggest that all creation in Rom 8 excludes human beings, Paul recognizes humans as part of the created order. Thus, Paul envisions the whole created world—human and non-human—participating in the act of birthing.

Paul, however, seems to contrast the whole creation who groans with another collective entity that he refers to as we. What then is the relationship between “the whole creation—human and non-human” and “we” in Rom 8? The whole creation stands in tension with “we,” whom Paul claims already have the first fruits of the Spirit. Creation in Romans is not the glorious “new creation,” but it is the creation which has rejected God and which currently lives in the old age of alienation and separation from

¹⁵Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1996), 518.

¹⁶Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul*, 54-55, 182-83. See also her review of recent scholarship on this point and her decisive refutation of those who would exclude humans from the whole creation in Rom 8.

God's will. The brokenness of the creation in chapter 1 is readily apparent given that creation—both human and nonhuman—is worshipping itself and not the Creator (1:25). So, also the creation as described in Rom 8 is the old creation, not the new. Paul, in Rom 8, contrasts the present suffering of creation with future glory (v. 18). He describes creation as groaning and suffering (vv. 18, 22). The creation in Rom 8 hopes; and Paul clarifies that hope involves contrasting the future which is not seen with the present. The creation which hopes is still looking for redemption in the future. Thus, the humans who are part of creation in Rom 8 groan and suffer at the present time like a woman in labor; creation in Romans does not refer to the glorious, future creation but to the present creation, in slavery, subjected against its will and hoping for the future glorious revelation of the children of God (vv. 20-21). Paul further seems to distinguish both human and nonhuman creation from “we,” whom he describes as having the first fruits of the Spirit (8:23). Four times in Rom 8:23, Paul includes pronouns that underscore “we” as a distinct entity (αὐτοί, ἡμεῖς καὶ αὐτοί, ἐν ἑαυτοῖς) in contrast to the whole creation described in the previous verses. By claiming that “we” possess the first fruits of the Spirit, Paul places “we” apart from the old-age creation. As opposed to the old creation, “we” are those who are already experiencing the initial in-breaking of the new age. A Wesleyan way of paraphrasing Paul might be that “we” refers to those who have experienced new birth in the midst of the broken world of this present age.

When creation in Rom 8 is recognized as the unredeemed, broken reality of the present time and “we” are determined to be a distinct entity, Paul's insistence that “we—who have the first fruits of the Spirit—groan and eagerly expect alongside the old creation is provocative. Paul never explicitly states that “we” are in labor. But he repeats the other verb in v. 22 and v. 23—just as creation groans (συστενάζω, v. 22) so too we groan (στενάζω, v. 23). Paul also uses the same verb ἀποδέχομαι (“wait expectantly,” 8:19, 23) for both creation and “we.” We, who already are children via the Spirit, stand alongside the rest of unredeemed creation, and we groan and we hope along with creation for God's redemption of our corporate, created body. The whole thing is very odd. And it becomes odder when one realizes that the thing which the creation is eagerly awaiting is the revelation of the children of God. Who is that if not “we—who have the first fruits of the Spirit” but of whom Paul says also participate in this eager expecting? Susan Eastman has argued that “we” hope for the revelation of more children of God who are not yet a part of the “we”: among

those she names Israelites who have not yet professed Christ.¹⁷ Hers is a beautiful vision of the future—children of God both Jew and Greek together; moreover, her claim fits well with the direction Paul's argument is about to take in Rom 9-11. Certainly, Jews are included, yet Paul's words if taken seriously suggest that he thinks Christians ought to hope for the eventual redemption of the whole creation—all human and non-human creatures. Paul hopes that in the future none will be lost, but all creation will be saved.

Paul's view of the future redemption of all creation is quite amazing. Personally, though, I find myself drawn to the present and the image of "we" standing on this side of Paul's already/not-yet eschatology. By virtue of our adoption—Paul claims in 8:16 that we are already children of God. "We" belong to the future age. Yet, Paul here envisions us—the children of God—as part of the creation that is not yet. Given the tendency in Christian history toward triumphalism, Paul's metaphor calls for humility. We too—who have the first fruits of the Spirit—we groan and we wait. Our new birth and adoption do not exempt us from the present suffering of creation. Instead, we are called to go even more deeply into solidarity with the present groaning of a world still waiting for God's eschatological salvation. New birth in this case is not removal from the troubles of this world, but more empathetic engagement with those who suffer.

III. Implications for Wesleyan conversation about new birth

What, then, do Paul's birthing metaphors have to contribute to a Wesleyan conversation about "new birth"? My hope is to offer out three possible suggestions for reframing the conversation about new birth by drawing attention to Paul's birthing metaphors as they highlight key Wesleyan themes which perhaps were only indirectly addressed in Wesley's sermons on the topic of new birth ("The Marks of the New Birth" [18] and "The New Birth" [45]) and thus may have been underutilized in the subsequent scholarly conversation. Here are the three avenues for further discussion that I perceive arising from Paul's birthing metaphors that would perhaps connect to the larger Wesleyan tradition: 1) that new birth is not exclusively (perhaps not predominantly) an individual experience, 2) that the conversation about new birth would be enriched by greater emphasis

¹⁷Susan Eastman, "Whose Apocalypse? The Identity of the Sons of God in Romans 8:19," *JBL* 121 (2002): 266.

on calling (not just conversion), and 3) that we heed Paul's warning not to let our "new birth" status to cause us to be arrogant about the current situation of the created world of which we continue to be a part.

First, new birth is not exclusively (perhaps not predominantly) an individual experience. Wesley himself as well as the Wesleyan tradition has always emphasized the importance of community for faithful Christian living. Despite frequently using the first person plural "we" in his sermons on "new birth," Wesley's emphasis on "internal transformation" makes it easy to fall into the trap of separating the experience of new birth from the importance of Christian community. Attention to Paul's birthing metaphors places the question of communal experience of faith front-and-center. Paul begets communities (Corinthians; cf. Thessalonians). Paul is in the process of birthing the Galatians as a corporate identity. Paul thinks that new birth results not in a bunch of individual Christians, but in a Christian community, in the church. Paul calls us to consider again the context of "church" (not the individual) as the proper *sitz en leben* for any conversation about "new birth."

Second, the conversation about new birth would be enriched by greater emphasis on calling (not just conversion). Paul does speak of individual births, but never apart from their calling to serve the community. Paul himself was called by God from before his birth to be a minister to the Gentiles. Likewise, Paul refers to Onesimus and Timothy as his sons, whom he beget. As sons, Paul expects them to be in service to Pauline communities. Paul understands new birth not as status, but as calling. Once again, Wesleyans have a rich history of emphasis on living out the faith in service to one another. To emphasize "new birth" not as something to be grasped but as a way of life would be in keeping with our tradition and its values. Paul's examples of individuals born to serve invite us as Wesleyans to frame our conversation about new birth around the topic of calling, not conversion.

Third, Paul's metaphor of the creation and us groaning in Rom 8 should serve as a warning against arrogance. As the first fruits of the Spirit, Paul envisions our calling as that of standing in deepest solidarity with a suffering creation and hoping for the redemption of the corporate body of creation. There is a great temptation when discussing "new birth" to divide the world between those who have been born again and those who have not. Yet, Paul insists that to be born again is a calling to live with and for the world. Parts of the Wesleyan tradition have always stood in solidarity with those who suffer. What avenues for conversation would

be opened up if “new birth” were pursued first and foremost as a calling to solidarity with the broken world, not an escape from it? Paul’s birthing image in Rom 8 invites us to consider that the moment when we stand in solidarity with a suffering world is perhaps the moment at which we are living out most faithfully our “new birth.”

Perhaps, then, even if Paul didn’t use the phrase “new birth,” by looking back at Paul’s birthing imagery, we discover different yet exciting ways of framing Wesleyan questions about “new birth” and maybe even new avenues for moving forward with conversations that shed light on what it means to be Wesleyan.

DAUGHTERS AND FATHERS IN THE BIBLE

by

Karen Strand Winslow

Introduction

Many people, at least in some places in the world, think of daughters and sons as equally deserving of their father's love. We do not say, "The daughters of Lot, Jacob, Judah, Jephthah, and David were disenfranchised and violated, but they were *just* daughters." Or do we?

The biblical stories that feature daughters and fathers are cryptic, tension-filled, and disquieting, like the son-father stories. But son-father stories are more numerous, more developed and filled with deep compassion and connection.¹ Given that son narratives are about *patriarchs* of Israel, they have been mined for meaning far more extensively than *daughter* stories, which have been relatively ignored although they are equally multi-layered, enigmatic, and provoke even more questions. Daughter-father stories are "fraught with meaning," the phrase Eric Auerbach used about Gen 22's account of the binding of Isaac by Abraham.

While neither set of stories provides models of healthy parent-child interactions, the biblical daughter stories are even more disturbing than the son stories, especially in what they convey about paternal attitudes toward daughters. In a time of supposed benevolent patriarchy, many high (and low) profile fathers are shockingly indifferent, neglectful, and inadequate in their treatment of their daughters. What the father *fails* to do for his daughter reveals misconceptions, priorities, or fears as much as what he attempts to do or does. Either they *send* their daughters *out* to ruin, or they do not protect or defend them. They are speechless or their speech destroys their daughters. On the other hand, when daughters are

¹Consider Gen 22, Abraham bound Isaac and laid him on a stone altar as an *olah*. The story indicates complete oneness of father and son. Gen 27 conveys favoritism, betrayal, and severance between parents, sons, and brothers. Jacob was inconsolable when he was told his son Joseph was dead (Gen 37). David was expelled from his throne and city by his son Absalom, but was utterly distressed over his slaying by Joab.

not presented as silent or despairing victims, they outstrip their father or father-in-law in righteousness, wits and/or courage.

I propose here that even though male writers wrote daughter-father stories during times that we label “patriarchal,” the writers and the shapers of Scripture deployed the daughter-father narratives to overtly and subtly censure Israel’s leaders including royalty.² The effect on readers is one of dismay and distress. I suggest that the writers’ *intended* to provoke such reactions. In this way, the writers maligned male leaders for their misunderstanding of how to serve God faithfully, as well as for being terrible fathers, even in patriarchal terms. Daughter stories show how doing right in one’s own eyes endangers the family, tribe, and/or nation, leading to dismemberment and dissolution of the people of God.

Furthermore, these stories are primary examples of inter-textuality. They recall and allude to one another through their similar movements and themes, such as *going out* or being *cast out* into danger. This *expulsion* pattern also unites these daughters. Lot would have *put out* his daughters to utter degradation; Judah’s daughter-in-law was *sent away* and almost destroyed by fire; Dinah *went out* and was raped; Jephthah slew his daughter ostensibly because she *came out* to meet him; the Levite’s wife was *put out* and her body parts were *sent out*; David *sent* his daughter to the room of his son who raped her. And, as mentioned earlier, daughter-father stories point to the son-father stories, to which they may be contrasted.

Interpreters have not usually seen them this way, but have further blamed or neglected daughters in the Bible. Whereas ancient interpreters tended to blame daughters for the ill that befell them, modern interpreters have ignored, have not been sympathetic to endangered daughters or recognized the narrators’ implicit or explicit criticism of the fathers. Feminist biblical interpreters have begun focusing their spotlight on daughters and take various approaches, which shall be remarked upon in a later version.³

²For a detailed expression of this see in regards to Gen 38 and David, see Gary Rendsburg, “David and His Circle in Genesis XXXVIII,” *Vetus Testamentum* 36 (1986), 438-446. The narrator’s criticism of David by using this story about Jacob will be expanded in a later version of this essay.

³Scholars who have examined daughters in the Bible include Naomi Graetz, “Dinah the Daughter,” in *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 306-17; Ilona Rashkow, “Daughters and Fathers in Genesis: Or, What is Wrong with This Picture?” in *A Feminist*

What have we, pastors, teachers, scholars done with these stories? Can biblical daughter-father narratives, mired as they are in patriarchal values of the producers and interpreters of these texts, which still exist today in many cultures, become living Scripture for readers? Can they be interpreted to encourage love and respect between generations and produce women and men of valor who seek to please God rather than men? I will demonstrate the difficulty of this task by highlighting some of these stories.

The Stories: In the Beginning

If we began at the beginning of the Bible as it has been laid out for centuries, we would at once notice that the daughters of Eve and Adam are barely mentioned: “and *he* had other sons and daughters” (Gen 5:4). This continues up to Noah’s birth. However, Gen 6:1 says that “daughters were born” to the multiplying people, one case in which sons are not even mentioned! The children of these daughters (and the sons of God) were the heroes and warriors of renown. Daughters are not mentioned throughout subsequent genealogies until we get to Milcah daughter of Haran, the brother of Nahor and Abram.⁴ But we soon meet Lot’s daughters.

After the LORD had appeared to Abraham as three men in Gen 18, two of the three, called messengers in Gen 19, became Lot’s guests in Sodom. When all the men of Sodom urged Lot to give his guests to them so that they may know them, *Lot offered to bring out his virgin daughters to them*: “do to them as you please; only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof.” Lot was willing to *put out* his own daughters, fully recognizing the dire danger to which he thus

Companion to Exodus, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 22-36; Gila Ramras Rauch, “Fathers and Daughters: Two Biblical Narratives,” in *In Mappings of the Biblical Terrain: The Bible as Text*, ed. Vincent Tollers and John Maier (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1990), 158-169; J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives*. Vol. 163 of *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993); *ibid.* “Second Thoughts about Secondary Characters: Women in Exodus 1:8-2:10,” in *A Feminist Companion to Exodus to Deuteronomy*. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994) 75-87; and *ibid.* “‘You Shall Let Every Daughter Live’: A Study of Exodus 1:8-2:10,” *Semeia* 28 (1983): 63-82; repr. in *A Feminist Companion to Exodus to Deuteronomy*, edited by Athalya Brenner, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994) 37-61.

⁴Ilona Rashkow has noted the conspicuous absence of daughters in Genesis. “Daughters and Fathers,” 22-25.

exposed them. Lot's willingness to *put out* his virgin daughters to be raped and perhaps killed to protect his guests may have been considered an extreme expression of hospitality to strangers, but it certainly counters any illusion of benevolent patriarchy.

All the men of Sodom refused Lot's offer to *put out his own daughters*. They "pressed hard against him" and threatened him. They did not want the daughters; they wanted Lot's guests or Lot himself. The guests rescued Lot, his wife, *and his daughters* out of Sodom. Lot feared harm (*ra*) in the hills, but later suffered harm at the hands of his own daughters who drugged him for sex so that they could bear offspring.⁵ Clearly, the passage illustrates poetic justice. The father who was willing to expel his own daughters to whatever the men of Sodom wished to do to them was later forced to have sex by his own daughters to preserve offspring, Ammon and Moab. These future enemies of Israel, albeit relatives, were generated through incest instigated by Lot's *daughters*!

Given the admiration of biblical writers for other women/daughters who go to excessive lengths to have children and preserve life, we must admit that the incest Lot's daughters performed is at least a little ambiguous.⁶ Lot's daughters' *desperation* for offspring must be compared to that of Tamar in Gen 38, the daughter-in-law of Judah, who engineered an

⁵Genesis 19:30-38: "Now Lot went up out of Zoar and settled in the hills with his two daughters, for he was afraid to stay in Zoar; so he lived in a cave with his two daughters. ³¹And the firstborn said to the younger, 'Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come in to us after the manner of all the world. ³²Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, so that we may preserve offspring through our father.' ³³So they made their father drink wine that night; and the firstborn went in, and lay with her father; he did not know when she lay down or when she rose. ³⁴On the next day, the firstborn said to the younger, 'Look, I lay last night with my father; let us make him drink wine tonight also; then you go in and lie with him, so that we may preserve offspring through our father.' ³⁵So they made their father drink wine that night also; and the younger rose, and lay with him; and he did not know when she lay down or when she rose. ³⁶Thus both the daughters of Lot became pregnant by their father. ³⁷The firstborn bore a son, and named him Moab; he is the ancestor of the Moabites to this day. ³⁸The younger also bore a son and named him Ben-ammi; he is the ancestor of the Ammonites to this day."

⁶Feminist interpreters point out that the stories' patriarchal hegemony remains despite daughters' assertion for the result is often children, a patriarchal value. However, we can never expect ancient stories to espouse the values of our contemporary contexts.

incestuous encounter with him for the same reason.⁷ Judah expelled Tamar—left her in limbo—a widow with no child to raise up for the dead brothers' and no freedom to remarry and produce offspring. When he brought the pregnant widow out to be burned for harlotry, which he apparently had the right to do as her father-in-law (even though he had *put her out*), she saved herself and her sons by using tokens that she had the wits to acquire from Judah at the time of their encounter.

Judah confessed that his daughter-in-law was more righteous than he was. He claimed that his crime of withholding his third son from her was more heinous than Tamar's playing at harlotry in order to become pregnant by him! Judah, and the narrator, admired Tamar's concern for progeny and despised Judah's hesitation in this regard. From this union came the tribe of Judah—it was through Perez that the house of Judah was built up—we are reminded of this in Ruth⁸—and produced David and all the kings of Israel, including Christ the coming King.

Lot attempted to *expel* his daughters from the shelter of their home into danger including a state of never being able to become wives and mothers. Judah *sent Tamar away* (Gen 38:11) and tried to *expel* her into the ultimate exile of death: "Bring her out! Let her be burned!" (Gen 38:24).

These daughters were saved from danger and death to become mothers; their children were produced and preserved by their mothers' wits. Given the value of offspring and preserving life, a primary theme of Genesis—beginning with God, these daughters were lifted up as models to be admired. But the narrators shame their fathers, Lot and Judah (who were coerced into acting as sperm donors) who were far less interested in progeny.

The story of Jephthah's daughter in Judges has a similar theme, with a far more dire outcome. Her fate recalls and contrasts with other daughters endangered by their fathers, as well as Isaac's in Gen 22, but, unlike the case of Abraham and Isaac, the LORD did not test Jephthah or ask him to offer his only daughter up as an *olah*. Neither did the LORD save her by stopping Jephthah's hand at the last second.

⁷See: "Do not have sexual relations with your daughter-in-law; she is your son's wife, so you must not have sexual relations with her" (Lev 18:15); and "If a man has sexual relations with his daughter-in-law, both of them are to be put to death. What they have done is a perversion; their blood will be on their own heads" (Lev 20:12).

⁸The book about Ruth, *the Moabite*, reminds us of Tamar who bore Perez to Judah who had a great household and many offspring (Ruth 3:12).

Like the other daughter stories, her story is one of *going out* of the house, which led to danger. Her choice to go out led her father to blame her for what happened, for what he did to her on account of his vow. Jephthah's impetuous vow reminds us of the "rash" vow that Saul made and attempted to keep when he fought for Israel, but the writer here does not call Jephthah's vow "rash." Recall that Saul's son Jonathan had eaten honey when Saul ordered his army to fast and cursed anyone who broke the order. Saul would have killed his son even though Jonathan knew nothing of the vow. But *Saul's troops saved Jonathan* from death at the hands of his father.⁹ No army, no warrior, no one spoke up for this young woman. Nei-

⁹¹ Sam 14: "24Now Saul committed a very rash act on that day. He had laid an oath on the troops, saying, 'Cursed be anyone who eats food before it is evening and I have been avenged on my enemies.' So none of the troops tasted food. 25All the troops came upon a honeycomb; and there was honey on the ground. 26When the troops came upon the honeycomb, the honey was dripping out; but they did not put their hands to their mouths, for they feared the oath. 27But Jonathan had not heard his father charge the troops with the oath; so he extended the staff that was in his hand, and dipped the tip of it in the honeycomb, and put his hand to his mouth; and his eyes brightened. 28Then one of the soldiers said, 'Your father strictly charged the troops with an oath, saying, "Cursed be anyone who eats food this day." And so the troops are faint.' 29Then Jonathan said, 'My father has troubled the land; see how my eyes have brightened because I tasted a little of this honey. 30How much better if today the troops had eaten freely of the spoil taken from their enemies; for now the slaughter among the Philistines has not been great. . . .' 36Then Saul said, 'Let us go down after the Philistines by night and despoil them until the morning light; let us not leave one of them.' They said, 'Do whatever seems good to you.' But the priest said, 'Let us draw near to God here.' 37So Saul inquired of God, 'Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will you give them into the hand of Israel?' But he did not answer him that day. 38Saul said, 'Come here, all you leaders of the people; and let us find out how this sin has arisen today. 39For as the Lord lives who saves Israel, even if it is in my son Jonathan, he shall surely die!' But there was no one among all the people who answered him. 40He said to all Israel, 'You shall be on one side, and I and my son Jonathan will be on the other side.' The people said to Saul, 'Do what seems good to you.' 41Then Saul said, 'O Lord God of Israel, why have you not answered your servant today? If this guilt is in me or in my son Jonathan, O Lord God of Israel, give Urim; but if this guilt is in your people Israel, give Thummim.' And Jonathan and Saul were indicated by the lot, but the people were cleared. 42Then Saul said, 'Cast the lot between me and my son Jonathan.' And Jonathan was taken. 43Then Saul said to Jonathan, 'Tell me what you have done.' Jonathan told him, 'I tasted a little honey with the tip of the staff that was in my hand; here I am, I will die.' 44Saul said, 'God do so to me and

ther did she or angels find a way to save her life or help her to become a mother. Instead, she died after she and her friends mourned her virginity, her failure to be a mother.

She was offered up as a holocaust—an *olah*, a whole burnt offering. Although she was not silent, and her words showed her courage, they did not point out that Jephthah's vow was untenable. "My father, if you have opened your mouth to the Lord, do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth, now that the Lord has given you vengeance against your enemies, the Ammonites."³⁷ And she said to her father, "Let this thing be done for me: Grant me two months, so that I may go and wander on the mountains, and bewail my virginity, my companions and I." She and her mourners *did not mourn her life, they mourned her virginity!*

I interpret this story as another mark of Israel's degeneracy in the Judges period; this lack of understanding on the part of father *and daughter* to think that the LORD was required to keep the vow. We can never know if early audiences considered it absurd, or if both Jephthah and his daughter were admired. It is likely that the story is also a warning against making disturbing vows that violate life.

The *going out to danger* theme is reiterated in the story of the Levite's concubine. This time her actual father is not implicated in her demise, although he appears in her story.¹⁰ After she *went out* from her husband's house and returned to her father's home in Bethlehem, her father attempted to delay—perhaps forever—her return to her husband's home in Ephraim. Her husband finally insisted on taking her away and they stopped in Gibeah of Benjamin, which turned out to be like Sodom. Either her husband or her host, who was a father of a daughter, expelled this wife from shelter to the Benjaminites who raped her throughout the

more also; you shall surely die, Jonathan!' ⁴⁵Then the people said to Saul, 'Shall Jonathan die, who has accomplished this great victory in Israel? Far from it! As the Lord lives, not one hair of his head shall fall to the ground; for he has worked with God today.' So the people ransomed Jonathan, and he did not die. ⁴⁶Then Saul withdrew from pursuing the Philistines; and the Philistines went to their own place."

¹⁰Judge 19:1: "In those days, when there was no king in Israel, a certain Levite, residing in the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim, took to himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah. ²But his concubine became angry with him, and she went away from him to her father's house at Bethlehem in Judah, and was there some four months. Then her husband set out after her, to speak tenderly to her and bring her back."

night. Either they, or her husband *put out* her life before her husband *sent out* her body parts as a call to war against the men of Gibeah. The host was a father who, like Lot, offered to cast out his daughter *and his guest's wife* to danger and then did so.¹¹

Unlike Jephthah, the Levite, made no a vow; there was nothing sanctionious about her death and subsequent dismemberment. He was first cruel, then callous, and only later "appalled." Like Saul later divided an ox with an oath as a call to arms, so this daughter's Levite husband sent out her body parts as a call to arms against the Benjaminites. This is ironic given that her abuse was caused when he or his host *put her out* of the house. The entire pericope demonstrates how Israel had become like the worst of Sodom. Is the *Levite* any better than the rapists of Gibeah?¹²

Although the horror of these movements in Israel's story leave the woman's original *going out* in the shadows, *her going out* from her husband's home eventuated in the violence that aggressive men, including her husband, forced on her. Is there an implicit message for daughters (and wives) here, even though the narrator assigns blame to the men of Ephraim and Benjamin, who, like the murdered woman, were Israelites?

Dinah's story of *going out* in Gen 34 resonates with that of the Levite's concubine and with that of David's daughter Tamar. All three daughters are raped, but the men who violate them are extremely different from one another. In each case, the father is in the shadows, albeit culpably absent.

In Dinah's case, when she *went out* "to visit the women of the region," she put herself in danger for she was raped by the son of Hamor, the prince of the region and remained in his household. Dinah's *going out*

¹¹Judge 19:22: "While they were enjoying themselves, the men of the city, a perverse lot, surrounded the house, and started pounding on the door. They said to the old man, the master of the house, 'Bring out the man who came into your house, so that we may have intercourse with him.' ²³And the man, the master of the house, went out to them and said to them, 'No, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. Since this man is my guest, do not do this vile thing. ²⁴Here are my virgin daughter and his concubine; let me bring them out now. Ravish them and do whatever you want to them; but against this man do not do such a vile thing.' ²⁵But the men would not listen to him. So the man seized his concubine, and put her out to them."

¹²Perhaps these stories are intended to be a subtle attack on Saul, for his actions parallel several of the incidents of the Judges period, showing how he had not left the period behind, when everyone did what was right in his own eyes. Even though he was a king, he was not a wise king.

did not *cause* what happened—Shechem was the aggressor, the rapist. But *going out* led to the rape. If she had stayed home, she would have been safe.

When Shechem sought to marry her (Gen 34:1-4), Jacob, her father, did not speak or act. Instead, her brothers were angry, planned revenge, and reinstated Dinah to her home. The author does not remark upon Dinah's silence, but he suggests that Jacob's silence (he held his peace) is remarkable. Dinah's brothers take over to punish Shechem for treating "our daughter" as a whore. Dinah's father only speaks at the end of the story to reprove her brothers for killing all the men of Shechem when they brought their sister back.¹³

Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me by making me odious to the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites; my numbers are few, and if they gather themselves against me and attack me, I shall be destroyed, both I and my household" (34:30).

So many other things could be observed about this story to counter the perspectives of many interpreters. But I wish to stress that in Jacob's

¹³34:1: "Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out. ²When Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, saw her, he seized her and lay with her by force. ³And his soul was drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob; he loved the girl, and spoke tenderly to her. ⁴So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, 'Get me this girl to be my wife.' ⁵Now Jacob heard that Shechem had defiled his daughter Dinah; but his sons were with his cattle in the field, so Jacob held his peace until they came. ⁶And Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to speak with him, ⁷just as the sons of Jacob came in from the field. When they heard of it, the men were indignant and very angry, because he had committed an outrage in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, for such a thing ought not to be done. . . . ²⁵On the third day, when they were still in pain, two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords and came against the city unawares, and killed all the males. ²⁶They killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went away. ²⁷And the other sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and plundered the city, because their sister had been defiled. ²⁸They took their flocks and their herds, their donkeys, and whatever was in the city and in the field. ²⁹All their wealth, all their little ones and their wives, all that was in the houses, they captured and made their prey. ³⁰Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, 'You have brought trouble on me by making me odious to the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites; my numbers are few, and if they gather themselves against me and attack me, I shall be destroyed, both I and my household.' ³¹But they said, 'Should our sister be treated like a whore?'"

silence, the brothers took on the role of father, even so much as to call their sister “our daughter.” Dinah was not left without defenders, redeemers. Yes, the brothers multiplied the violence, they went horribly overboard in their vengeance; they seized the wives and little ones of the murdered men as prey.

But they *did* bring their sister back home, which Jacob did not make any move to do. He was more concerned about the safety of the rest of his household. One of the possible, albeit unfortunate take-aways from this story has been: a lot of people had to die because Dinah *went out!*¹⁴

Those who know the whole Bible well see parallels with another daughter father story, Tamar’s story in 2 Sam.¹⁵ This Tamar is David’s

¹⁴From midrash *Genesis Rabba*: The Rabbis commented: The vat was clear, and you have muddied it . . . The vat was muddied, and we have purified it. And they said: should one deal with our sister as with a harlot? Will they treat us as common property, they exclaimed, What caused all this? The fact that “Dinah went out” (*Gen R.* 80:12).

¹⁵2 Sam 13:1-22: “Some time passed. David’s son Absalom had a beautiful sister whose name was Tamar; and David’s son Amnon fell in love with her. ²Amnon was so tormented that he made himself ill because of his sister Tamar, for she was a virgin and it seemed impossible to Amnon to do anything to her. ³But Amnon had a friend whose name was Jonadab, the son of David’s brother Shimeah; and Jonadab was a very crafty man. ⁴He said to him, ‘O son of the king, why are you so haggard morning after morning? Will you not tell me?’ Amnon said to him, ‘I love Tamar, my brother Absalom’s sister.’ ⁵Jonadab said to him, ‘Lie down on your bed, and pretend to be ill; and when your father comes to see you, say to him, “Let my sister Tamar come and give me something to eat, and prepare the food in my sight, so that I may see it and eat it from her hand.”’ ⁶So Amnon lay down, and pretended to be ill; and when the king came to see him, Amnon said to the king, ‘Please let my sister Tamar come and make a couple of cakes in my sight, so that I may eat from her hand.’ ⁷Then David sent home to Tamar, saying, ‘Go to your brother Amnon’s house, and prepare food for him.’ ⁸So Tamar went to her brother Amnon’s house, where he was lying down. She took dough, kneaded it, made cakes in his sight, and baked the cakes. ⁹Then she took the pan and set them out before him, but he refused to eat. Amnon said, ‘Send out everyone from me.’ So everyone went out from him. ¹⁰Then Amnon said to Tamar, ‘Bring the food into the chamber, so that I may eat from your hand.’ So Tamar took the cakes she had made, and brought them into the chamber to Amnon her brother. ¹¹But when she brought them near him to eat, he took hold of her, and said to her, ‘Come, lie with me, my sister.’ ¹²She answered him, ‘No, my brother, do not force me; for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do anything so vile! ¹³As for me, where could I carry my shame? And as for you, you would be as one of the scoundrels in Israel. Now therefore, I beg you, speak to

daughter. Here the father is implicitly involved in the danger. Tamar does not go out. *Her father* sends her into danger. David did not know he was endangering his daughter, but if he had been a more involved father he might have known that Amnon was feigning illness to rape her. David is clearly culpable in acting like Jacob and refusing to do anything to punish Amnon, to call him to account.

Like Dinah's brothers, Tamar's brother, Absalom, was infuriated and plotted to slay the perpetrator of the rape. This time he was not Shechem of the Hivite city of Shechem, but Amnon, Absalom's own brother. If David had sought justice for Tamar and if Jacob had sought justice for Dinah, far less blood may have been shed. Did either father really think the brothers of the rape victims would do nothing about it?

When the fathers showed no concern for the welfare of their daughters, when they were passive and speechless, brothers stepped in causing further violence, more conflict, distancing, bloodshed, and ruin. Amnon's rape of Tamar was a step toward Absalom's rebellion against his father. Like Jacob, David neglected his daughter, neglected justice, and callously left her as a sort of widow, doomed to barrenness because she could not be married to someone else. 2 Samuel 13:20-22 says,

²⁰So Tamar remained, a desolate woman, in her brother Absalom's house. ²¹When King David heard of all these things, he became very angry, but he would not punish his son Amnon,

the king; for he will not withhold me from you.' ¹⁴But he would not listen to her; and being stronger than she, he forced her and lay with her."

¹⁵Then Amnon was seized with a very great loathing for her; indeed, his loathing was even greater than the lust he had felt for her. Amnon said to her, 'Get out!' ¹⁶But she said to him, 'No, my brother; for this wrong in sending me away is greater than the other that you did to me.' But he would not listen to her. ¹⁷He called the young man who served him and said, 'Put this woman out of my presence, and bolt the door after her.' ¹⁸(Now she was wearing a long robe with sleeves; for this is how the virgin daughters of the king were clothed in earlier times.) So his servant put her out, and bolted the door after her. ¹⁹But Tamar put ashes on her head, and tore the long robe that she was wearing; she put her hand on her head, and went away, crying aloud as she went."

²⁰Her brother Absalom said to her, 'Has Amnon your brother been with you? Be quiet for now, my sister; he is your brother; do not take this to heart.' So Tamar remained, a desolate woman, in her brother Absalom's house. ²¹When King David heard of all these things, he became very angry, but he would not punish his son Amnon, because he loved him, for he was his firstborn. ²²But Absalom spoke to Amnon neither good nor bad; for Absalom hated Amnon, because he had raped his sister Tamar."

because he loved him, for he was his firstborn. ²²But Absalom spoke to Amnon neither good nor bad; for Absalom hated Amnon, because he had raped his sister Tamar.

The narrator was done with Tamar, just as Dinah's narrator was done with her in Gen 34. We *do* know what happened to Absalom; much of the rest of David's story is about him. We know that even though Absalom had become David's enemy, David's heart was broken when Joab killed him. 2 Samuel 18:33 says, "The king was deeply moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept; and as he went, he said, 'O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!'"¹⁶

We do know about Simeon and Levi. They and their tribes appear again and again in the story of Israel, but nothing about Dinah. We might well ask: Did the narrator care about Dinah or Tamar? We might conclude that even though the narrator provokes our sympathy for and curiosity about these violated sisters, they have served his purpose in each pericope, a stepping stone to the next movements of the plot. But their stories are more than stepping stones, for, as I said at the outset, they show that Jacob and David's flaws extend to their parenting, and their failures as fathers harm their households and their nation.

Conclusion

The distancing between daughters and fathers in these tales contrasts to the *yachad*, the togetherness, the oneness, between Abraham and Isaac and his virgin son Isaac, the one with whom he was one. Even as son and father *seemed* to be headed for ultimate separation through the *olah/holocaust*, the whole burnt offering, the storyteller subtly but powerfully unites them, and continues to emphasize their oneness. Abraham slowly and deliberately indicated his willingness to obey God's impossible demand with each step toward Moriah. Taking the same steps, Isaac indicated complete trust in his father, and the unity between the two grew—even to the point of being bound and laid upon that altar. But no whole burnt offering was comprised of Isaac! It was only a test!¹⁷ He was taken

¹⁶*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989), 2 Sam 18:33.

¹⁷Although *midrash* suspects some distancing resulted from this, the story itself does not. This story shows that even though Israel's god would not require or accept human sacrifice, Israel's founding father, Abraham, was willing to be

from home and mother, but he was not cast out.¹⁸ Because it was only a test of Abraham and because the LORD rescued Isaac, he lived to marry and become a father.

On the daughter's hand, no husbands or offspring existed for Dinah, Jephthah's daughter, the concubine, or Tamar. Jephthah's virgin daughter and the multiply raped concubine lost their lives; the raped Dinah and Tamar were returned to their families as desolate women. Betrayed by fathers, these daughters were bereft. Lot's daughters had children, but they were stuck with *him*; bereft of any opportunity to become mothers any other way.

And what shall I more say? For the time would fail me to tell of Rebekah, Leah, and Rachel, Miriam, Zipporah, Pharaoh's daughter, Merab, and Michal, the unnamed daughters, Esther, and the utter lack of *any* mother daughter stories in the Bible, except for that of Ruth. Leah and Rachel are not cast out; they choose to depart from their father's household, siding with Jacob, their husband, who consulted them. In fact, Laban chases their party, catches them, and confronts them. Ruth and Zipporah provide examples of outsider daughter stories, which, in contrast to the daughters of Israel, have happy endings. All of these daughter-father stories will be discussed in later chapters.

If there is any lesson so far from the stories mentioned here about these Israelite fathers, it is in how *not* to parent daughters. Even though the narrator may have had an ambiguous attitude to the incestuous sex and sought to take some blame off of Lot and Judah—they did not know—condemnation falls on them for their egregious neglect of daughters that led to suffering, not just for the daughters but for many other innocent people.

On the other hand, readers, especially those with less status and power may emulate these daughters' desperate ingenuity or be wary of

that devoted to Yahweh. J. A. Emerton, "Judah and Tamar." VT 29 (1969): 403-415. *Ibid.* "Examination of a Recent Structuralist Interpretation of Genesis 38," *Vetus Testamentum* 26 (January 1976): 79-98. Gary Rendsburg, "David and His Circle in Genesis XXXVIII," *Vetus Testamentum* 36 (1986), 438-446.

¹⁸This can be problematized however, for Abraham is said to have returned to his young men and to Beer-sheba with no mention of Isaac. Isaac is next mentioned as coming from Beer-lahai-roi (south of Beer-sheba) and later takes Rebekah into his mother's tent (24:62-67). Sarah was buried in Hebron a bit north of Beer-sheba.

obeying their fathers. Most of all, we dare not forget the theological and entertainment value of stories in which some of the daughters outsmart their fathers, and thus, the lesser overcomes the greater; the weak displaces the mighty, the feeble gird on strength. Most of all, we must not forget the daughters!

“LIKE A WEANED CHILD”: BREASTFEEDING PRACTICES IN THE BIBLICAL PERIOD

by

Laura Rogers Ziesel

Introduction

In 2016, breastfeeding practices vary wildly around the globe. Many women do not breastfeed their babies even once, and other women breastfeed every three hours for three years. All men, who have been the great majority of Bible scholars and teachers to date, have no personal experience breastfeeding at all, and the few men that have been thoroughly exposed to breastfeeding are more likely to be health professionals than Bible scholars. These cultural and experiential lenses directly impact the way readers interpret breastfeeding-related passages in the Bible, which tend to fall into two major categories: 1) narratives that include breastfeeding as part of their story (e.g., the nursing of Moses as told in Ex 2:7-9), and 2) metaphorical references to breastfeeding (e.g., “my soul is like the weaned child” in Ps 131:2). This article is an attempt to increase understanding of what the breastfeeding practices likely were during the biblical period, which brings illumination to all breastfeeding passages across the board.

By “biblical period” I am referring to the very general culture of the Ancient Near East as the setting in which the Hebrew Scriptures were born. Because I embrace theories that the Hebrew Scriptures bear the marks of many different moments in history, from original oral sources to final redaction, I will examine practices spanning hundreds of years. Looking at the story of Moses as an example, it is equally relevant what the breastfeeding practices were in Ancient Egyptian culture, Ancient pre-Israelite culture, in later Israelite culture that continued to carry and transmit Moses’ story through the generations, and finally in the culture of the final redactor who gave us the story in the form we have it today. My main aim is to be able to help the modern reader understand a breastfeeding context that is thousands of years old and probably very different than our own, and to show how increased understanding can have significant effects on how we interpret Scripture.

Breastfeeding in Scripture

It is not difficult to see that reproductive concerns are pervasive throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. From Gen 3:16 to Rev 12:5, conception and birth narratives are part of the fabric of Israel's survival story and the origins of the Church. There are fewer stories with explicit references to breastfeeding, but the stories we do have concern key matriarchs and patriarchs. I will not retell all of the stories that mention breastfeeding, but I do want to highlight a few of the references to breastfeeding in narratives, and a few of the metaphorical references:

The child grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned (Gen 21:8).

So they sent away their sister Rebekah and her nurse (Gen 24:59).

And Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried under an oak below Bethel. So it was called Allon-bacuth (Gen 35:8).

When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him. "This must be one of the Hebrews' children," she said. Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Yes." So the girl went and called the child's mother. Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed it. When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, "because," she said, "I drew him out of the water" (Ex 2:6-10).

Did I [Moses] conceive all this people? Did I give birth to them, that you

[the Lord] should say to me, "Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a sucking child; to the land that you promised on oath to their ancestors?" (Ex 11:12).

But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, "As soon as the child is weaned, I will bring him, that he may appear in the presence of the Lord, and remain there forever; I will offer him as a nazirite for all time." Her husband Elkanah said to her, "Do what seems best to you, wait until you have weaned him; only – may the Lord establish his word." So the woman remained and nursed her son, until she weaned him. When she had weaned him, she took him up with her, along

with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine. She brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh; and the child was young (1 Sam 1:22-24).

But Zion said, "The Lord has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me." Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you (Isa 49:15).

Thus says the Lord God: "I will soon lift up my hand to the nations, and raise my signal to the peoples; and they shall bring your sons in their bosom, and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders. Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers" (Isa 49:23).

Rejoice with Jerusalem. . . . that you may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast; that you may drink deeply with delight from her glorious abundance. For thus says the LORD: "Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream; and you shall nurse, you shall be carried upon her hip, and bounced upon her knees. As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem" (Isa 66:10-14).

She conceived again and bore a daughter. Then the Lord said to him, "Name her Lo-ruhamah. . . . When she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived and bore a son" (Hosea 1:6, 8).

I want to make a few simple observations based on these and other breastfeeding references in Scripture. First, weaning marked a rite of passage of sorts, with a child crossing over from vulnerable infancy to viable boyhood or girlhood when fully weaned. Surviving to the point of weaning was a great accomplishment in societies with infant mortality rates at least around 30%, if not higher.¹ While some readers might assume that weaning is abrupt, the reality of breastfeeding corrects that assumption, as weaning usually happens slowly over time before the child is fully weaned from the breast. Related to that, it is worth noting that "a weaned child" was viewed as an age-based category of persons, similar to "nursling" or "adult." So references to weaned children would include children who had weaned recently and older children who had weaned years ago but were not yet old enough to be considered among the next

¹M. Bar-Ilan, "Infant Mortality in the Land of Israel in Late Antiquity," in *Essays in the Social Scientific Study of Judaism and Jewish Society*, eds. S. Fishbane and J. N. Lightstone. (Montreal: Concordia University, 1990), 3-25.

age group, either youth or adults; a “weaned child” did not necessarily mean a just-weaned child.

Second, we can see that wet nursing was an unremarkable occurrence. Scripture does not think it is necessary to explain what wet nursing was or why a child wasn’t nursed by its mother; it just talks about wet nursing as a normal part of life. To the modern reader, especially in my American culture, this is probably an unfamiliar and perhaps even strange practice. In the next section, we will learn more about ancient wet nursing practices.

Third, breastfeeding created a kinship bond. We can see this demonstrated in the relationship between Rebekah and Deborah in Gen 21 and 35. We can also see this demonstrated in the metaphorical language about breastfeeding, which leveraged the perception that there was a sustained bond between nurse and nursling, as seen in Isa 49. However, this kinship bond did not only link nurse and nursling, but extended to wider familial networks—two unrelated children who were nursed by the same woman were considered kin as well.²

Breastfeeding Practices in the Ancient Near East

We will now turn to extra-biblical sources to flesh out the breastfeeding context of the Ancient Near East. First, there is a general harmony between many pieces of evidence that the expected time of breastfeeding would be *at least* two years, but probably longer. We can see a hint about this in the story of Hannah and Samuel; when she finally brings the child to relinquish him to serve in the house of the Lord, she also brings a three-year-old bull as part of her sacrifice.³ This alone isn’t convincing, but in addition, we know that wet nurses of the ancient world were routinely hired for 2-3 years.⁴ From the excavation at Karatepe, we also have an engraved depiction dating to Hittites of the eight century BCE of a woman nursing a child who is old enough to reach the breast while standing on the ground by itself, suggesting the child would be at least five.⁵

²Cynthia R. Chapman. “Oh that you were like a brother to me, one who had nursed at my mother’s breasts.” Breast Milk as Kinship-Forging Substance,” *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*, 12 (2012).

³1 Sam 1:24.

⁴Valerie Fildes. *Wet Nursing: A History from Antiquity to the Present*. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 7-8.

⁵How do we receive permission to include an image from this excavation? Image attached.

We also have 2 Macc 7:27 that, while dated later to the second century BCE, explicitly says, “I carried you nine months in my womb, and I nursed you for three years.” The *Talmud*, also dated later but helpful to approximating cultural norms for Jews in the Ancient world, states that “A baby nurses for twenty-four months . . . the nursing period should not be cut down for the baby may die of thirst.”⁶ Given these and other evidences, we should accept a nursing duration with a minimum of two years, with an awareness that nursing longer was probably the norm.

Next, we can learn a lot from extra-biblical sources about typical wet nursing practices. First, in many civilizations “wet nursing occurred mainly on a casual basis: where lactating relatives or neighbors fed another child along with, or after weaning, their own infant.”⁷ Because societies lacked alternatives to breast milk this was necessary for a child to survive if its mother died or had insufficient milk. However, some civilizations also embraced formalized, legal wet nursing by means of monetary compensation. This was obviously more common in wealthy families within diverse societies, since it was necessary to have enough money to formally hire a nurse. This was especially common in Pharaonic Egypt, where wet nurses would “appear in guest-lists of funeral feasts of royalty” showing that they enjoyed high social regard for their work.⁸ We can even see in the Moses story that his mother was promised “her wages” in exchange for nursing the child.⁹

In addition to a woman (or her lord if she was a slave) earning wages for her service, it was expected that wet nurse mothers try to avoid pregnancy so as to protect their milk supply for their nursling. In legal documents preserved from the Old- and Neo-Babylonian periods, as well as the laws of Hammurabi, wet nurses were expected to avoid pregnancy, if need be by abstinence. In fact, many of the contracts about wet nursing included her husband or father coming to agreement about her duties.¹⁰ We find these two proverbs from the ANE as well: “A wet-nurse who has had sexual intercourse loses (her ability to) suckle” (Sumerian), and “To have intercourse makes (the ability to) suckle disappear” (Akkadian).¹¹

⁶Soranus, as quoted in Fildes, 23.

⁷Fildes, 1.

⁸Fildes, 3.

⁹Ex 2:9.

¹⁰M. Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible: Its Mediterranean Setting*. (Groningen: Styx Publications, 2000), 181-184.

¹¹Stol, 184.

Among the Hebrews, *coitus interruptus* was “recommended in the religious laws” for nursing mothers, which indicates that sexual activity continued despite it being frowned upon.¹² In the Hammurabi code, if the nurse took on a second child to nurse without permission of her original charge’s parents, and her original nursling died while in her care, she was to have a breast cut off for failure of her duties.¹³ The responsibilities of a wet nurse were taken very seriously—the child was, in practice and in law, fully her responsibility, so she must make every effort to protect its food supply, including limiting her sexual activity.

Another quality of both maternal nursing and wet nursing was that children were thought to take on the mental and emotional characteristics of the women whose milk they drank. This was universally believed in the Greco Roman world.¹⁴ There is also ample evidence of it from Ancient Egyptian and Canaanite civilizations. Both the goddesses Ishtar (Mesopotamia) and Isis (Egypt) are depicted as being wet nurses to royalty. The Egyptians also worshipped the cow as a sacred animal of Hathor, goddess of heaven, who was “frequently depicted in human or bovine form giving suck to both calves and children.”¹⁵ Many rulers either claimed that they had sucked at the breasts of divine wet nurses or they worked to deify their human nurses.¹⁶ In Egypt in particular, “each royal infant had several wet nurses” some of whom were only meant to nurse for symbolic reasons for a short period of time.¹⁷ It seems reasonable to suggest that these attempts to establish nursing relationships with powerful female figures reflected the belief that nursing women were responsible for the characteristics of their nurslings. If a goddess had nursed a boy, it made him god-like, a characteristic royalty was keen to claim.

Another observation about breastfeeding in the Ancient Near East, this time one that is specific to Jewish culture, is that breastfeeding represented a reversal of the perception that patriarchy was deterministic in decision-making. In both the *Talmud* and in Midrash, mothers were given the right to make the decision to continue nursing a child, even if the husband did not desire she do so.¹⁸ In TB Ketubbot 61a we see:

¹²Fildes, 9.

¹³Stol, 184.

¹⁴Fildes, 20.

¹⁵Fildes, 2.

¹⁶Fildes, 2.

¹⁷Fildes, 2.

¹⁸Fildes, 24.

If she expresses a desire to nurse, but he expresses a desire that she not nurse, she is heeded because the pain is hers. If he expresses a desire for her to nurse, and she expresses a desire not to nurse, what is the rule? The rule is as follows: Whenever it is not the custom in her family, she is heeded.¹⁹

This deference to the woman when there was a difference of opinion about breastfeeding also gave nursing women some control over their fertility. Because of the absence or infrequency of menses during breastfeeding, as well as the reality that women would not frequently find themselves pregnant while breastfeeding, it is reasonable to assume that the women of Ancient Israel knew the more they breastfed the less likely they were to conceive, as was common knowledge among most women of the ancient world.²⁰ We have clear evidence from Aristotle that this was known by the time of the Greco-Roman world: "While women are suckling children menstruation does not occur according to nature, nor do they conceive; if they do conceive, the milk dries up."²¹ Gruber believes that in the Scriptures we have one hint that the link between breastfeeding and fertility was understood: "The author of the Book of Hosea [suggests] a causal or at least sequential relationship between Gomer's weaning her daughter Lo-Ruhamah and her conceiving her son Lo-Ammi" in Hos 1:8.²² It is not only possible but probable that Israelite women attempted to manipulate their fertility through breastfeeding. When women, not their husbands, had the authoritative say in whether or not they continued to breastfeed their children, they then had a considerable power boost in family planning decisions.

Possible Considerations

Based on this context of breastfeeding practices in the biblical period, I propose a few items for additional consideration. First, the theological implications that God was nursed by a human woman—by Mary through Jesus—would have been substantial to both Jews and Gentiles in the Greco-Roman world. Mary breastfeeding Jesus would have communi-

¹⁹Mayer Gruber, "Breast-Feeding Practices in Biblical Israel and in Old Babylonian Mesopotamia," *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society*, 19 (1989), 75.

²⁰Fildes, 8.

²¹Shyam Thapa, Roger V. Short, and Malcolm Potts. "Breast feeding, birth spacing and their effects on child survival," *Nature*, 335 (1988), 679.

²²Gruber, 68.

cated *at least* 1) Mary's very high character and virtue, 2) Jesus' true humanity, and 3) Jesus' kinship with other humans. The reality of breastfeeding reinforces what we already know about the character of God as revealed through the incarnation—God was vulnerable to the degree that his very life depended completely on a woman. But what breastfeeding shows us goes a bit further—God was dependent not just on *a woman* but on *women* in general. If Mary had died in childbirth or had insufficient milk, Jesus' nourishment would have fallen to another woman as his wet nurse; it could not have fallen to a man. To enter the world from the default position of dependence upon women specifically, and not to mankind generally, gives us more insight into who God is and how He views women.

Second, while conducting this research I noticed a distinct absence of the mention of breast milk in the Levitical purity codes concerning bodily emissions. In Lev 15, for instance, when there are purity codes given to account for seminal emissions or menstrual blood, there is no mention of breast milk. Further, I found no mention of breast milk in all of Leviticus, or any indications elsewhere that it was a consideration in impurity codes at all. Linked to this, the amenorrhea experienced during both pregnancy and breastfeeding would have made the child-bearing years unusually free of purity concerns for many women; even if women in Ancient Israel didn't fully comply with the purity codes, the expectation of compliance would have been lifted from them while pregnant and (after their 40 or 80 day period of parturient impurity) while breastfeeding.

Third, I propose that breastfeeding provides us a possible explanation for why there was a double period of impurity for parturients after the birth of a girl baby, as prescribed in Lev 12. As we saw earlier, Gomer weaned her daughter prior to conceiving her son. This could be a hint that Gomer weaned her daughter precisely because she was a daughter, so that she could try again to have a son.²³ Given what Ancient Israelites knew about the connection between breastfeeding and fertility, Gruber submits:

The idea that in a patriarchal society daughters might be weaned earlier than sons in order that the woman might try again with better luck to conceive a son suggests a most plausible answer to the question posed by Lev 12:1-5 as to why a parturient should be 'impure', i.e., forbidden to engage in sex rela-

²³Brim, as cited in Gruber, 68.

tions, twice as long after the birth of a daughter as she is after the birth of a son. Given the late Hebrew proverb "The birth of a daughter first is a favorable omen concerning the birth of sons," it is reasonable to suggest that Lev 12:1-5 is meant to counter the notion that the first thought after the birth of a daughter is when to try for a son and that it is meant to provide an extra margin of time for mother and daughter to establish breast-feeding.²⁴

I have not seen this explanation elsewhere, and I am very grateful to Gruber for it. It is well known that sons were preferred in the ancient world, even in many places around the world today.²⁵ With that in mind, it is possible that many women faced spousal and familial pressure to try again for a son very soon after giving birth to a girl. This would not only place a physical burden on the woman who had just recently given birth (and survived, which was not a surety), but conceiving again so soon after birth would have jeopardized the survival of the newborn.

Therefore, this double length of parturition would have had at least three practical effects: 1) It would have given the mother the gift of double the length of sexual rest following birth. To many who have just survived birth, it would probably have been viewed as a blessing to not be expected to resume sexual duties right away. While there was perhaps disappointment that she had just birthed a daughter, this doubly-long impurity would have served as a small way to balance the scales, and see a girl's birth as positive in at least one way. 2) As Gruber states, the double length of impurity would have also helped to establish a healthy breastfeeding relationship between mother and daughter, which would not only have helped with bonding but would have increased the chances of survival for the infant. With the double impurity, a parturient faced a decreased (though not non-existent) likelihood of both the pressure to wean early and a quick subsequent conception, both of which would endanger the life of the baby girl. 3) This double period of impurity, which allowed a woman to very successfully establish breastfeeding and avoid pregnancy, would have increased her ability to manipulate her fertility in the months and years after birth. The first months are crucial in establishing an adequate milk supply, a healthy hormonal balance, and proper nursing techniques, and so with double the time to let these things fall into place, the

²⁴Gruber, 68.

²⁵Stol, 206.

woman was more likely to be able to delay ovulation and therefore pregnancy.

And finally, I propose that it is possible that this double length of parturitive impurity may have had a theological effect among the people of Israel who heard and read Lev 12: It would have added to the evidence that the God of the Israelites was in the business of undermining patriarchal injustice toward women. Instead of viewing the double length of parturient impurity as discriminatory against girls, which is perhaps how many modern readers experience the text, through the lens of breastfeeding we are able to see that perhaps it was the exact opposite—it was meant to protect and elevate the status of baby girls and the women who had just birthed them. From the modern lens, we would call this a redemptive hermeneutic—the Bible tells a story of a God was slowly chipping away at patriarchy, creating a society among the Israelites that was more favorable to women than the surrounding cultures of the biblical period.

Conclusion

While difficult to fully remove our modern lenses—clouded in part by the accessibility of formula and birth control—it is vital that we attempt to understand the historical breastfeeding realities of the biblical period. In doing so, we will better be able to understand and interpret biblical passages from Genesis to Revelation.

JOHN WESLEY'S NOTION OF WATCHFULNESS: "A MIGHTY EXERTION"

by

Amy G. Oden

Introduction

This article explores John Wesley's notion of "watchfulness" as a key practice of the Christian life. Part 1 will show how Wesley uses watchfulness in both a negative sense of vigilance and a positive sense of attending to God. Part 2 identifies Wesley's placement of watchfulness in his soteriological framework, making it a general means of grace that bears fruit without fail. Part 3 locates watchfulness within a larger Christian tradition of mindful attentiveness to God. Finally, part 4 suggests watchfulness has promising application as a prudential means of grace for the chronically diffused attention of post-modern life.

1. Wesley's Notion of Watchfulness

By no means exhaustive, this survey will present John Wesley's use of the words "watch," "watching" and "watchfulness" in order to construct a coherent view of "watchfulness" within Wesley's semantic landscape.

1.1. Negative Meaning: Vigilance

Henry H. Knight, in his foundational work, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace*, describes the negative and positive dimensions of watchfulness.¹ Knight notes that Wesley defines watchfulness negatively in the sense of vigilance, that is, watching *against* vice or sin. This dimension of watchfulness is defensive, guarded and alert: "Do you steadily watch against the world? The devil? Yourself? Your besetting sin?"² Many other examples of the negative dimension can be found in Wesley's *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament* as well as sermons and conference minutes.

¹Henry H. Knight III, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace*. Scarecrow Press, 1992, 122.

²John Wesley, "The 'Large' Minutes, E and F (1780, 1789)," ed. Henry Rack, volume 10 of *The Bicentennial Edition of The Works of John Wesley*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976-), 924.

This negative meaning of watching is perhaps most succinctly put in the simple phrase, "Watch ye—against all your seen and unseen enemies,"³ Wesley's commentary on Paul's instructions in 1 Cor 16, "Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong."

Commenting on the parable of wheat and weed (Matthew 13) Wesley exclaims of the sleeping planter, "They ought to have watched" to prevent the weeds from growing.⁴

Similarly, Wesley describes the vigilant posture of the Christian life commenting on Luke 21:34. If even the apostles were exhorted to watchfulness, then how much more are we to be watchful: "Neither are we wise, if we think ourselves out of the reach of any sin" for our hearts, too, can be overloaded with cares of this world.⁵ Watchfulness guards against worldly distractions.

In "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection" Wesley describes the defensive role of watchfulness in the progress of the Christian life:

Q. 38. What is the last advice that you would give them? . . .

(7.) If, after having renounced all, we do not watch incessantly, and beseech God to accompany our vigilance with his, we shall be again entangled and overcome.

As the most dangerous winds may enter at little openings, so the devil never enters more dangerously than by little unobserved incidents, which seem to be nothing, yet insensibly opens the heart to great temptations.⁶

In his extended reflections on the way anger creeps into the Christian life while masquerading as zeal, he makes clear that watchfulness guards against internal dangers as much as external ones:

If meekness be an inseparable property of zeal, what shall we say of those who call their anger by that name? Why, that they mistake the truth totally; that they, in the fullest sense, put darkness for light, and light for darkness. We cannot be too

³John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, 3rd corrected edition (Bristol: Graham and Pine, 1760–62; many later reprints), 1 Cor 16: 13.

⁴*NT Notes*, Matthew 13:25.

⁵*NT Notes*, Luke 21:34. See also *NT Notes*, Matthew 25:1–13.

⁶John Wesley, "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection." In Volume XI of *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A.*, ed. Thomas Jackson, 3rd ed., 14 vols. (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872; reprinted Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 514.

watchful against this delusion, because it spreads over the whole Christian world.⁷

1.2 Positive Meaning: Attending to God

Wesley also develops the positive meaning of watchfulness as more than a guard against sin. In its positive sense, watchfulness is a movement toward God, the *telos* of attentiveness. This is perhaps most clearly put in his comments on Ephesians 6:18, "And watching—Inwardly attending on God, to know his will, to gain power to do it, and to attain to the blessings we desire."⁸ Attention is oriented toward God, "attending on God." Watching focuses awareness on God, "to set God always before us." Wesley calls Christians to this notion of watchfulness both individually and corporately.

The positive dimension of watching is echoed in the Minutes of 1747 Bristol Conference of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Association. In the context of conferencing, they ask,

Q. 2. How may the time of this Conference be made more eminently a time of prayer, watching, and self-denial?

A. (1) While we are in Conference, let us have an especial care to set God always before us.⁹

1.3 Watching as "Mighty Exertion"

For Wesley this posture of attentiveness to God is not an ethereal state of contemplation but an active state of Christian witness. Far from a passive state of observation, watching is, for Wesley, an active state of faith, indeed a "mighty exertion."

His comments on 2 Timothy 4:5 both begin and end with the word "watch." In between is perhaps the most expansive description of what Wesley has in mind,

Watch—An earnest, constant, persevering exercise. The scripture watching, or waiting, implies steadfast faith, patient hope,

⁷John Wesley, Sermon 92, "On Zeal," § 3, in *Sermons III*, ed. Albert C. Outler, vol. 3 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976–), 316.

⁸NT Notes, Ephesians 6:18.

⁹John Wesley, "The London Conference of June 15-18, 1747," in *Works*, 10:189. See also a similar statement repeated in the Large Minutes of 1753-63, 10:845.

labouring love, unceasing prayer; yea, the mighty exertion of all the affections of the soul that a man is capable of. In all things—Whatever you are doing, yet in that, and in all things, watch.¹⁰

Wesley sees watchfulness as an “exercise,” an activity, something one does. This active state is both “earnest” and “constant.” It is earnest in that it is authentic, real, and not a form of religion that pretends to piety. It is constant in that holiness of life is not compartmentalized (just for church or scripture reading) or subject to the vagaries of mood (when one *feels* religious affections). Watching is a whole-body, whole-life experience. And, for one to be “earnest, constant, persevering” in anything, it takes discipline, a “persevering exercise” and “mighty exertion.”

Important to Wesley is an expectant posture, in “whatever you are doing . . . watch.” He lists the three theological virtues, faith, hope and love, implied in this posture as always at the ready. This takes everything we have: “the mighty exertion of all the affections of the soul” “in all things”—an expansive practice that pervades all of life.

Watching as an active practice of the Christian life is reinforced in Wesley’s frequent use of the phrase “watch and pray.”¹¹ Commenting upon 1 Peter 4:7 he connects temperance, watching and, praying as practices that are mutually reinforcing, “be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer—Temperance helps watchfulness, and both of them help prayer. Watch, that ye may pray; and pray, that ye may watch.”¹² Just as temperance protects one from enthusiasms, it also protects one from the dullness of excess. In either excitement or dullness, one cannot be attentive, and thereby temperance preserves watchfulness. Prayer can be empty or merely formal if one is not watchful or attentive to God rather than to going through the motions. Watching and praying are thus mutually reinforcing. Attentiveness to God is necessary for authentic prayer. In turn, authentic prayer cultivates greater sensible awareness of God in the believer, increasing daily watchfulness of God.

¹⁰*NT Notes*, 2 Timothy 4:5.

¹¹Wesley may use the phrase “watch and pray” in some instances to refer straightforwardly to staying awake into the night. Eighteenth century speech used “watch” in this sense, for example, “night watchman,” one who stays awake through the night to keep watch. However, the vast majority of Wesley’s use of “watch” and “watchfulness” refers to more than merely staying awake.

¹²*Ibid*, 1 Peter 4:7. “Sober” here contrasts with “drunken” as “awake” contrasts to “asleep” in Wesley’s description of the spiritual life. Sober prayer is akin to awake, watchful prayer.

Wesley connects watchfulness to "casting our care" upon God in his comments on 1 Peter 5. Here Wesley is addressing the phrase "keep alert" (v. 8). Watching is not intended to be a fearful stance, but rather a confident one.

But in the mean time *watch* [my italics]. There is a close connexion between this, and the duly casting our care upon him. How deeply had St. Peter himself suffered for want of watching!¹³

1.4 Fruits of Watchfulness

Wesley explicitly ties watchfulness to fruitfulness in the Christian life. In fact, watching cannot truly be exercised without producing fruit. The Large Minutes go so far as to say that, "These [other] means may be used without fruit. But there are some means which cannot; namely, watching, denying ourselves, taking up our cross, exercise of the presence of God."¹⁴ Continuing this train of conversation, the Wesleys claim that fruit is assured,

Do you endeavour to set God always before you? To see his eye continually fixed upon you? Never can you use these means but a blessing will ensue. And the more you use them the more will you grow in grace.¹⁵

Similarly, in other minutes on conversations with his brother, Charles, watching is a practice that produces fruit of God's work: "The more watchful they are against all sin, the more careful to grow in grace, the more zealous of good works . . . the more swiftly and steadily does the gradual work of God go on in their souls."¹⁶

Another fruit of watchfulness is authentic faith, witnessed through heart-felt prayer and conversation. Wesley's concern from the very beginning of the Methodist movement about formal religion was not a reaction against authority or tradition, both of which he valued. Rather, his concern was about the dangers of nominal religion. Formality too often led to an insincere, inauthentic, often self-deluded faith. In these minutes from early conferences, watchfulness is the prescribed antidote to inauthenticity in prayer or conversation:

¹³Ibid 1 Peter 5:8.

¹⁴John Wesley, "Large Minutes of Several Conversations between the Rev Mr John and Charles Wesley and others," Bicentennial Edition, 10:924.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶John Wesley, "Annual Minutes of some late Conversations," 1768, 10:363.

Q. 15. How shall we exclude formality from prayer and from conversation?

A. (1) By preaching frequently on this head.

(2) By watching always, that we may only speak what we feel.¹⁷

Notice that in this case, watching helps believers identify and “only speak what we feel.” This attentiveness to one’s internal landscape requires not so much liberty as discipline. To know one’s own heart takes watchful attention over time.

Minutes from following years echo the notion that fruitful conversation requires watchfulness, a purposeful attention to one’s thoughts, feelings, and speech. At the Bristol Conference in 1746, the minutes note it this way:

Q. 6. How shall we be more recollected and more useful in conversation?

A. (1) Plan every conversation before you begin. (2) Watch and pray during the time, that your mind be not dissipated.

(3) Spend two or three minutes in every hour in prayer.

(4) Strictly observe morning and evening hour of retirement.¹⁸

This expectation of authentic conversation is evidenced as well in this description of conferencing as

a time of “particular watching and self-denial,” fasting and prayer (§4-5). To ensure that everyone speaks freely, no one should be checked “either by word or look, even though he should say what is quite wrong” (§7).¹⁹

Wesley’s exhortation to watchfulness for those seeking authentic faith appears in Sermon 61, “We may learn hence, Fourthly, how great watchfulness they need who desire to be real Christians;” speaking of false purveyors of Christianity. It is easy to fall under their influence because “Their conversation, their spirit, is infectious, and steals upon us unaware.”²⁰ Thus, watchfulness cultivates one’s ability to stay true to real faith. Every conversation warrants watchfulness so that we are not dis-

¹⁷John Wesley, “Conference at the Foundry, 1744,” 10:144-5.

¹⁸John Wesley, “Bristol Conference 1746,” 10:182-3. Repeated in the *Large Minutes of 1753-63*, 10:902.

¹⁹Introduction: *The Conference: History and Minutes*, 10:62.

²⁰Wesley, Sermon 61.35, “The Mystery of Iniquity,” *Works* 3:134.

tracted and diffused, as so much contemporary life is. Only then can the fruit of authentic faith grow.

Further, watchfulness as a posture attentive to God is essential for sustaining ministry. In this eerily relevant passage describing burn out, Wesley warns that in the work of ministry, leaders can become anxious and discouraged. But that is only because they are not mindful of their own spirits, aware of themselves before God, who is the true author of ministry:

It is very possible this fact also may be true; that you have tried to do good, and have not succeeded; yea, that those who seemed reformed, relapsed into sin, and their last state was worse than the first. . . . But the trial hurries and frets your own soul. Perhaps it did so for this very reason, because you thought you was accountable for the event, which no man is, nor indeed can be;—or perhaps, because you was off your guard; you was not watchful over your own spirit. . . . Be more humbled before God, more deeply convinced that of yourself you can do nothing. Be more jealous over your own spirit; more gentle, and watchful unto prayer.²¹

Watchfulness, then, cultivates healthy ministry as it helps leaders perceive both the source and the fruit of ministry, which might otherwise be deemed insufficient.

Finally, and important for fruitfulness, Wesley ties watching to the witness of the Spirit. In "Witness of the Spirit, Discourse 1 (Sermon 21)," Wesley claims that, without watching, Christians "have not the true testimony of [our] own spirit." We are prone to self-deception, convinced that rote religion is, in fact, faith. The "presumptuous pretender to the love of God" is "less watchful over his own heart."²² Without watchfulness we fall into pretense, fulfilling the expectations of others, or even ourselves rather than attending to the testimony of the Spirit. Watching, attentive mindfulness to the testimony of the Spirit to our spirit, cultivates the fruit of real faith.

A corollary of Wesley's claim that watchfulness produces fruit in the Christian life, is the claim that a lack of watchfulness leads to an unfruit-

²¹Wesley, Sermon 24.8, "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount Discourse Four," *Works* 1:546.

²²Wesley, Sermon 21.7, "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount Discourse One," *Works* 1:280.

ful and ineffective witness. 2 Peter warns about unfruitfulness and describes the disciplines that prevent it (2 Peter 1:8). Wesley comments that, without watching, we lack the faith that works by love,

Do not suffer you to be faint in your mind, or without fruit in your lives. If there is less faithfulness, less care and watchfulness . . . we are both slothful and unfruitful in the knowledge of Christ, that is, in the faith, which then cannot work by love.²³

In summary, Wesley uses “watching” in its negative sense to mean vigilance against all that dissipates the Christian life. He uses it in its positive sense to mean attentiveness to God at work in oneself and in all things. In addition, Wesley describes “watchfulness” as an active exertion, a spiritual practice that produces fruit, particularly the fruit of authentic faith.

2. Watching as Means of Grace

We turn now to address watchfulness as a means of grace and identify its soteriological dimension. In addition, we will note how Wesley, always the practical theologian, diagnoses and prescribes watchfulness in different contexts and under different conditions as a means to know God’s grace.

2.1 General Means of Grace

Many are surprised to learn that Wesley places “watching” among the general means of grace, along with “keep all the commandments,” “take up our cross daily,” and “exercise of the presence of God.” Of these, “watching” is surely the most neglected or even entirely dismissed in our own time, yet perhaps the most needed. Contemporary Wesleyans neglect it at our peril, especially in light of Wesley’s astounding claim that, unlike other means of grace that “may be used without fruit,” “Never can you use these means but a blessing will ensue” such that the “more you use them, the more you grow in grace.”²⁴

In his incisive work on Wesley and the means of grace, Knight notes that watching has a general and foundational character as a means of grace, “watching is an essential attitude underlying the disciplined accountability and confessional practices of the classes and bands.”²⁵ This

²³Ibid, 2 Peter 1:8.

²⁴John Wesley, “Large Minutes of Several Conversations between the Rev Mr John and Charles Wesley and others,” Bicentennial Edition, 10:924.

²⁵Knight, 123.

conveys the sense of watching as a fundamental Christian posture or orientation of life as much as a specific practice. Watching is "earnest, constant, persevering exercise," and as such, watching accompanies the Christian life all the way along. Knight's analysis shows that all the general means of grace are intended particularly to resist the formalism that can result from participating in the instituted means of grace only. Watching keeps one focused on God, so to avoid the dissipation that rote religion introduces to erode lively faith. The fruit of authentic faith discussed above results from this attentiveness to God's presence.

2.2 Soteriological Dimension

It's important to locate watchfulness within Wesley's soteriological framework. While watching is both a posture and a practice of the Christian life, it is not a sheer act of the human will. Indeed, The Christian life is first and foremost a response to God's initiating love for all creation, and, therefore, all means of grace are "graced responses to grace received."²⁶ Thus, watching is a response to God's saving work in and with us.

With regards to Wesley's *ordo salutis*, Kenneth Collins observes that "theocentric flavor of Wesley's estimation of works prior to justification is paralleled in his view of works *after* justification (hence preceding entire sanctification)."²⁷ That is, God is just as much at work in sanctification as in justification. Therefore, sanctification is not a matter of the faithful Christian simply getting busy. Rather, the sanctified life attends to what God is up to through, among other things, the means of grace, and thereby walks in the way that leads to life. Referring to Wesley, Collins points out, "he viewed the works which flow from justification as the way God has appointed in which one is to wait for the subsequent change of entire sanctification," and those works include watchfulness, according to Wesley:

Q. How are we to wait for this change (entire sanctification)?

A. Not in careless indifference or indolent inactivity, but in vigorous, universal obedience, in a zealous keeping of all the commandments, in watchfulness . . . in denying ourselves . . . and a close attendance on all the ordinances of God.²⁸

²⁶Knight, 125.

²⁷Kenneth Collins, "A Hermeneutical Model for Wesley's *ordo salutis*," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 19 no 2 Fall 1984, 33.

²⁸Wesley *Works*, 11:402 quoted in Collins, 33.

With this “theocentric flavor” the justified Christian is watchful, actively engaging the means of grace in order to attend to God. Watchfulness, then, is rooted in this soteriological dimension in the working out of salvation.

2.3. Eschatological Dimension

Further, we also note the eschatological dimension of watchfulness within Wesley’s soteriological framework. Most notably in his comments on Jesus’ parables related to servants watching for their master’s return, Wesley hones in on this eschatological dimension.²⁹ However, it is in his comments on Revelation 16:15 that Wesley, in a startling turn of phrase, directs Christians to “observe the beautiful abruptness” of Jesus so that faithful are “looking continually for him” who comes when they do not expect it,

Behold, I come as a thief—Suddenly, unexpectedly. Observe the beautiful abruptness. I—Jesus Christ. Hear him. Happy is he that watcheth.—Looking continually for him that “cometh quickly.”³⁰

Remember that this “looking continually for him” has both the “already” and the “not yet” character entailed in the eschatological dimension of the Christian life. Christians “observe the beautiful abruptness” of Jesus entering their lives with a call to obedience in this present moment. Indeed, this is what Wesley has in mind as he uses the present tense imperative, “observe,” not the future tense, “will observe.” The positive meaning of watchfulness as “inwardly attending on God, to know his will, to gain power to do it . . .”³¹ while often an earnest, steady attentiveness, can also produce the sudden and unexpected experience of Christ breaking into life right here, right now. Indeed, convicting as well as justifying and sanctifying grace has just this quality of inbreaking, like a thief.

Watchfulness is not mere observation, but active participation in and anticipation of, salvation. Through watchfulness Christians come to see and know God’s present work to save and anticipate the fullness of God’s kingdom to come. If asleep, or not watchful (i.e., inattentive), it is easy to miss entirely the “beautiful abruptness” of Jesus’ inbreaking.

²⁹E.g., see *NT Notes*, Matthew 25: 1-13.

³⁰*NT Notes*, Revelation to John 16:15.

³¹*NT Notes*, Ephesians 6:18.

The eschatological dimension of watchfulness is expressly articulated in the emergence of the watch night service. Wesley encouraged the early Methodist Societies to observe watch-night service, an extended night-time service of prayer, singing, and preaching. Initially Wesley offers the watch-night service as a nocturnal alternative to the "wild carousals of the Kingswood miners" near Bristol.³² Many of the converted Methodists had participated in the "drunken ribaldry" in former days and wished to be otherwise occupied on such evenings. Over time, the watch-night service became more widespread in the Methodist movement as a "solemn service," "a particular blessing," a time "when the word of God sunk deep into the heart, even of those who till then knew him not."³³ Watch-night was therefore useful to both the converted and unconverted. Parkes describes that the "watching" in the watch-night service entailed:

The "Watching" in the Watchnight was the "watching unto prayer," the watching for the Lord's outpouring, and the watching of eschatological expectancy. This was largely understood in a realised sense; the Kingdom as here and now in the rapture of praise and the majesty of Christ's light symbolized by hundreds of candles challenging the night.³⁴

Echoing this description of expectancy in the watch-night service, Jonathan Roach says that early watch-nights

were enthusiastic worship services during which the participants waited and watched for the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Elements of corporate and silent individual prayer, songs, and scripture readings were combined to create a sense that "something" great was coming.³⁵

The watch-night service stands, then, as perhaps the concentrated practice of this means of grace that functions to both discipline the Christian life and instill hope for fullness of salvation in the believer.

2.4 Spiritual Diagnoses and Prescriptions

Beyond Wesley's biblical commentary on watchfulness and the theological dimension that places watchfulness squarely within his soteriology,

³²William Parkes, "Watchnight, Covenant Service and the Love-Feast in Early British Methodism," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 32 no 2 Fall 1997, 45.

³³Wesley, "Plain Account of People Called Methodist," quoted in Parkes, 47.

³⁴Parkes, 47.

³⁵"Watch Night: A Time between Times," Roach, Jonathan C. Source: *Worship*, 83 no 4 Jul 2009, 28.

watchfulness has a very practical application as well. Wesley frequently advises its use both because watchfulness is a general means of grace and also because it is adaptable in almost all times and places. Always the practical theologian, he diagnoses spiritual maladies and prescribes watchfulness in different contexts and under different conditions, both for individual and corporate discipline.

Instruction to watchfulness crops up frequently in the primary literature as a corrective to those gone astray as well as offering reinforcement to those on a righteous path. For helping those “still wanting in seriousness,” watchfulness is the recommended strategy.³⁶ For “avoiding formality” in prayer or conversation, watchfulness is prescribed.³⁷

In order to ensure one’s conversations are “more recollected and more useful,” Wesley instructs the use of watchfulness.³⁸ And to guide those who think they have attained entire sanctification, Wesley advises them to “watch always that God may search the ground of their hearts.”³⁹

For Christian conferencing, watchfulness is exhorted again and again as a way to ensure the faithfulness of corporate discernment and witness, so that “all things be considered as in the immediate presence of God.”⁴⁰

We can also note the early development of the watch-night service as an initial pastoral prescription for those rowdy miners in Kingswood. By 1744, the dates for watch-night are fixed monthly in the conference minutes not only for the miners, but also for the societies in London, Bristol, and Newcastle.⁴¹ This focused practice of watchfulness is training ground for the whole Christian life.

In summary, watchfulness is a general means of grace with soteriological and eschatological dimensions woven throughout Wesley’s writings. It is often in his practical application of watchfulness that we see what he has in mind and how it serves to both awaken and keep awake those walking in grace.

³⁶Wesley, “London Conference, May 1754,” Bicentennial Edition 10:283.

³⁷Wesley, “MS Minutes: London Conference, June 1744,” Bicentennial Edition 10:144.

³⁸Wesley, “Bristol Conference 1746,” 10: 182-3. Repeated in the Large Minutes of 1753-63, 10:902.

³⁹John Wesley, “MS Minutes: London Conference, June 1744,” Bicentennial Edition 10:133.

⁴⁰“The ‘Large’ Minutes, A and B (1753, 1763),” Bicentennial Edition 10:844.

⁴¹John Wesley, “MS Minutes: London Conference, June 1744,” Bicentennial Edition 10:144.

3. Watchfulness Within the Larger Historical Stream

The third section will locate Wesley's understanding of "watchfulness" within other historical Christian understandings of mindfulness and attentiveness as formative in the Christian life. We will look at only four other historical examples of watchfulness due to the limited scope here. The first two, *nepsis* and *apatheia*, are more often considered postures of the Christian life and second two, the divine offices and Ignatian attentiveness, are more often concerned practices.

3.1 *Nepsis*

Early spiritual teachers in the Eastern Orthodox tradition highlighted *nepsis*, a watchfulness of heart and mind as central to the Christian life. From the verb *nepho*, to be vigilant, mindful, the practice trained disciples to become attentive particularly to their internal landscape. This carries both the negative and positive meanings of watchfulness. In the negative sense, only when able to be present and aware of thoughts and feelings can the Christian then be vigilant against the passions. In the positive sense, *nepsis* entails focused attending upon God, a noetic perception not of information only but of divine wisdom, something more akin to the heart-knowledge of the Wesleyan tradition. In the *Philokalia* Gregory of Sinai puts it this way in describing the numbing effects of distraction and the need for mindfulness:

For our purity has been overlaid by a state of sense-dominated mindlessness and our original incorruption by the corruption of the flesh . . . mere skill in reasoning does not make a person's intelligence pure, for since the fall our intelligence has been corrupted by evil thoughts . . . the wisdom of this world . . . falls far short of real wisdom and contemplation.⁴²

Still today Orthodox Christians recognize *nepsis* as an ongoing discipline of watchfulness and mindfulness. Wesley's use of watchfulness parallels *nepsis* both in the negative sense of vigilance and in the positive sense of attending upon God.

3.2 *Apatheia*

The concept of *apatheia* develops early in desert monasticism. It means not apathy but a deeper form of freedom from self-interested attach-

⁴²St. Gregory of Sinai, *Philokalia*, ed. G.E.H Palmer, P. Sherrard and K. Ware (Trans) (London: Faber and Faber, 1990). IV:212.

ments, freedom from captivity to the surface clutter of life, freedom from disordered desires to make one's life genuinely available to what God most desires. Apatheia among these teachers is closer to Wesley's positive meaning of watchfulness as attending to God. To rest is apatheia is to be free to pay attention to God's presence here in this moment.

Many of these desert Christians, including Evagrius Ponticus (345–399 CE) and his student, John Cassian (360–435 CE), teach that prayer is rooted first in mindful awareness of God already present if one will only stop and pay attention.⁴³ *Apatheia* is a form of *hesychasm* or quietness, a stilling of the swirl of sensations and thoughts in order to attend to God as deeper reality underneath it all.⁴⁴ The key operative principle of *apatheia* is a simple “being” in God's presence without preoccupations or unconscious drives pulling this way and that.⁴⁵ Evagrius was concerned to counter the numbing effects of an over stimulated life, mentally scattered and out of touch with any spiritual center. *Apatheia* frees one for mindful attention to God's deepest desires. Such watchful freedom from distraction allows participation in God's saving work in human hearts and in the world.

Apatheia is a kenotic practice in the eastern traditions rooted in Philippians 2:5ff where Paul describes the way Jesus “emptied himself” (*kenosis*) to take the form of servant, and thus, surrender his whole being into God. Apatheia as both freedom from attachments and as emptying of clutter, is a posture of available obedience. Through watchfulness, one becomes aware of inappropriate attachments and releases them in order to desire what God desires.

Wesley's notion of watchfulness has some overlap with apatheia, primarily in his insistence that watching helps to release attachments to the wrong things: others approval, wealth, status, formal religion, superficiality. Once freed from these attachments, apatheia then turns awareness and attachment to God. Herein lies continuity with Wesley's notion of watchfulness.

⁴³Evagrius Ponticus, *The Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer*, Cistercian Publications, 1972; John Cassian, *Conferences*, Classics of Western Spirituality, Paulist Press, 1985.

⁴⁴W. Harmless, R. R. Fitzgerald, “The Sapphire Light of the Mind: The Skemmata of Evagrius Ponticus,” *Theological Studies* 2001 6: 498–529.

⁴⁵The use of *apatheia* as free of attachments or agendas is not to be confused with common English use of “apathy,” meaning disinterest or lack of concern.

3.3 Divine Offices

The early Christian practice of observing divine offices follow both from nepesis and apatheia teachings as central to an ordered, monastic life. The practice of set hours for communal prayer throughout the day in monastic life has a rich and complex history. However, for purposes here we note only that it expresses an early institutional recognition of the need for intentional practices and disciplines to exercise watchfulness in the Christian life. The *Rule of Benedict* offers one of the very early iterations of this practice.

In chapter 8-19, *The Rule of Benedict*, sets out the practice of praying the eight canonical hours. These were intended to punctuate daily life, weaving together physical work and attention to God in one fluid whole. These fixed times of prayer were an expression of Benedict's call to "work and pray," insisting that God was not somehow outside the rhythms of daily life, but very much embedded within them. Set times to pause from work and recognize God as author, sustainer, and redeemer in the midst of work was a form of watchfulness.

Without such structural aids to stop and pay attention, the daily grind can make one numb and insensible to God's working in one's life. Benedict alludes to the seduction of busy-ness and the preoccupation of distraction when he declares, "nothing is to be preferred above the work of God" (Chapter 43). Therefore, in Benedict's community, when a monk hears the bell for the divine office, no matter how pressing the task before him, he turns his heart to God. In this way, the divine offices train the faithful's eyes to see God in all things, including and especially the mundane.

The divine offices function as the pattern of mindfulness to become aware of one's present moment and prayerfully so. Wesley's watchfulness does not take nearly this structured form of canonical hours, though we might suspect he would have liked for it to! Still, his concern that watchfulness discipline our eyes to see God at work in all things, including and especially in the mundane, is in continuity with the purpose of the divine hours.

3.4 Ignatian Attentiveness

Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556), the founder of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) and author of the *Spiritual Exercises*, developed spiritual practices that pay attention to our concrete experience of daily life in order to

encounter God. This great spiritual teacher describes this discipline as “finding God in all things and all things in God.”⁴⁶ The whole of Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises* rely on the premise that everything that happens in life, the nitty-gritty details of daily living, opens the path into deeper communion with God. “Do what you are doing,” *age quod agis*, or, pay strict attention to the actions in the present moment. Paying attention, then, to one’s own life as the place God is at work entails a watchfulness that is both vigilant and attends upon God.

To be sure, the goal for Ignatius is holy indifference, a concept we might compare to the deep tradition of apatheia. For Ignatius, holy indifference is freedom from attachments to superficial desires or to particular outcomes so that one has no personal preference for how or where God will show up. Only then are we free from prejudgments, from our own projections and judgments of others, so that we can be watchful for God. Further, holy indifference frees one from the need to control either our environments or God. We are emptied of attachments and completely available for God’s desire to manifest, wherever the Spirit shows up.

The practice of paying attention to our lives in God takes several traditional forms in the Ignatian tradition. First, the Examen is a daily exercise in paying attention and honing perceptions of where and how God is presently at work. Second, the *Spiritual Exercises* are a structured, guided 30 day intensive retreat of daily watchfulness for God in Scripture and in our lives. The third practice is discernment built upon the foundation of paying attention. These are time-tested, powerful tools for spiritual formation in the Ignatian tradition.

Wesley was accused more than once in his own time, most often by his adversaries, of being a Jesuit himself. The parallels between Ignatius’ view of the Christian life and Wesley’s were not lost on eighteenth century hearers.⁴⁷ Many have already compared Wesleyan and Ignatian spirituality. Both Wesley and Ignatius understand watchfulness as a whole-body, whole-life experience.

⁴⁶William A Barry, SJ, *Finding God in All Things: A Companion to the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, Ave Maria Press, 2009, 3.

⁴⁷See Brendan Byrne, S. J., “Ignatius of Loyola and John Wesley: Experience and Strategies of Conversion,” *Colloquium* 19 no 1, October 1986, 54-66; J. S. Simon, *John Wesley and the Advance of Methodism* (London: Epworth, 1925) 74-75; and M. Schmidt, *John Wesley: A Theological Biography* (2 Vols.; London: Epworth, 1962, 1971) Vol. 2, Part I, 173-80.

In summary, Wesley's notion of watchfulness resides within a larger stream of Christian teaching and practice. These four examples (nepesis, apatheia, the divine offices and Ignatian attentiveness) begin to identify a larger Christian tradition of attentiveness to God, though we could also discuss many others, including Brother Lawrence's "practicing the presence of God." We can locate Wesley's notions of watchfulness within these points of continuity.

4. Watchfulness for Today

Having examined Wesley's use of watchfulness, its role as a means of grace, and some points within the larger Christian tradition of attentive practices, we close with a few preliminary conclusions about the recovery of this means of grace for Wesleyans today, as well as some lines of investigation regarding its application as a prudential means of grace for our digital age.

4.1 Hunger for this General Means of Grace

We know it well, the tendency in American culture to rush through daily life at a breathless pace from one thing to the next, as we jump mentally ahead to the next thing while doing this one. To reply to emails and update our calendars while sitting in a meeting at work. To multitask our way through the day and pull into the driveway with no memory of driving home. To be numbed by over stimulation and continually preoccupied. To never truly be present to the moment we're actually living.

The hunger I hear about over and over from students, friends, and in the wider culture, is a hunger to live the real life that I'm living here and now. Not the life that happened yesterday as I re-play a conversation over and over in my head. Not the life that will happen tomorrow as I anticipate a crammed day. Not the edited life that I project online. This is a hunger to live deeply and truly, to know and inhabit our own lives, to be at home this life right now.

Often this hunger is expressed through weariness with chronically over-scheduled lives. I hear this especially from parents and families. They hunger for a life that runs deep, not just wide. They describe a life diffused across the surface of things yet never able to stop and savor it deeply. This hunger is expressed as a longing for focus in the midst of distractions or as a desire for rootedness that goes deep rather than living in scattered fragments. Sometimes we simply long to be one person living one life, rather than feeling like we are several people living multiple lives.

Jesus calls this hunger for “abundant life.” Abundant life is the life God desires for all of us. A life that is real, not fake. A life that is true, not false. A life that is whole, not fragmented. A life fully sensory, including our spiritual senses, not numbed. A life that is rooted, not scattered. A life that is connected to those we love, not disembodied in distraction. A life rooted in love, not anxiety or fear. “I come that they may have life and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10b). Jesus promises abundant life, the fullness of life God desires for each of us.

Wesley calls this abundant life a life of holiness. Watching as a general means of grace looks toward holiness of heart and life. The recovery of watchfulness as both a posture and a practice for holiness may be a corrective in a runaway world whose false promises do not lead to life abundant. This “earnest, constant, persevering exercise” keeps us present to the world in front of us and to God’s saving work in it. Watchfulness cultivates eyes to see and ears to hear the work of God the Spirit in us and around us, right here, right now.

4.2 Watchfulness and Mindfulness

In our own time, the mindfulness movement is an expression of the hunger for a more rooted, authentic life. This popular movement has spread rapidly in our culture, from neuroscience to public schools to cognitive-behavioral therapy to yoga classes to corporate training. Yet many people assume that mindfulness practice belongs exclusively to eastern religions. Indeed, most world religions offer some form of mindfulness practice. As we’ve seen, Christianity, too, has a long history of attentive postures and practices that can be located within the mindfulness rubric.

Given the hunger of our times for centering spiritual practices and rapid growth of the mindfulness movement, I invite Wesleyans to explore watchfulness as a form of Christian mindfulness. Might the vocabulary of mindfulness be useful to recover watchfulness as a general means of grace? One working definition of Christian mindfulness is “the practice of paying prayerful attention to the present moment in order to discover and live God’s abundant life.”⁴⁸

⁴⁸Compare this to the well-known definition by leading proponent of mindfulness, Jon Kabat-Zinn, “Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way; On purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally.” In *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life*, (Hyperion, 1994) 4.

Christian mindfulness is rooted biblically and historically in the Christian tradition.⁴⁹ And has as its *telos* the Triune Life of God. That is, mindfulness begins with awareness of one's concrete, physical experience of the present moment and, through prayerful attention moves in and through that physical experience to a deeper awareness of God's presence and work. Christian mindfulness cultivates "eyes to see" and "ears to hear" the kingdom of God that is at hand, similar to Wesley's notion of watchfulness.

4.3 Mindfulness as a Prudential Means of Grace

Wesley employs this very practical category of "prudential means of grace" whereby God provides means of grace prudent to a particular moment in history or a particular place and context. This God who "became flesh and dwelt among us" is the God who always meets us where we are. While the general means of grace remain operative and effective, prudential means of grace are "audibles," practices that tether us to God's grace in particular activity or historical moment. Most well-known is the list of "works of mercy" which Wesley identified as prudential means of grace: doing good, visiting the sick and prisoners, feeding and clothing people, etc. This list is not exhaustive, however, as Kevin Watson points out,

Wesley would later define the class and band meetings as prudential means of grace. By this, he meant that the classes and bands were the particular ways that God had led Methodism to so effectively practice one of the instituted means of grace—Christian conferencing.⁵⁰

In our own day, the nearly constant distraction demanded by various screens—computers, smartphones, tablets, televisions—make it especially difficult if not impossible to practice watchfulness as a general means of grace. Wesley himself acknowledges that watchfulness takes a "mighty exertion of all the affections of the soul," and, as such, surely requires some structures or methods to exercise.

⁴⁹The central thesis of *God Here Now*.

⁵⁰Kevin Watson, "Christian Conferencing as a Means of Grace," *Wesleyan Accent: Following Jesus in the Company of the Wesleys*, accessed February 24, 2016, <http://wesleyanaccent.seedbed.com/2014/11/06/kevin-watson-christian-conferencing-means-grace/>.

In the same way that the class and band meetings were the “particular ways” God provided to practice Christian conferencing, perhaps there are “particular ways” God is providing to effectively practice Christian watchfulness today. Perhaps mindfulness practice, as found in Christian tradition, is a prudential means of grace for our own digital age.

In the same way that class and band meetings become regulated, that is, ordered by a rule, over time, so mindfulness practice will need intentional development to become an expressly prudential means of grace. We cannot simply adopt popular cultural practices, slap the label “means of grace” on them, and endorse them as valid Wesleyan or even Christian practices. Still, given that 1) the deep hunger for rootedness in God that is evidenced not only among over-stimulated Christians but also among the “spiritual but not religious,” and given that 2) the centrality of Wesley’s consistent teaching on watchfulness, this line of investigation may be promising.

The practice of Christian mindfulness, defined as the practice of paying prayerful attention to the present moment in order to discover and live God’s abundant life, could promote the Wesleyan practice of watchfulness in lives of holiness, particularly in digital contexts. The forms such mindfulness practice might take are many and beyond the scope here.

5. Conclusion

To summarize: the notion of watchfulness is central in Wesley’s teaching on the Christian life. It functions in both the negative sense of vigilance and the positive sense of attending to God. Wesley teaches that, as a general means of grace, watchfulness bears fruit without fail and roots Christians in an authentic faith sensibly aware of God’s presence with us now and in the fullness of salvation to come. Watchfulness stands within a historic Christian tradition of mindful attention on God. The Christian tradition of mindfulness practice may offer a prudential means for exercising watchfulness in post-modern life.

**THE ONTIC SIGNIFICANCE OF
GOD'S ESCHATOLOGICAL WORD:
ROBERT JENSON'S POTENTIAL VIA MEDIA
BETWEEN IMPARTATION AND IMPUTATION**

by

Jonathan Platter

Introduction

Between theologians of the Reformed tradition and those of the Wesleyan, there exists a difference in the articulation of salvation, especially pertaining to how righteousness is received in the new birth. The standard distinction is between impartation (the Wesleyan view) and imputation of righteousness (Reformed). Another way to express this difference is to say that according to the Wesleyan view, we receive the righteousness of Christ as something we may become whereas according to the Reformed, we are merely called righteous. If the Reformed perspective admits of more than nominalist righteousness, it often grants righteousness only to the eschatological self who remains "hidden in Christ."¹

Robert Jenson's theology breaks down the sharp distinction in this dichotomy in two ways: first, Jenson uses word/speech as a metaphysical category. Because God is triune, the divine discourse by which God's life is constituted is the very speech through which creatures have being.

¹Yet another typology of these differences has been used of the Reformed/Catholic debate, which is longer standing and yet similar to the debate of the Reformed with Wesleyans. In the former, the difference is characterized as the "proclamatory" vs the "transformational" conceptions of justification. Robert Jenson frames his discussion in the terms of the Reformed/Catholic ecumenical discussions, using the proclamatory/transformational rubric. He then posits that these two perspectives arise from a difference of questions, to which a third can be added, that of St Paul himself, which Jenson frames with the question, "How does God maintain his righteousness?" See Robert W Jenson, "Justification as a Triune Event," *Modern Theology* 11:4 (October 1995), 421-3; for quotation see 422. I am not using his threefold typology here because of the difference of aim of my paper; nonetheless, his discussion is interesting in its own right. More on his framing of "proclamatory" (which he ends up preferring to call "metalinguistic") and "transformational" below.

Hence, there is no longer a sharp distinction between what persons are “called” by God and what we may become through the Spirit in Christ.

Second, Jenson sets God’s act of creation into an eschatological context. This is in a sense an implication of how Jenson works out the metaphysics above. Giving such ontological priority to the Spirit’s liberating and eschatological action, our righteous selves, who are “hidden in Christ” (qua Reformed emphasis), have a genuine bearing on the present possibility to become righteous, for the eschatological Spirit is the Spirit of all creaturely freedom.

Through an examination of these themes in the theology of Robert Jenson, I will argue that one may find a potential rapprochement between Wesleyan and Reformed articulations of justification/new birth in these creative theological proposals. By framing creation in an eschatological context and by granting “word” metaphysical import, Jenson’s theology offers a potential *via media*. I will first briefly diagnose the current aporia as a metaphysical problem. The positions seem incommensurable because they both default to a false metaphysical picture. Then I will turn to an analysis of Jenson’s alternative revisionary metaphysic and show how it resolves this aporia, thereby offering a potential “*via media*.”

A Metaphysical Aporia in Discussions of Justification

On their own, and without further qualification or supplementation from other doctrines, imputation and impartation theologies of justification run up against a metaphysical problem: how can the event of justification be wholly an act of God and be true of the creature without either minimizing the present significance of justification for the life of the person or potentially blurring the distinction between God and creature? The problem framed thusly already reveals the metaphysical problem; namely, do Creator and creatures stand in a competitive causal relation? The problem is with both adjectives; on the one hand, with conceptualizing the God-world relation in such a way that the two could be in competition at all, and on the other hand, in placing their relation under the category of causation.²

²Katherine Sonderegger also discusses the problem with using causal categories for God’s relation with creation. She resolves the problem by reframing it in terms of God’s *personal* nature and hence personal relation to creation, which is similar to how Jenson frames the relation. See Katherine Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology*, Vol 1: *The Doctrine of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 176–85, 300–25. See Robert W. Jenson “Some Riffs on Thomas Aquinas’s *De ente et essentia*,” in *Theological Theology: Essays in Honor of John Webster*, ed R. David Nelson, Darren Sarisky, and Justin Stratis (New York: Bloomsbury T. & T. Clark, 2015), 126–8.

In the concern to maintain that God's action in justification is wholly a divine act, the affirmation of God's agency can be taken to imply the exclusion of human agency. Two options then result; one can either affirm that God is the sole agent in justification or divide up the causes in the event, assigning some to God (probably the most important ones) and others to humans.³ So, a temptation in the imputation model is to reject any human causal agency in preference for the all-sufficiency of Christ's imputed righteousness and merit.⁴ And a Wesleyan temptation is to treat initial justification as strictly by grace through faith but perseverance as, in part, contingent on human action.

These are of course caricatures, and yet they still operate in some of the polemics. My point is that insofar as they operate in the polemics, they indicate a default metaphysical picture, one in which God is causally related to creation such that divine and creaturely causation are in competition with one another.⁵ Jenson would further add to this metaphysical picture that it presumes a "monadic" God whose agency is as such extrinsic and unilateral.⁶

Jenson's Revisionary Metaphysics

Every metaphysic takes certain data as givens—as the basic facts with which its vision must comport. Throughout Jenson's career, he has consistently remarked that the givens of the gospel *should* lead to a different metaphysic than what has been received from the Greeks. For some this entails a complete rejection of metaphysics. For Jenson, in contrast, this

³Calvin almost unequivocally rejects the latter possibility by *presuming* the former. So: "Thus according to them [the "Sophists"], man is justified by faith as well as by works, provided these are not his own works, but gifts of Christ and fruits of regeneration . . . But they observe not that in the antithesis between Legal and Gospel righteousness, which Paul elsewhere introduces, all kinds of works, with whatever name adorned, are excluded, (Galatians 3:11, 12.)," John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III.xi.14.

⁴Ibid. Also, Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xi.2, III.xv.6.

⁵Jenson provides a very similar diagnosis of these pitfalls treating them as fundamentally category mistakes that, whatever their virtues, "they are theological catastrophes." See Robert W Jenson, "The Holy Spirit," in *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol 2, ed Carl E Braaten and Robert W Jenson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1984), 128.

⁶Jenson, "Justification as Triune Event," 426.

leads to a new analysis of the concept of “being.”⁷ And the givens that our metaphysic should help make intelligible are precisely those concerning the man Jesus Christ and his being for creatures.⁸ Jenson can approvingly quote from the Catholic-Anglican dialogue, “God’s grace effects what he declares; his creative word *imparts what it imputes*.”⁹ We will ask: what must the metaphysical fact of the matter be for this to make sense? Who must God be in God’s relation to us?¹⁰ But first, I will explain how Jenson interprets the language of imputation and impartation, which will prepare the way for the metaphysical investigation.

Justification as Enacted, Unconditional Promise

Jenson has been concerned about the proper conception of imputation for some time. To recognize its role in his thought, one need only look to the centrality of promise for his interpretation of the gospel and for his

⁷Jenson explains why he is attracted to the New Finnish interpretation of Luther: it allows him to *use* Luther’s perspective on being in the event of justification as a constructive starting point in his own revisionary metaphysics. Robert W Jenson, “Response to Tuomo Mannermaa, ‘Why is Luther So Fascinating?’” in *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*, ed Carl E Braaten and Robert W Jenson (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans, 1998), 21.

⁸Mark Mattes claims that Jenson’s interpretation of justification shifted from an existentialist-type understanding of justification as primarily a recognition of word as promise as a distinct form of discourse to an ecclesiological and eschatological doctrine based on the future visible unity of the Church; Mark C Mattes, *The Role of Justification in Contemporary Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans, 2004), 117-8. However, he does not explain why he believes these are different positions in Jenson’s work. On the contrary, they both seem to derive from the center of Jenson’s program, that God is whoever raised Jesus from the dead and that this fact is the interpretive key of all reality. If this is Jenson’s guide, then the two distinct views that Mattes detects are easily seen as of a piece. Where, after all, do we receive word as unconditional promise but in the community that gathers around and as Christ’s body? Further, what Mattes discusses as an “existentialist” understanding is Jenson’s interpretation of the Reformation doctrine of justification as a metalinguistic rule for proclamation. As I will argue below, this understanding remains in Jenson and is a complement to the ecclesiological formulation that emphasizes the transformation and unity of God’s priestly work in justification.

⁹Robert W Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, Vol 2: *The Works of God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 294; citing from Anglican—Roman Catholic International Conversation, *Justification*, 15. Jenson’s emphasis. Henceforth cited as *ST* 2.

¹⁰*Ibid.* Also, Jenson, “Justification as Triune Event,” 424f.

revisionary metaphysics. A promise is a word or a gesture whereby one is opened up to a new future. Promise is fundamental to all personal encounters, for when another addresses me, I receive a new future, a possibility I would not have had if left to myself. However, words and personal addresses can become "law" rather than promise. A word becomes law, according to Jenson, when another binds me to a future to which I am not free in giving consent. In our fallen state in which our desires, and consequently our polities, are fragmented, our words to one another are characteristically law rather than promise.¹¹

The problem with promises, especially when they become specific, is that we can never guarantee that they will be fulfilled. Consequently, our promises are always conditional, at least implicitly. Bracketing out our proclivities for failure, there is one ultimate condition on all our promises: death. Because we will die, at least some of our promises will go unfulfilled, and this includes our promises of fidelity—to spouses, communities, and to our covenant God. Because "covenant-making is the purpose of creating . . . [and the] goal of all things is a holy community,"¹² our inability to make good on our promises compromises God's intent for creation. There is one, however, in and through whom unconditional promises can be made. This is Jesus Christ, the man who died and yet is raised. Having overcome death, Jesus' promises are unconditional. Because Jesus is the Word by that God creates, he is the enactment of God's unconditional promise: he is the gospel.¹³

This is necessary for understanding how Jenson understands "imputation." Justification as imputation is not a doctrine but a metalinguistic rule for correct proclamation, or "hermeneutical instruction to preachers."¹⁴ The rule goes like this, "so speak of Christ and of the life of your community that the justification for that life which your words open is

¹¹Robert W Jenson, "Violence as a Mode of Language," in *Essays in Theology of Culture* (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans, 1995), 43-4; Robert W Jenson, *Story and Promise: A Brief Theology of the Gospel About Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1973), 28-30, 37-41, 49-50, 77.

¹²Robert W Jenson, "What Kind of God Can Make a Covenant?," in *Covenant and Hope: Christian and Jewish Reflections*, ed Robert W Jenson and Eugene B Korn (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans, 2012), 7.

¹³Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, Vol 1: *The Triune God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 168-71; ST 2:318-21. Henceforth cited as ST 1.

¹⁴Jenson, "The Holy Spirit," 130. My thanks to John Drury for directing my attention to this passage.

the kind grasped by faith rather than the kind constituted by works.”¹⁵ So Jenson finally summarizes that “promise” is rightly understood as “that radical proclamation of Christ that by its *nonlegal* character, by its *unconditional* bestowing of forgiveness and *unconditional* assuring of final salvation is itself God’s act to make all humanity right.”¹⁶ Imputation is a name for this rule for proper proclamation. Because Christ is the enacted word of God’s promise to restore creation, the preacher is able to proclaim justification without conditions, so that “You are Jesus’ beloved” is the illocutionary and perlocutionary content of genuine proclamation.¹⁷

Consequently, talk of “imputation” and “impartation” are each responding to different questions. The former is concerned with the metalinguistic rules for genuine proclamation. The latter is concerned with the transformation that takes place. The former is a rule for speech, the latter is a proper matter of doctrine. Distinguishing the terms in this way makes progress toward rapprochement between Reformed and Wesleyan, for if Jenson’s analysis is correct they are not contradictory but supplementary. However, this serves to make the metaphysical question more precise: insofar as God’s “creative word *imparts what it imputes*,” God makes justification-as-transformation actual in the Church through proclamation as unconditional promise. And here Jenson’s trinitarian metaphysic will bring coherence to this picture of justification by clarifying the nature of reality such that Christian proclamation can effect unconditional promise through Christ and that this word forms a community that, through justification, is transformed into God’s faithful covenant partner.¹⁸

One might wonder how this discussion comports with recent work in Pauline theology, especially the so-called “new perspective” (which NT Wright has playfully admitted is “now less ‘new’ than once it was”).¹⁹ One excellent dialogue partner would be Michael Gorman, who has shown how Paul’s understanding of justification is much broader than both “imputation”—even when understood as a metalinguistic rule—and what

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Jenson, “The Holy Spirit,” 132.

¹⁷Jenson, “The Holy Spirit,” 134.

¹⁸On this note, I think there are hints of commonality between Jenson and the so-called “new perspective” on Paul. I will discuss this briefly in the concluding section on further constructive work on justification.

¹⁹N. T. Wright, *Justification: God’s Plan & Paul’s Vision*, with a new Introduction (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016), 8.

Jenson dubs "Paul's question," by which he means God's maintenance of divine justice. Gorman argues for a new construal of union with Christ in Paul (understood as cruciformity, or non-identical repetition of Christ in his faithful life of kenosis), one that has greater resonance with Orthodox and patristic doctrines of *theosis*.²⁰ Justification according to Gorman names the believer's share in the story of Jesus Christ through co-crucifixion and resurrection, thereby being engrafted into Christ's new community of faithful covenant partners to God.²¹

This makes a great deal of progress toward an ecumenical reading of Paul, and one which is *prima facie* compatible with Jenson's work. In fact, it shares much with Jenson's understanding of the transformational question of justification (which is, again, a properly *doctrinal* rather than metalinguistic concern). This describes the reality that is proclaimed as unconditional promise, according to Jenson's rendering of imputation. So we might gloss Jenson's metalinguistic rule with a new perspective rendering by saying: *so preach that it is made clear that Christ alone, in his life, death, and resurrection has made you a member of the reconciled, justified people of God—and that even as Gentiles, apart from inclusion in the works of Torah*. Imputation and impartation go together as different modes of discourse concerning the significance of Christ's death and resurrection. The metaphysics of the doctrine of justification still must be examined, because for many theologians it is due to an inherited metaphysical picture that the default purely forensic reading of justification has plausibility, which is part of the problem I laid out above as the metaphysical aporia.

Creator—Creature Relation

According to Jenson, we struggle to make sense of seemingly divergent views of justification—even when we recognize their difference in orientation—because we presume a metaphysic that has not been properly baptized.²² To give a brief entry into the proposed alternative, I will take

²⁰Michael J Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans, 2009).

²¹Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*, passim, especially 105-28, 161-72.

²²Jenson, "Justification as Triune Event," and Robert W Jenson, *Unbaptized God: The Basic Flaw in Ecumenical Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1992), where the defense and exposition of this charge is the main task of the final chapter, 132-47.

the classic Creator-creature distinction. In Thomistic categories, the difference between God and creatures lies in the fact that in God essence and existence are identical, whereas in creatures they are distinct. Jenson admits he has long been convinced by this way of putting the matter.²³ The essence and existence distinction, however, is quite different in Jenson than in Thomas, in large part because of his commitment to God's triunity and temporality. So Jenson can "riff" on Aquinas to rethink creaturely being in light of God's creative act in terms of *address*—God gives *esse* to creatures by addressing them.²⁴ He continues, "the inner whence and whither of a composite creature will be that of the partner in a conversation with God, in and by which it is granted being: the whence, the 'matter,' will be the hearing of God's address, the whither, the 'form,' the responding to it, and the unity of both, the *essentia*, will be faith."²⁵

This is a Luther-Thomas hybrid. Following Luther, Jenson takes "word" as a basic metaphysical category. Rather than speaking of creaturely being in terms of "substance," Jenson speaks of creatures as invited participants in God's triune dialogue. In God's own life there is both whence and whither, as the Father and Spirit. The Father is the first speaker who in so speaking speaks the Son, who as the perfect expression of the Father is also speech in return.²⁶ So, as the generative act of speaking, the Father is the "whence." As acts of speaking, the Father and Son are freed to be distinct acts by the Spirit, who is the "whither" in God, the power of God's own future.²⁷

This is a controversial piece of Jenson's thought, which I think has been misunderstood. Without the space to adequately exposit the metaphysics, I will note two things: first, that the Spirit is the power of the

²³Jenson, "Riffs on Aquinas," 125. This may seem surprising to some of Jenson's readers, given his at times vehement attacks on divine simplicity, which is a name for the identity of essence and existence in God. The attack on simplicity is related not to Jenson's positive use of the essence-existence identity, but rather to the complicity of divine simplicity in idealizing timelessness. So, when Jenson's rethinks being through a positive understanding of time, simplicity has a role, however dramatically different its entailments are than in the classical Thomistic metaphysic. In this recent essay, Jenson concedes that his problems with divine simplicity do not extend to this aspect of Thomas's doctrine, Jenson, "Riffs on Aquinas," 129n17.

²⁴Jenson, *ST* 2:6-7, 38; Jenson, "Some Riffs on Aquinas," 127-8.

²⁵Jenson, "Riffs on Aquinas," 128.

²⁶Jenson, *ST* 1:223. See also Jenson, "Riffs on Aquinas," 130.

²⁷Jenson, *ST* 1:160, see also 218.

future for God's own self does not entail that God *will* only be a dramatic unity at some future time, but rather that God's self as Spirit *is* the Goal, perfected in Father and Son.²⁸ Because God *is* Spirit and the Spirit is the subsistent relation of final unity in God, God enjoys this unity eternally. The important point, which is unfortunately misinterpreted, is that God's unity is a dramatic, enacted unity in the Spirit. God's very being is personal, and so God's unity is eternally enacted by the consummation of the love of the Father and Son by the Spirit. God's "whence and whither" are not therefore distinct points that can be plotted on a linear time-line but are the principles (I am borrowing a Thomistic term) of source and end, *arche* and *telos*.

Second, the Spirit is not the principle of goal as a distinct "entity" or object in God who enacts final unity over against the other two in God (which is what would have to be the case for this futurity to be a to-be-awaited-unity) but is a subsistence relation, which is a term that Jenson has self-consciously retrieved from Thomas to understand how God is simple (in the sense of the identity of essence and existence) and yet three persons. As a subsistence relation, the Spirit does not affect eschatological freedom and unity as a distinct term in relation to Father and Son, but rather *as identical to the perfecting relation of the love of Father and Son*.²⁹

Jenson is operating with analogical language here in using "whence and whither" of God. To understand the function of this analogy in creaturely temporality, an illustration from analytic philosophy's notion of "truth-makers" might help. God as Father is *that by virtue of which* creatures have their being as given, brute fact; God as Spirit is *that by virtue of which* creatures have future as promise.³⁰ And these relations are not reducible to the economy, but are true by virtue of God's inner-trinitarian life. God is the "truth-maker" of creatures' whence and whither. Because Jenson holds a form of Rahner's Rule, this does not require a distinct immanent Trinity, but rather that the inner-trinitarian life *is* the truth-maker of creatures' whence and whither by offering space and time for

²⁸This is the "Hegelian" charge against Jenson, paradigmatically instanced in George Hunsinger, "Robert Jenson's *Systematic Theology*: a review essay," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 55:2 (2002), 182-7.

²⁹"Subsistence relation" has had a prominent role in all of Jenson's trinitarian reflection, beginning in Jenson, *Story and Promise*, 127; Robert W Jenson, *The Triune Identity: God According to the Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1982), 107, 123-5; Jenson, *ST* 1:116-9; Jenson, "Riffs on Aquinas," 130.

³⁰See Jenson, *ST* 2:5-6, 13-4 respectively, also 38-44.

creatures to participate in the divine life. The fact that the Spirit is Goal for God's own self is that by virtue of which creatures have a future to be received as a freedom beyond themselves.³¹

Justification as a Triune Event

Creation and justification share an ontological structure as events because they are enacted by the same triune God. And it is appropriate to gloss justification as "new creation" or "new birth." Accordingly, Jenson is able to unify disparate conceptualities of justification by attending its trinitarian shape. He can then explain that there are three aspects of justification, two of which form the antinomy of this paper, which can be mapped onto the three persons in God's creative action.

First, he introduces what he calls "Paul's question" of justification, namely, "How does God maintain his righteousness?"³² Jenson appropriates this to the Father:

The Pauline question plainly invites interpretation as a question about precisely the Father's role in one divine act of righteousness *ad extra* . . . The only kind of explanation that can be given . . . : the Father justifies because he "loves," or . . . because he is "free." Why and how is there righteousness? . . . The only answer is "Because God is God," to which "Because God so decides" is simply equivalent.³³

As the Father's role in creating is to speak creatures into being, as brute fact of existence, so the Father's role in justification is decision that it be so. The Father speaks righteousness and thereby things are made right. That the Father grants creatures their *esse* through personal address means that there is continuity in my personhood when God "decides" for righteousness. That God's decision does not obliterate sinful creatures, that it is not simply a rejection of unfaithful creation, is only by virtue of the Father's gracious act of giving being in this decision.

Second, the Reformation's "imputation" is appropriated to the Son. This was discussed above as the "metalinguistic rule" for proclamation. When the Father decides that creatures are justified, this is so only first as a decision about Christ. Christ, the Son, is faithful in his promises, and thereby we may receive righteousness in him. So:

³¹Also for the Father, *mutatis mutandis*.

³²Jenson, "Justification as Triune Event," 422.

³³Jenson, "Justification as Triune Event," 425.

It happens as the risen Christ's word is spoken and believed, as the word that he *is* occurs among us. That is, in the mutuality of word and soul, we are righteous as we are one with the Son, as we are his body and his spouse. . . . in all these propositions about actuality, "the Son" denotes the actual Son, the incarnate Son, the risen crucified man, whose divine righteousness is itself achieved as a human event.³⁴

By the Son's act in creating, the Father's word of address *ad extra* has definite content. In the Son, creaturely being is "their material determination by the moral will of God."³⁵ In the *new* creation that is justification, the Son is the *re*-determination of our beings by the moral decision of God in Christ. And in Christ humanity receives the divine attributes via the *communicatio idiomatum*.³⁶ So the life God enjoys in the triune fellowship is not extrinsic to justification, but is genuinely granted to the hearer of Christ's promise. Because of Christ's resurrection, our humanity shares in a life that can speak genuine promise without fear of our finite conditions for its fulfillment. The promised life in Christ effected in justification is the only coherent form of life available to creatures, for only in and through Christ is our matter and form—our whence and whither—united in a single hypostasis, our *essentia* granted through faith in the Son.³⁷

Third, the Wesleyan "impartation" emphasis is fittingly appropriated to the Spirit. "Justification as an act of the Spirit is . . . the *fulfilling* of righteousness . . . the movement of our righteousness, its eschatological liveliness."³⁸ Just as in creating, the Spirit brings spontaneity, future, and freedom to creatures; in justification the Spirit makes it possible for creatures to *become* truly righteous persons—to live holy lives. Because the

³⁴Jenson, "Justification as Triune Event," 425-6. This shows, contra Mattes, that for Jenson the personal, existential understanding of justification is one with the ecclesiological; we hear the word of justification as we are bound to Christ in his body (which is the Church). See note 8 above. Mattes, *The Role of Justification in Contemporary Theology*, 117-8.

³⁵Jenson, *ST* 2:45.

³⁶Which the Finnish interpretation of Luther makes possible for Jenson's "Reformed" question on justification. See Tuomo Mannermaa, "Why is Luther So Fascinating?: Modern Finnish Luther Research," in *Union with Christ*, ed Braaten and Jenson, 13-9.

³⁷Jenson, "Riffs on Aquinas," 128.

³⁸Jenson, "Justification as Triune Event," 426.

Spirit addresses us, we have a future in which to respond to God. Because the Spirit addresses us with the resurrected Son, this future is a promise without the limits of death. It is an eschatological liberation in which an anticipated unity is granted—the “holy community” that is the goal of all things.³⁹ The Church is integral to the “impartation” of righteousness, for to become faithful covenant-partners with God entails a covenant community. Through the Spirit’s agency, we can live into the promises necessary to enact the holy community that God elects. The Church and its members anticipate a final restoration in which the future redemption of all things is accomplished. The Spirit animates the Church’s life as a genuine present foretaste of this eschatological fellowship.

Resolution of the Metaphysical Aporia

When I setup the problem, I blamed two hidden assumptions for the impasse, together forming a false metaphysical picture. God and creation were wrongly construed (1) as in competition and (2) as in a causal relation. After working through Jenson’s alternative metaphysic and resolution to the problems in debates on justification, a noncompetitive, non-causal approach is possible.

The God-world relation is noncompetitive because creaturely freedom is itself a participation in God’s creative freedom. Every temporal pole of creaturely existence is what it is by virtue of God’s triune act of creation. Importantly, that includes creatures’ openness to the future. Freedom is the spontaneity to become otherwise than what has been. Justification is a freedom to share the life God calls us to Christ—freedom to be faithful to our covenanting God. Thus, if justification were purely forensic—purely imputed—then freedom—and thereby genuine *faithfulness*—would be precluded. But God’s creativity is not purely unilateral *dictation*, but free invitation to *conversation*. Our very being is a “being-spoken,” which in the Spirit is freed to talk back. So also, because of the Spirit’s gift, we are able to respond faithfully or faithlessly—and neither one is in competition with God’s provision of being and freedom.

The God-world relation is non-causal because it is first and foremost *personal*.⁴⁰ God creates not by *causing* creation as an *effect* but by *addressing* the triune conversation to an other than God’s self. The causal model mistakes the God-world relation as purely univocal, as if creatures stand

³⁹Jenson, “What Kind of God Can Make a Covenant?” 7.

⁴⁰Jenson, “Riffs on Aquinas,” 126-8.

as one term in a univocal relation in which God is the more causally powerful other term.⁴¹ Rather, creatures are analogically related to God as that which is spoken by the One who is eternally Speech. "Discourse' is one of [God's] names."⁴² God is God's own act of speech, whereas creatures speak only as they are first spoken. This follows from the way Jenson reformulates the essence-existence distinction in creatures. Just as creatures are created by the word, when God "calls" persons righteous, when God addresses creatures as faithful ones, a discourse opens up (in the Spirit's liberating gift of divine love) through which a faithful word may be offered back to God. In this way persons can *become* what they have been *called*, so God "imparts what he imputes."⁴³

Conclusion

When theology guides metaphysics, when the gospel is the norm for interpreting reality, these seemingly divergent accounts of justification can be recognized as illuminations of a single event, an event with a triune shape. Impartation and imputation are competing doctrines only when they presume a monadic God, acting in causal competition with creatures. Jenson provides an alternative. How should this alternative be used for future reflection on justification?

The move to appropriate aspects of justification to the triune persons is compelling and provides a robustly Christian approach to resolving the metaphysical problem of God's action in regeneration. When a received metaphysic restricts our ability to speak the gospel in the idiom of scripture and tradition, then the problem is most likely with the metaphysic itself. Jenson's trinitarian and dialogical metaphysic is an exemplar of what such an alternative project might be.

The approach exemplified by Jenson, in which metaphysics are made to comport with the view that God addresses creatures creatively and transformationally, will pair well with Pauline studies for interaction between biblical and systematic theologians. Further, it provides a compelling approach to crossing a traditionally divisive boundary, honoring the best of multiple traditions on the new life granted in Christ.

⁴¹Jenson does allow a sense of univocity between God and creatures; see *ST* 2:38.

⁴²Jenson, "Riffs on Aquinas," 130.

⁴³See note 8 above.

**GOD'S ESSENTIAL WILL TO LOVE:
A RESPONSE TO THOMAS J. OORD'S
CRITICISM OF KARL BARTH'S
THEOLOGY OF DIVINE REASON**

by

Matthias Gockel and John Daniel Holloway, III

Thomas Jay Oord has accused Karl Barth of a crime. With by-standers, reporters, police officers, and detectives present, Oord brings forward the charge that Barth betrayed God's essential nature as love by prioritizing divine freedom. Now that Oord's case is brought in as evidence, we must decide if Barth is guilty. Endlessly controversial, Barth is no stranger to accusations. Throughout his life, he spoke boldly and was not afraid to cause a scandal. Would it really be much of a surprise if Barth truly did the deed? The court of popular opinion might easily resolve the case in favor of Oord, but we should not be so quick to put Barth behind bars.

What will be demonstrated is that this is a case of mistaken identity. Oord mistook Barth for another, less sophisticated theologian. Ultimately, Barth can and will be vindicated, and his concept of divine freedom explained. It will be demonstrated that Barth, rather than offering a portrait of a capricious God who is more free than loving, is actually more in agreement with Oord than would have been guessed. Barth, like Oord, affirms God's nature as love and definitively states that God's exercise of freedom will always look like love; that God cannot decline to love because it is in God's very nature to love.

Oord's Assessment of Barth's Theology

Oord, in his book *The Nature of Love: A Theology*, criticizes Karl Barth for his theology of God's freedom. According to Oord's reading of Barth, "God's nature does not include God's love for the world."¹ That is, God chooses to love us, but could choose otherwise because God is free from any and all obligation toward humans. Oord quotes Barth: "God's freedom constitutes the essential positive quality, not only of His action

¹Thomas Jay Oord, *The Nature of Love: A Theology* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2010), 7.

toward what is outside Himself, but also of His own inner being.”² This rendering of God’s nature is problematic for Oord because it means “God’s love for creatures depends ultimately upon God’s arbitrary choice whether or not to love them.”³ Barth’s theology, Oord says, “results in freedom trumping love,” because “God’s freedom from us [is] more important than God’s love for us.”⁴ Even further, he says that for Barth, “freedom from the world is essential to God’s nature.”⁵ As Oord sees it, God in Barth’s theology is not bound to love humans and so does not have to continue loving humans. There is nothing stopping God from cutting off the relationship, from abandoning the creature, or even from harming the creature. Barth’s God, says Oord, is “essentially capricious.”⁶

This is not an uncommon reading of Barth’s theology, although scholars who defend Barth and who themselves emphasize the “the sovereign ontological freedom of God,”⁷ would strongly reject the charge that this makes God to be “essentially capricious.” Our essay will demonstrate that such a charge indeed fails to realize that, for Barth, God’s love and God’s freedom do not, as Robert B. Price states, stand “in any sort of competitive relationship.”⁸

Pitting himself against the likes of Barth, Oord offers his model of “essential kenosis,” which states that “God necessarily loves us.”⁹ He explains: “God must love creation. God is not free to do otherwise, because love is part of God’s eternal nature.”¹⁰ For Oord, God’s nature inherently involves love, so that God cannot resist loving creatures. There is no scenario in which God decides not to love, for God’s nature as love means God will always love. We can take that for granted.

²Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics, Vol. II, The Doctrine of God, Part 1*, eds. G. W. Bromily and T.F. Torrance, trans. T. H. L. Parker, W. B. Johnston, Harold Knight, and J. L. M. Haire (New York: T. & T. Clark, 1957; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 303, as quoted in Oord, *The Nature of Love*, 160, n.33. The translation, however, is problematic. The adjective *eigentliche* should be translated not as “essential” but as “actual” (see below, n.38).

³Oord, *The Nature of Love*, 7.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., 139.

⁶Ibid., 7.

⁷Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996), 108.

⁸Robert B. Price, *Letters of the Divine Word. The Perfections of God in Karl Barth’s Church Dogmatics* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2011), 44.

⁹Oord, *The Nature of Love*, 125.

¹⁰Ibid., 139.

Furthermore, Oord contests the conventional theological claim that God *freely* limits God's self for the sake of the freedom of creation. If God has the ability to override a creature's freedom but does not do so to stop a creature from harming someone else, Oord claims, then God is not truly loving. For God to truly love creatures, God would do everything possible to keep them from being unjustly harmed.¹¹ Thus, Oord draws the conclusion that God must *necessarily* limit God's self to make room for the freedom of the creature. God, Oord says, cannot override the creature's freedom, because it is in God's essential nature to impart freedom to the creature.¹²

What will be demonstrated is not only that Oord misunderstands Barth, but also that Oord and Barth are almost in agreement on this issue. Barth does not offer a theology in which God's freedom comes first and love bows to God's freedom as one among an infinite number of options for God so that God is capricious. On the contrary, Barth has his own version of "essential kenosis," in which God's self-determining will concretely establishes that God is eternally the God who loves and will never not love, who limits the divine self for the sake of creation, and determines to be forever bound to creation.

Barth's Concept of Divine Freedom I: God Loves in Freedom

The first witness to Barth's innocence is Barth's own objection to the theology of a capricious God. In volume II.1 of the *Church Dogmatics*, in his discussion of the divine perfections, Barth addresses the question of divine omnipotence and explicitly rejects the very theology Oord thinks Barth advocates. "To define [God] in terms of power," Barth says, "in itself has as its consequence, not merely a neutralisation of the concept of God, but its perversion into its opposite." Power, Barth continues, is in itself evil, because it "is nothing less than freedom from restraint and suppression; revolt and domination." Thus, if power alone constituted God's omnipotence, "it would mean that God was evil, that He was the revolutionary and tyrannical demon *par excellence*."¹³ If God's nature consisted of sheer power, this would not be the God of love, the God revealed in

¹¹See his critique of Clark Pinnock in this respect in *ibid.*, 85–116, and his similar criticism of John Sanders in Thomas Jay Oord, *The Uncontrolling Love of God: An Open and Relational Account of Providence* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 133–149.

¹²See Oord, *The Nature of Love*, 117–157, and *The Uncontrolling love of God*, 151–186.

¹³Barth, *CD* II.1, 524 (translation revised).

Jesus Christ, but simply a powerful being doing anything and everything he (and certainly it would be a "he") can. Thus, God could be evil, because for God every kind of action would be permitted.

This judgment is similar to Oord's. For Oord, if God is defined in terms of power alone, of freedom from restraint and suppression, then God is ultimately capricious, and we have no reason to say God essentially loves. Barth offers the same conclusion, saying that a God who is merely powerful and free from restraint and suppression is actually evil.

Barth's alternative is to say that "God's might never at any place precedes right, but is always and everywhere associated with it."¹⁴ Specifically, he says, the "life and act of God is the life and act of His love," so that if "we have interpreted the divinity of His act, or the divinity of God, as freedom, we could not and cannot mean by this notion of freedom anything different from Himself as the One who loves."¹⁵ The mystery of the divine will is that the free God who resists all domestication has resolved to be known by *love*.¹⁶ "The one will of God," Barth says, is "the will of the divine love."¹⁷ Thus, God is free, but *free as the one who loves*, as the one whose nature it is to love.¹⁸ Barth states unequivocally that

¹⁴Ibid., 526.

¹⁵Ibid., 321. Furthermore, he says that at the center of God's love and grace stands mercy. God's mercy "springs from His innermost nature and stamps His being and doing" (ibid., 369). God is never the God who does not have mercy because it is in God's nature to have mercy.

¹⁶"The divine freedom of will is always an absolute and quite impenetrable mystery for all knowledge which is distinct from God's knowledge, and therefore for all creaturely knowledge, even when the latter stands face to face with the works of God. But this hidden will of God is *revealed* to us by Himself. For God Himself, being love Himself, is in Himself not only hidden but also revealed" (Barth, *CD II.1*, 591, transl. rev., emphasis in the original).

¹⁷Ibid., 592.

¹⁸"His freedom is the freedom of His love" (ibid., 441). Therefore, Barth can say that God's loving is both necessary and free. It is "necessary, for it is itself the being, the essence and the nature of God," but for this very reason "it is free from every need in respect to its object" (Barth *CD II.1*, 280). In a conversation from 1966, Barth exclaims that he does not like the word "necessary" as a theological concept. If it is used at all, he says, one should use it literally, that is, in the sense of the turning (*Wende*) of a need (*Not*). See Karl Barth, *Gespräche 1964–1968*, ed. Eberhard Busch (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1997), 270. See also *CD II.1*, 369, where Barth uses the word precisely in this way: "divine love bears necessarily the character of mercy," because "in the grace of God, we have to do with the 'turning' of a 'need' (*Not-Wende*)."

there cannot be any notion of freedom that excludes or qualifies God's nature as love. God will never not love because it is in God's nature to love. Such a one is God.

Barth speaks similarly of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. "In all circumstances," he says, "we must understand God as the One who has done and does that which took place and still takes place in Jesus Christ. He is immutably this God, and not another."¹⁹ However we might want to understand God, we have to understand God as the one who is revealed in Jesus Christ. God will never not be the God revealed in Jesus Christ. This revelation, for Barth, stands in contrast to the "man-made willful and arbitrary image of God."²⁰ In the incarnation, Barth says, "God reveals the place and manner in which He pledges Himself to be true to His creation, in which He has actually bound Himself to it, so that He would be untrue to Himself if He were not to befriend it further and in

¹⁹Ibid., 513. Similarly, he says in his discussion of "the older theology" that "the hidden will of God was understood as God's immovable and inscrutable inner being, and as such it was regarded as the will of God properly so called, and contrasted with the revealed will of God, which was looked on as figurative, an arrangement and appearance for the benefit of the creature." In this rendering, Barth says, "the real inner being of God is falsely represented as the immutability of a dead God, and . . . this representation does not take into account the perfection and scope of the Word of God as the divine self-revelation. . . . The knowledge of the reality and genuineness of the divine will are not advanced but hindered and finally made quite impossible by this interpretation of the distinction. For how can God will in His inner life if this inner life is in fact immovable? But if He cannot will, what truth or binding force remains for our knowledge of his revealed will as such? Do not the truth and binding force of our encounter with the will of God, and the reality of our subjection to it, depend absolutely on the fact that in them we are dealing unreservedly with God Himself in His inmost life and not with a mere divine arrangement or appearance? We cannot recognise a will if we do not recognise One who wills. In that case we have to accept the belief that there is no one who really and genuinely wills, but only a being unmoved in itself which for our benefit has assumed the shape, but only the shape, of a will. We therefore *correct* the theologoumenon of our fathers by finding in both the *voluntas occulta* or *beneplaciti* on the one hand and the *voluntas revelata* or *signi* on the other the one will of God, the one God who wills, the will of the divine love" (ibid., 591–592, transl. rev.).

²⁰Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. 1, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, Part 2, eds. G. W. Bromily and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. T. Thomson and Harold Knight (New York: T. & T. Clark, 1956; repr. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 280 (transl. rev.).

other circumstances.”²¹ The God revealed in Jesus Christ is the God who determines to be bound to creation, so that to deny creation would be to deny God's own self. Even more strongly, Barth says, “God has determined Himself to be this God and no other, to be the love which is active and effective at this point and in this way, in Jesus Christ. God has bound Himself in His own Son to be eternally true to His creature.”²² There is no capriciousness in God, for God is truly and always the God revealed in Jesus Christ, who has chosen to be eternally bound to creation.

Wait a minute! Has Barth just been quoted saying “God has determined Himself,” meaning God has *chosen* to determine God's self? Is this not the very idea Oord repudiates, since it implies that God could have chosen *not* to determine God's self in such a way? Does not Oord say, in contrast, that God's determination as love is a necessary facet of God's essential nature? Is not Oord's theology, then, a corrective to Barth's? Indeed, it might seem to be so, but it is not.

On the contrary, Barth often comes very close to anticipating Oord word for word. “God cannot do everything without distinction,” he says, because “God's omnipotence consists positively in His power to be Himself and therefore to be true to Himself.” In this, “God is not able to do certain things”—that is, things which would be contrary to God's nature to do.²³ “The conditions and limits of what is possible for God,” he continues, “are found in God Himself.”²⁴ Thus, God's power “is conditioned by His deity. It is His own power, the power of His right, the power Himself to be true and true to Himself.”²⁵ God is powerful *as God*, as the one who acts according to God's own nature. God can do all things which are consistent with God's nature, but not those things which are contrary to God's nature. God is, as Barth puts it beautifully, “the master of His omnipotence and not its slave.” God is not sheer power. God's power answers to God's will. As “the judge of what is wise and foolish, possible

²¹Ibid., 515. Similarly, he says that in the “singular and supreme relationship and fellowship between God and the world realised in the incarnation we have the quintessence of all possible relationship and fellowship generally and as such, [and in the] freedom of God thus expressed we see the archetype and the norm of all possible ways in which he expresses His freedom in this relationship and fellowship” (Ibid., 317).

²²Ibid., 518 (transl. rev.).

²³Ibid., 533.

²⁴Ibid., 534.

²⁵Ibid., 543.

and impossible,” God is “always holy and righteous in His actions,” because “God does not cease to be God.”²⁶ God is holy and righteous in nature, and so God never ceases to be holy and righteous because to do so would be to betray God’s very nature. Thus, as with Oord, for Barth it is in God’s nature to determine and bind God’s self for the sake of creation.

Whereas Oord uses the language of God’s “essential nature,” Barth usually speaks of the *will* of God, without separating will and nature. To speak of God’s will for Barth is to speak of God’s nature. God’s omnipotence cannot be separated from God’s will. God’s freedom cannot be separated from God’s will. Barth rejects the idea of an “active omnipotence without a will.”²⁷ In place of it, he says, “that which is all-embracing and completely free in God, the divine being itself, is active will or willed action.”²⁸ God is not simply all-powerful and free, but God’s action is determined by God’s own will. God, he says, “is His own will, and He wills His own being. . . . It is as He wills that He is God, and as He is God that He wills.”²⁹ Thus, Barth would join Oord in saying that in a specific way God must love creation, because God’s creative, redemptive, and reconciling love is a constitutive feature of God’s eternal will.

Hence, it seems Barth has a good alibi. He was not present at the scene of the crime. Further support for his innocence is found in his later essay *The Gift of Freedom*, written at the time when Barth was working on his doctrine of reconciliation (CD IV). There, Oord can find his own objection addressed. Oord says Barth’s theology implies that “God’s freedom from us [is] more important than God’s love for us.”³⁰ Quite remarkably, however, Barth says the exact opposite: “God’s freedom is primarily not some freedom *from*, but a freedom *to* and *for*. . . . God is free for *man*,

²⁶Ibid., 544. Here is the full quote: “He is the master of His omnipotence and not its slave. He is the judge of what is wise and foolish, possible and impossible. He is, therefore, always holy and righteous in His actions. Because it is not willed by Him, and only the object of His will and knowledge in this sense, sin is always sin, folly folly, and the devil the devil, with *no prospect* even in eternity of *ever* becoming the object of His omnipotence in *any* other sense. And the reason is that His omnipotence is that of His personal judgment and decision, which is negative towards sin, folly and the devil, and can only continue to be so for all eternity, since God does not cease to be God” (emphasis added).

²⁷Ibid., 589.

²⁸Ibid., 589–590.

²⁹Ibid., 550.

³⁰Ibid.

free to coexist with man and, as the Lord of the covenant, to participate in his *history*.”³¹ And Barth does not stop there; he even goes so far as to say, “The concept of God without man is indeed as anomalous as wooden iron.”³² Furthermore, Barth repeats his earlier assertion that God cannot be reduced to freedom as such or freedom in itself: “God’s freedom is not merely unlimited possibility or formal majesty and power of disposition, that is to say empty, naked sovereignty.” If this were so, he says, God would be “a demon.”³³

Barth has thus made abundantly clear that God’s *essential* will is to love. Nothing Barth says about God’s freedom should be construed to mean that God can decide not to love. God has eternally willed to love, eternally willed to be bound to creation, so that God eternally refuses to be without creatures.

Barth’s Concept of Divine Freedom II: God Loves in *Freedom*

That being said, Barth does talk a lot about God’s freedom and even sometimes comes close to saying what Oord criticizes. For example, he says, “God is not compelled to become man by any superior inward or outward necessity. He has decided to act in this way because it was His free good-pleasure to do so.”³⁴ Similarly: “That as Creator God posits and maintains by His will a reality distinct from Himself is something which He does as an expression and confirmation of His constant vitality. . . . He does it in love. But His love is free. It does not have to do what it does.”³⁵ Furthermore, “The freedom of God’s will means . . . God is not dependent on anything that is not Himself; on anything outside Himself. He is not limited by anything outside Himself, and is not subject to any necessity distinct from Himself.”³⁶

Do these statements complicate the picture that has hitherto been painted of Barth’s theology? Barth may not have been at the scene of the crime, but is it possible that he had a twin commit the crime in his place? After all, he was a dialectical thinker. Does Barth have a doppelganger

³¹Karl Barth, “The Gift of Freedom,” in *The Humanity of God*, trans. John Newton Thomas and Thomas Wieser (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 69–96, 72 (transl. rev.).

³²*Ibid.*

³³*Ibid.*, 71 (transl. rev.).

³⁴Barth, *CD* II.1, 518.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 499.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 560.

that commits crimes in his stead so that he can remain in the clear? Or is Barth perhaps his own doppelganger? Anyone familiar with Barth will recognize this as a possibility. He was not always the most consistent thinker. Still, it need not be said that he was contradictory on this point. It will be demonstrated that there is an important difference between Oord's and Barth's respective conceptions of freedom.

Barth's understanding of divine freedom is influenced by his emphasis on the Creator-creature distinction. We creatures did not choose to be. We were not consulted about being. As soon as we are born, we lack full autonomy. We are always already part of a history we did not choose, and we float along in a current that is largely out of our control. We do not always get to decide what happens to us, or how it will affect us. Creatures are subjects, always already subjected to others, dependent on others, compelled and limited by others, happened upon by others, conditioned and shaped by others. This inter-determination is a facet of our spontaneous existence, intrinsic to our everyday experience, inherently inscribed in our actual life. God, Barth rightly says, is above this condition.

The underlying difference between Oord and Barth is that Oord operates with a rather libertarian model of freedom, in which free actions must be based on an "undetermined choice."³⁷ In order to act freely, an agent must possess the freedom of "choosing between alternate possibilities in the absence of deterministic factors."³⁸ Thus, when Oord quotes Barth saying, "God's freedom constitutes the [actual] positive quality, not only of His action toward what is outside Himself, but also of His own inner being,"³⁹ he thinks Barth states that the positive quality of God is that God can do whatever God wants to do, loving or not. Barth's concept of freedom, however, is different. What Barth means when he says that God is free is that God is self-determining. God's essential nature is not determined by others, nor is it handed down to God by something preceding God. God has eternally consulted God's self to determine God's

³⁷Jesse Couenhoven, "Karl Barth's Conceptions of Human and Divine Freedom(s)," in *Commanding Grace. Studies in Karl Barth's Ethics*, ed. Daniel L. Migliore (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2010), 239–255, 244, n.21. According to Couenhoven, Barth regards "theonomy" and "autonomy" as compatible. Human freedom is fully realized when it acts "in line with God's own goodness" (ibid., 248).

³⁸Ibid., 243, n.12.

³⁹Barth, CD II.1, 303, quoted in Oord, *The Nature of Love*, 160, n.33 (see above, n.2).

own essential nature. God is not compelled by any outside force to do what God does. God is neither dependent on any other thing for action, nor limited by any outside necessity. As Barth says, "freedom in its positive and proper qualities means to be grounded in one's own being, to be determined and moved by oneself."⁴⁰ Hence, God conditions, shapes, and makes God's own self. God's own nature determines what God chooses, and what God chooses determines God's nature. God "does what He does because He wills it."⁴¹ God has eternally chosen to be bound to creation. And this is what God has willed and done: "God has bound Himself in His own Son to be eternally true to His creation."⁴²

That there is no higher necessity compelling God to do what God does means God does what *God* wills. This is what Barth means when he says God's loving is "free from every [need or] necessity in respect to its object."⁴³ Oord uses this quote to argue that Barth's theology of love is compromised,⁴⁴ but given Barth's view of freedom, all it says is that the object of God's love is not what causes God to love. There is nothing outside of God to which God submits or from which God receives orders. God's freedom is "freedom from all conditioning by that which is distinct from Himself."⁴⁵ *God* determines God's self. It is in this way that Barth speaks of God as free.

This is actually good news for Oord, because it means God's eternal determination to be love is absolute and reliable. When Oord quotes Barth saying, "God's being consists in His being as the One who loves in freedom,"⁴⁶ Oord thinks Barth is qualifying God's loving nature by God's freedom, as if Barth would have God say, "I do love you . . . but, remember, I don't have to do so." On the contrary, God's being as the One who loves in freedom actually means God has eternally determined to be the One who loves and so can *always* be counted on as this One and no other. Sharply put: God is free exclusively as the One who loves in freedom. God is not free to change God's mind and choose not to be the One who loves in freedom.

At the same time, we do find a slight difference between Oord and Barth. For Oord, God loves necessarily. Barth would not put it that way,

⁴⁰Barth, *CD* II.1, 301.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 589.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 518.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 280.

⁴⁴See Oord, *The Nature of Love*, 7.

⁴⁵Barth, *CD* II.1, 303.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 352, quoted in Oord, *The Nature of Love*, 7.

since for God to be self-determining means there is no higher necessity to which God is subject. However, there seems to be no discrepancy between the theological affirmations of Oord and Barth, but only a problem of semantics. We have seen that for Barth, too, God will always love, and there is no possibility of God not loving because it is in God's nature and will to do so, because God has eternally determined God's nature to be love. Oord, on the other hand, suggests that God loves out of necessity. In both theologies, God will certainly always love because it is in God's essential nature to love, but Oord uses the language of necessity more forcefully. "God *must* love creation," he says. "God is not free to do otherwise." "Love for others . . . is a necessary feature of God's nature."⁴⁷ While Oord says this with the understanding that God's essential nature is what makes it so, the words he uses seem to suggest that God is subject to some higher necessity. Oord does not speak in terms of God's self-determination or self-willing. Barth's theology, then, might stand as a slight corrective to the language Oord uses for God. For both Oord and Barth, God's nature determines that God will always love, but for Barth this originates in the eternal will of God, as only God can determine what is necessary for God; whereas, Oord speaks as if it is simply an ontological necessity. By doing so, Oord risks essentializing love as an independent subject to which God is subordinate.

It should be clarified that for Barth to say that God's nature as love originates in God's eternal will does not imply that God has or had an alternate will which determined God to be otherwise. God's freedom does not mean God can renege on God's decision to be bound to creation. On the contrary, that God is self-determining means that for God to determine to be God in a certain way means we can always count on God being that way. In this sense, God's nature determines the use of God's freedom. Thus, that God is free does not mean that God is individualistic, disengaged, or insulated, because God's nature is not individualistic, disengaged, or insulated. The truth of God's freedom lies in "the inner-Trinitarian life of the Father with the Son through the Holy Spirit" as well as in "the mode of being of God the Son."⁴⁸ Hence, the truth of God's freedom

⁴⁷Oord, *The Nature of Love*, 139, emphasis added.

⁴⁸Barth, CD II.1, 317. Similarly, in *The Gift of Freedom*, Barth says, "God's freedom is the freedom of the Father and the Son in the unity of the Holy Spirit . . . embracing grace, thankfulness, and peace. It is the freedom of the living God. Only in this *relational freedom* is God sovereign, almighty, the Lord of all" (72, transl. rev., emphasis added).

is relational and God's relational nature "necessarily" implies that God's freedom is directed outward. As Barth explains,

God in Himself is not only existent. He is co-existent. And so He can co-exist with another also. To grant co-existence with Himself to another is no contradiction of His essence. On the contrary, it corresponds to it. And this is true also of His own entering into co-existence with this other. This co-existence, of course, can be only one which is posited, limited, conditioned and circumscribed by His own essence.⁴⁹

God as completely self-determining means God can determine to be bound to another, and God as communal in nature means God can *always* be expected to do so. God's triune life cannot be understood apart from God's covenant with humankind. God's essence is identical with God's being-for-us. We shall encounter it "at the place where God deals with us as Lord and Savior, or not at all," that is, in God's revelation, where God gives "no less than Himself . . . as the Father in His own Son by the Holy Spirit."⁵⁰ The idea of God's self-giving is spelled out more fully in Barth's doctrine of election in CD II.2, which represents the second part of Barth's doctrine of God.

Barth's Concept of Divine Freedom III: God *Elects* in Freedom

For Barth, the doctrine of election "belongs to the doctrine of God, because by choosing (*wählen*) humankind God determines not only the latter but fundamentally also Himself."⁵¹ By choosing or electing the human being as covenant-partner, God determines God's very being in an

⁴⁹Barth, CD II.1, 463. Along these lines, he says: "Without sacrificing His distinction and freedom, but in exercise of them, He enters into and faithfully maintains communion with this reality other than Himself in His activity as Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer. . . . God must not only be unconditioned but, in the absoluteness in which He sets up this fellowship, He can and will also be conditioned. He who can and does do this is the God of the Holy Scripture, the triune God known to us in His revelation. This ability, proved and manifested to us in His action, constitutes His freedom" (303).

⁵⁰Ibid. 261–262.

⁵¹Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics, Vol. II, The Doctrine of God, Part 2*, eds. G. W. Bromily and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromily, J. C. Campbell, Iain Wilson, J. Strathearn McNab, Harold Knight, and R. A. Stewart (New York: T. & T. Clark, 1957; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 3. Barth's repeated emphasis on God's choice exploits the semantic proximity of the German words *Erwählung* (election) and *Wahl* (choice).

original or primal way. Barth now identifies election with God's self-determination, a concept we already encountered in CD II/1. He thinks that a Christian doctrine of God is not complete without considering God's decision to be God in relation to a *non-divine* other. In a two-fold sense, the election of Jesus Christ is an integral aspect of God's triune life. On the one hand, God's self-determination is related to Jesus Christ as the Son of God: God determines Himself as Father in relation to God the Son, and correspondingly, the Son chooses the Father—in the communion of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, Jesus Christ is not only the divine other but also the human other. Hence, Barth identifies the Son of God with Jesus Christ and with the human being Jesus of Nazareth. This identification stands at the heart of his revision of the doctrine of election.

Much more could be said about Barth's revision, particularly about his integration of the work of Christ "for us and our salvation," which leads to the much debated thesis that in Jesus Christ God chose reprobation for *Himself*. For our purposes, however, the point is clear: God's self-determination as Father, Son, and Spirit is "*at the same time*"⁵² God's self-determination as the God of the covenant between God and human beings in and through Jesus Christ. The primal history (*Urgeschichte*), and with it the covenant, are the act and attitude (*Verhalten*) "in which by virtue of the decision of His free love God wills to be and is God."⁵³ It would be a "false abstraction" if the doctrine of God spoke only of God and did not recognize that, "when we speak of God, then, in consideration of His freedom, but thus precisely in consideration of His free decision, we at once must speak also of this *relationship*."⁵⁴ Barth is very clear here: God "is what He is" exclusively in relation to Jesus Christ and to God's people united in and through Jesus Christ: "Apart from this man and apart from this people, God would be a different, an alien God. According to [Christian knowledge], He would not be God at all."⁵⁵

Barth explains that the doctrine of election deals with the grace and love as well as the choice and freedom of God: "God in His love elects

⁵²Eberhard Jüngel, *God's Being is in Becoming. The Trinitarian Being of God in the Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. John Webster (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2001), 85 (emphasis in the original).

⁵³*Ibid.*, 9.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 6 (transl. rev., emphasis in the original). The fact that Barth's concept of God's original self-determination in the election of Jesus Christ refers not only to the "economy" of God's works but also to God's "immanent" being should be beyond dispute. Cf. Jüngel, 75–123.

⁵⁵Barth, CD II.2, 7.

another to fellowship with Himself.”⁵⁶ It is of utmost importance to recognize that, for Barth, the term “gracious choice” (*Gnadenwahl*), which was also used in traditional Reformed versions of the doctrine, is not a reference to the act of choosing in general. Rather, it is derived from the quality of God’s choice as gracious, and this gracious choice is “a divine decision made in Jesus Christ.”⁵⁷ Hence, God is not simply free but God is the God who *loves* in freedom, as we already heard in the previous section. Barth now adds that God’s love is absolutely reliable because it is an act of God’s own choosing.⁵⁸ God’s choice is not the best possible choice in general but it is the particular choice of Jesus of Nazareth as the elected human being and of humankind as the people of God. With this choice God determines once and for all to be God-for-us.

Moreover, for Barth, traditional versions of the doctrine failed in that they did not understand God’s eternal will and decree exclusively in the light of the history of Jesus Christ. Against this misunderstanding he asserts: “There is no choice, no beginning and decree, no Word of God, before and above, besides and outside of [Jesus Christ].”⁵⁹ In particular, two ideas are central for Barth. First, Jesus Christ is not only the object but also the subject of election. Therefore, Barth rejects the traditional Reformed concept of election or predestination as *decretum absolutum*: God’s gracious choice is not based on the good-pleasure of an almighty divine being defined, above all, by an absolute freedom of choice. Instead, it is a concrete decree based on a particular choice by which God’s being and essence are fundamentally determined. “There is no such thing as a will of God apart from the will of Jesus Christ. . . . He *tells* us that *He* Himself is the One who elects us.”⁶⁰

On the whole, Barth’s theology of election expands on the idea that God is the One who loves in freedom. Whereas *CD* II.1 was mainly concerned with the concept of God’s free love, *CD* II.2 focuses specifically on the concept of God’s gracious choice or election. The idea that God chooses and thus determines Himself for the sake of an Other, which already emerges at several points in *CD* II.1, is now explained more fully: “All God’s freedom and love became identical with . . . the election of

⁵⁶Ibid., 10.

⁵⁷Ibid., 64.

⁵⁸Cf. *ibid.*, 25f.

⁵⁹Barth, *CD* II.2, 95 (transl. rev.).

⁶⁰Ibid., 115 (emphasis in the original).

Jesus Christ.”⁶¹ Barth’s point thus comes through even more powerfully: God’s will is essentially gracious. To say that God is free means that God is faithful to God’s self in communion with the world. God’s faithfulness reveals God’s true being, and there is no “hidden” God behind the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ. God’s self-giving is so “radical”⁶² that it implies, “without doubt, also a binding and an obligation that God has taken upon Himself.”⁶³ As Eberhard Jüngel put it succinctly: “The more Barth pondered [the freedom of the divine Spirit and the divine Word], the more firmly he considered it a way of specifying more closely the character of God’s *self-binding*, thereby seeking to exclude on persuasive grounds the suspicion that God’s freedom might be caprice.”⁶⁴

Conclusion

Barth’s theology is complementary, not contradictory, to Oord’s assertions about God’s essential nature as love. Far from making God capricious, Barth’s theology suggests that we always know what to expect from God, and that is, simply, God. We can always expect for God to remain true to God’s nature, and God’s nature is essentially loving.⁶⁵ As Barth definitively states:

We must recognize the omnipotence of the divine knowing and willing . . . as the *omnipotence of love*. It is in this way that God knows and wills: He loves. This is what we mean by knowing

⁶¹Ibid., 162 (transl. rev.).

⁶²Ibid., 124.

⁶³Ibid., 183 (transl. rev.).

⁶⁴Jüngel, 135 (transl. rev., emphasis added).

⁶⁵This claim contradicts Harold Schulweis, who, in his discussion of Barth’s theological explication of the book of Job, has this to say of Barth’s theology: “No epistemic guarantees are offered to man by the unique and dynamic personality. . . . Man must be prepared to encounter His will ad hoc. He cannot make any deductions from the singularity of His concrete self-revelations, neither as to His essential character nor as to His future conduct. It may well not happen the same way a second time; indeed, the second time may contradict what man has taken to be the meaning of the original self-manifestation. With no constant predicates ascribable to the Subject, man’s false security is shattered. . . . [God has not given] any pledge that in Himself He is not perhaps quite other.” [See Harold M. Schulweis, “Karl Barth’s Job: ‘Morality and Theodicy,’” *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 65 no.3 (1975), 161–162.] From the preceding analysis, we can see that these assertions are not correct, for the God described by Schulweis is capricious, and Barth’s theology provides no foundation for such a portrait.

and willing in its divine origin and truth. This is the eternal knowing and the eternal will which determines all other knowing and willing by the grace of creation: it is love, and it seeks its own only in fellowship with another. It establishes and lifts up the other as a beloved object, as belonging to itself.⁶⁶

Certainly, Oord would agree that he himself could hardly have said it better. Therefore, we should conclude that this has all along been a case of mistaken identity. Oord did indeed mistake Barth for a less sophisticated theologian—or at least one less committed to God's nature as love. If Oord revisits Barth, he might find in Barth's writings a theological companion.

⁶⁶Barth *CD* II.1, 599 (transl. rev., emphasis in the original). Similarly, he says, "If we distinguish between God's *voluntas absoluta* and His *voluntas conditionalis*, we have on the one hand the will of God in its omnipotence and therefore in its perfect freedom, a freedom to determine and decide. . . . And on the other hand we have the same will of God to the extent that in His freedom God is love and therefore a definite and decided will, not at all arbitrary, but directed to what His freedom has chosen from eternity, and will choose in eternity, because it is the divine freedom. We have God's will to the extent that it has decided, and does and will decide, not apart from definite conditions, . . . but in such a way that the conditions themselves are created and posited by His decision. . . . Thus, whether we speak of the *voluntas absoluta* or the *voluntas conditionalis*, we speak of the will of God which is His eternal being itself, not of mere conditions of His relationship of God to the world and to time. For that which is operative in the relationship of God to the world and to time, in the act of His creation, is simply God Himself, His innermost will, which decides in freedom and love" (Ibid., 593).

A HOMILETIC NEW BIRTH: HOW EMPATHY DROVE JOHN WESLEY TO THE FIELDS

by

Lenny Luchetti

Introduction

Like my wife recounting the labor and delivery of our three children, John Wesley did not hesitate to describe the undesirable characteristics of his homiletic of new birth. In his earliest encounters with field-preaching, he described the practice as “strange”¹ and, worse, “vile.”² Wesley confessed twenty years after submitting to the vile practice, “What marvel the devil does not love field-preaching! Neither do I: I love a commodious room, a soft cushion, an handsome pulpit.”³ More than thirty years into field-preaching, Wesley was still not warmhearted toward the practice. He wrote in his journal, “To this day field-preaching is a cross to me.”⁴

Not only was preaching in the open-air undesirable for Wesley throughout his life, it was downright hazardous. In *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, Wesley described the hardships:

Can you bear the summer sun to beat upon your naked head?
Can you suffer the wintry rain or wind, from whatever quarter
it blows? Are you able to stand in the open air without any cov-
ering or defence when God casteth abroad his snow like wool,
or scattereth his hoar-frost like ashes? And yet these are some
of the smallest inconveniences which accompany field-preach-
ing. Far beyond all these, are the contradictions of sinners, the
scoffs both of the great vulgar and the small; contempt and
reproach of every kind; often more than verbal affronts, stupid,

¹John Wesley, Journal Entry March 29, 1739, in *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 19, ed. W. Reginald Ward, Bicentennial ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), 46. Hereafter *Wesley*.

²*Wesley*, Journal Entry April 2, 1739, vol. 19, ed. W. Reginald Ward, 46.

³*Wesley*, Journal Entry June 24, 1759, vol. 21, ed. W. Reginald Ward, 203.

⁴*Wesley*, Journal Entry September 6, 1772, vol. 22, ed. W. Reginald Ward, 348.

brutal violence, sometimes to the hazard of health, or limbs, or life.⁵

Clearly, field-preaching was a homiletic road paved with all sorts of inconveniences and threats for the preacher.

Despite all of this, Wesley preached in the fields for 51 years, preaching his first open-air sermon in Bristol, England on April 2, 1739, at age 35 and his last in 1790 in Winchelsea, England at age 87. Wesley admitted that field-preaching was “a thing submitted to, rather than chosen.”⁶ This begs the question, why in the name of all that is safe and Anglican did John Wesley submit to the practice of preaching in the open-air outside of the hallowed halls of the church?

The Usual Suspects: Whitefield, Effectiveness, and the Anglican Church

Wesley offers several possible reasons why he engaged in the precarious practice of field-preaching. One reason frequently cited for Wesley’s move from the church to the fields is the arm-twisting of his friend, George Whitefield. One can easily sense the persuasive flattery of Whitefield, when he wrote to urge Wesley to join him in the fields, “I am but a novice; you are acquainted with the great things of God. Come, I beseech you; come quickly.”⁷ A powerful preacher such as Whitefield could be overwhelmingly convincing. Yet, Wesley proved over and over again that he could resist Whitefield’s irresistible grace when it came to the latter’s Calvinism. Did Whitefield really drive Wesley to the fields?

Wesley was not shy about defending field-preaching due to its soul-saving effect. Thousands of people, most of whom were not welcome in the Anglican Church, came to hear Wesley preach in the fields. Wesley noted, “The converting, as well as convincing, power of God is eminently present with them.”⁸ The effectiveness of this “strange” way of preaching is captured by Wesley when he wrote, “I am well assured that I did far more

⁵John Wesley, A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, in *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 11, ed. Gerald R. Cragg, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), 397. Hereafter *Works*.

⁶*Works*, A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, in *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 11, ed. Gerald R. Cragg, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 178.

⁷Luke Tyerman, *The Life of the Rev. George Whitefield* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1876), I:193.

⁸Wesley, Journal Entry September 23, 1759, vol. 21, ed. W. Reginald Ward, 230.

good to my Lincolnshire parishioners by preaching three days on my father's tomb than I did by preaching three years in his pulpit."⁹

But, would Wesley engage in a ministry practice simply because it worked, regardless of its compatibility with his theology? While Wesley was a practical theologian, he was not a pragmatist. He endured persecution and closed ministry doors precisely because he did not allow pragmatic conventions to trump his theological convictions. The ministry doors that were closed to him, that made field-preaching a "virtue of necessity," were closed precisely because of his "unfashionable doctrine,"¹⁰ convictions he would not modify merely to become more effective. Did effectiveness really drive Wesley to the fields?

The most plausible and frequent reason cited by Wesley for his submission to the fields is that the preaching doors of the Anglican Church were, by and large, closed to him because of his "unfashionable doctrine." Wesley was ordained to preach but wasn't allowed to preach in most of the Anglican churches. He had to fulfill his call to preach and the open-air was the only way. But, did the Anglican Church really drive Wesley to the fields?

Wesley cited Whitefield, effectiveness, and closed churches as reasons why he took to the uncomfortable, non-traditional, and dangerous fields. But, Wesley can be somewhat misleading when it comes to Wesley. Perhaps a dig below the surface will hint at some other possible, and maybe even more influential, reasons why he preached in the field. The often cited reasons above certainly contributed to John Wesley's venture into field-preaching, but maybe not to the extent with which they are typically credited. Were any of these reasons, in isolation or combination, enough to drive Wesley to the fields and keep him there for 51 years despite the inconveniences and hazards? Or, was something else the primary motivator for Wesley?

Another Possibility: Theological Empathy

What drove Wesley to the fields? The obvious but easily overlooked answer is that he was being sanctified. Whether Wesley knew it or not, he was in the process of being sanctified, perfected in holy love for God and

⁹*Works*, Letter to John Smith March 25, 1747, in *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 26, ed. Frank Baker, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 237.

¹⁰*Wesley*, Sermon 112 "On Laying the Foundation of the New Chapel," vol. 3, ed. Albert C. Outler, 583-584.

for people. Holy love drove out of Wesley the fear of duty-bound religion and the hardships of field-preaching. As the Holy Spirit infiltrated Wesley in a pronounced way at Aldersgate and beyond, the latter's mind concerning God and his heart concerning the marginalized were being sanctified in love. Put another way, Wesley's understanding of God (theology) overcame his preferences and his feelings for the poor (empathy) overcame his prejudices. Once his cognitive understanding of God and his affective feelings for the marginalized were transformed, he was willing to change his behavior. Thus, he preached in the fields. This study seeks to show that Wesley's developing theology cultivated in him an empathy that drove him to the fields and kept him there for 51 years.

The main primary source that supports this work is Wesley's *A Farther Appeal*, which he wrote more than six years into his open-air adventure. In that writing, he makes an extended and strong case for field-preaching.¹¹ Some of the usual suspects were cited as rationale. However, and this doesn't get much scholarly press, Wesley mostly emphasized how theology and empathy were among the primary motivators that drove him to the fields.

Theology

Wesley's growing sense of the nature and mission of God as love comes through loud and clear in *A Farther Appeal*. Comparing field-preaching to the wilderness preaching of John the Baptist, Wesley writes, "Yet the Shepherd of souls sought after us into the wilderness . . . ought not we also to seek . . . and to save that which is lost? Behold the amazing love of God to the outcasts of men! His tender condescension to their folly!"¹² According to Wesley, the essential nature and mission of God is love for those who are wandering around aimlessly in the wilderness of life.

The nature of God as holy love drove God toward unusual lengths in mission. Again, Wesley alluded to the wilderness preaching of John, who operated outside of the Temple, "Then God was moved to jealousy, and went out of the usual way to save the souls which he had made."¹³ John the Baptist was raised up by God to preach in the "fields" to the marginalized poor when the religious establishment lost its focus on saving souls.

¹¹*Works*, A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, in *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 11, ed. Gerald R. Cragg, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), 305-309.

¹²*Ibid.*, 306.

¹³*Ibid.*, 306.

When religious leaders fail to embody God's love for the world, especially those who are marginalized, God will find another way, a plan B. Wesley pointed this out for those who contended against field-preaching, ". . . whenever it has pleased God to work any great work upon the earth, even from the earliest times, he has stepped more or less out of the common way. . . ."¹⁴ God's *modus operandi* is doing whatever it takes, even employing and empowering something as odd and, to some, unlawful as field-preaching to set captives free.

Wesley wrote in one of his letters, shortly after his *A Farther Appeal*, that the effectiveness of field-preaching is "not my motive" but "a deep conviction that this is the will of God."¹⁵ It is plausible, perhaps probable, that Wesley's morphing theological conception of God as love was the prime impetus for his submission to field-preaching.

Empathy

The second impetus, and one that flows naturally out of the first, is empathy. Theology cultivated empathy. Wesley's conception of God as love led to the cultivation of God's love in Wesley. In Wesleyan terms, the process of sanctification that Wesley believed and taught was at work in Wesley. Even if he cited external reasons for field-preaching (Whitefield, effectiveness, and the closed Anglican Church), it was the internal invasion of a sanctifying God that nurtured an empathic love in Wesley that drove him to the fields. Maybe when it comes to field-preaching Wesley couldn't always explain himself, though he came close in *A Farther Appeal*, but he certainly couldn't help himself.

Roman Krznaric, a leading expert in empathy studies, notes that recent scientific scholarship argues for humans as *homo empathicus*, "wired for empathy."¹⁶ He bases this on the work of Giacomo Rizzolatti and his team of neuroscientists from the University of Parma in 1990. Rizzolatti discovered that mirror neurons in the brain give human beings a natural capacity to be empathic, to feel what another is feels.¹⁷ Science indirectly confirms that God has made us like himself, with a capacity for

¹⁴Ibid., 308.

¹⁵*Works*, Letter to John Smith March 25, 1747, in *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 26, ed. Frank Baker, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), 237.

¹⁶Roman Krznaric, *Empathy: Why it Matters and How to Get It* (New York: Perigee, 2014), xiii.

¹⁷Ibid., 21.

empathy. The ability of humans to exhibit empathic love, then, is one of the marks of the *imago dei* in us.

Wesley believed the *imago dei* that marked us at creation can be restored through the process of sanctification here and now. Empathic love is a divine gene within us. It may be dormant, but it's there like a sleeping giant waiting to be awakened by the Holy Spirit through the process of sanctification. The Holy Spirit restores what we naturally are before the Fall. The *imago dei* is restored here and now, not merely there and later. Wesley is a walking, talking, and writing artifact for his theology, his optimism concerning the power of God's grace to make us what he originally created us to be, *homo empathicus*.

Krznaric defines empathy as "the art of stepping imaginatively into the shoes of another person, understanding their feelings and perspectives, and using that understanding to guide your actions."¹⁸ The biblical word that comes closest to the meaning of empathy is *σπλαγχνίζομαι*, typically translated "compassion." *σπλαγχνίζομαι* is a deep in the bowels of the body ache one feels because of someone else's suffering. Scripture is full of occasions when Jesus Christ was "filled with compassion"¹⁹ and acted on behalf of the suffering by feeding, or healing, or saving. Affection, what one feels, impacts behavior, what one does.

The empathy of Christ came alive in Wesley, evident by his empathic concern for and ministry to the poor, mostly unchurched, of English society. The connection between Wesley's theological understanding of God as holy love and the former's growing empathy for the marginalized to whom he preached in the open-air is tight in *A Farther Appeal*. Just after articulating the theology that drove him to the fields, Wesley articulated his empathy for his flock in the fields:

Consider coolly, if it was not highly expedient that something of this kind should be.

How expedient, were it only on account of those poor sinners against their own souls who, to all human appearance, were utterly inaccessible every other way! And what numbers of these are still to be found, even in or near our most populous cities! What multitudes of them were, some years since, both in Kingswood and the Fells about Newcastle! who, week after week, spent the Lord's day, either in the ale-house, or in idle

¹⁸Ibid., x.

¹⁹See Matthew 9:36, 14:14, 20:34; Mark 1:41, 6:34.

diversions, and never troubled themselves about going to church, or to any public worship at all. Now, would you really have desired that these poor wretches should have sinned on until they dropped into hell? Surely you would not. But by what other means was it possible they should have been plucked out of the fire? . . . It is hard to conceive anything else which could have reached them. Had it not been for field-preaching . . . they must have run on in the error of their way, and perished in their blood.²⁰

Wesley's theology of love induced his empathic concern for those "poor sinners" and led him to the fields. It should be noted that Wesley did not use the term "poor sinners" pejoratively but empathically. Whenever Wesley uses "sinner," the tone is laced with concern not condescension. This sentiment was not typical among preachers in Wesley's day. It is no coincidence that in his first field-preaching adventure, Wesley preached from Luke 4,²¹ a text that highlights God's empathic love for the marginalized. He saw sinners, like Jesus did, as "captives" who need and long to be "set free."

Once Wesley adjusted his method from the pulpit to the fields, his manner of preaching was transformed, too. His loving concern for the people in the fields impacted what and how Wesley preached. He empathically contextualized his preaching in a variety of ways. Wesley's most famous preaching practice evidences his empathic contextualization, "I design plain truth for plain people."²² It took a fair amount of restraint for an eloquent Oxford don to use colloquial language. Empathy supplied that restraint.

Contemporaries of Wesley picked up on his empathic contextualization. According to Heitzenrater, "The tendency to select topics according to the context and audience, and speak to their needs and at their level, is also supported by the testimony of several observers who indicate that Wesley spoke very directly to his listeners."²³ One such observer was John Hampson, Wesley's first biographer. Hampson provides this very helpful description of Wesley's empathic preaching: "Wesley's manner was grace-

²⁰*Works*, A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, in *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 11, ed. Gerald R. Cragg, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), 306-307.

²¹*Wesley*, Journal Entry April 2, 1739, vol. 19, ed. W. Reginald Ward, 46.

²²*Wesley*, Preface to Sermons, vol. 1, ed. Albert C. Outler, 104.

²³Richard P. Heitzenrater, "John Wesley's Principles and Practice of Preaching," *Methodist History* 37:2 (January, 1999), 102-103.

ful and easy . . . his style neat, simple, perspicuous, and admirably adapted to the capacity of his hearers.”²⁴

Wesley taught Methodist preachers to embody empathic contextualization. He advised, “always suit your subject to your audience.”²⁵ “Because we are to instruct people of the lowest understanding . . . We should use the most common, little, easy word . . . which our language affords.”²⁶ Vicki Tolar Burton succinctly sums up the uncommon nature of Wesley’s homiletic writing, “Wesley taught speakers to love their listeners . . . a radical notion.”²⁷

When compared to the preaching of Whitefield, Wesley’s style notably comes up short in the area of charisma. But, what Wesley may have lacked in charisma he more than made up for in contextualization. He seemed to have a rare ability in his day of adapting his method and manner of preaching to the particular needs of listeners, to put the gospel in a contextual container from which they can drink based upon their hopes and hurts, dreams and disappointments.

This study seeks to show the plausibility that Wesley’s motivation to preach in the fields was not merely pragmatic but theologically empathic. After Aldersgate, the empathic love of God for humanity, evident in the incarnation of Christ, got under Wesley’s skin and into his soul. God’s empathy drove God onto the field of human turf. That theology of empathy likely fueled Wesley’s actual empathy for the poor unchurched and led to his incarnational “on their turf” approach to preaching. What happened to God happened to Wesley, since “renewal in the image of God entails being drawn into God’s likeness.”²⁸ Wesley was being sanctified and that is a likely reason why he submitted to the “strange” and “vile,” inconvenient and dangerous practice of field-preaching for 51 years.

²⁴John Hampson, *Memoirs of the late Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, vol. 3 (Sunderland, 1791), 158.

²⁵Wesley, *Minutes of the Methodist Conference*, vol. 10, ed. Henry D. Rack, 859.

²⁶Wesley, Letter from John Wesley to the Rev. Samuel Furly on July 15, 1764, vol. 27, ed. Ted A. Campbell, 381.

²⁷Vicki Tolar Burton, *Spiritual Literacy in John Wesley’s Methodism: Reading, Writing, and Speaking to Believe* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2008), 31.

²⁸Richard P. Heitzenrater, “The Imitatio Christi and the Great Commandment: Virtue and Obligation in Wesley’s Ministry with the Poor,” in ed. M. Douglas Meeks, *The Portion of the Poor: Good News to the Poor in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1995), 63.

Implications for the Practice and Teaching of Preaching

Wesley was a practical, though not pragmatic, theologian. He did what he had to do to be effective. He did what worked, but only in as much as it aligned with his theological cognition and empathic affection. Theology and empathy, love of God and neighbor, ruled his practical roost. For Wesley, theology informs practice, and the bridge between the two is empathy. Wesleyan theology induces empathy which guides practice. An exploration of ways that Wesley's theological empathy can inform the practice and teaching of preaching today is warranted.

One of the current trends in the Church is video-venue preaching. A preacher in one context is video-recorded or streamed live for a different context. This method is based on the presumption that only the preacher's content matters, but the preaching context does not. In video-venue preaching, listeners are peripheral bystanders not participants who help shape the preaching event. A disembodied preacher cannot empathically contextualize a sermon in the moment the sermon is preached. The argument for video-venue preaching is a pragmatic one. It's easy, effective, and cheap.

Wesley was driven to the fields, though, not by a quest for pragmatic effectiveness but by his theological understanding of an incarnate God who comes onto our turf in the flesh. If Wesley was really a pragmatist and not a theologian, he would likely support the current trend. Perhaps Wesleyan studies have overplayed the pragmatist and downplayed the theologian in Wesley. Who can envision Wesley endorsing video-venue preaching? It would be easier, based on this study, to imagine him standing up at a General Conference and enthusiastically reasoning, "How dare we preachers proclaim a God whose love drove him to come onto our turf in the flesh if we are not willing to do the same through the ministry of preaching?"

Wesley's empathic contextualization offers a corrective for another development that has crept into the Church over the past generation. Churches that grow large often protect the preacher from the people to whom she preaches. After all, "the preacher is simply too busy now for people. We need to give the preacher space for study. Don't bother the preacher with shepherding needs." Protecting the preacher from the people who come to hear sermons on Sunday might seem wise initially but in the long-run is problematic. How can the preacher incisively and empathically contextualize the gospel for people she does not know well? Loving, empathic connection between preacher and listener is a Wesleyan

homiletic. Regardless of congregational size, the preacher is called to be more like an empathic shepherd than a pragmatic executive.

The cultural tendency to idolize style is also confronted by Wesley's theological empathy. A preponderance of literature in leadership, communication, and business persuades readers to play to their strengths in order to help their organizations most. "Find your strength and style. Make it your lead card. Stay in the lane of your sweet spot at all costs." This perspective has leaked into the ministry of preaching. Preachers must, no doubt, seek to find their unique, God-designed preaching strengths and develop them. However, preachers in the Wesleyan tradition will resist the ease of allowing our stylistic preferences to outweigh listener needs. If Wesley made too much of his preferential strengths and style, he would not have preached in the fields. The needs of listeners will significantly impact what and how the empathic preacher preaches.

What drove Wesley to the fields can also inform the professor in the classroom. Wesley's ministry flow from theology to empathy to practice presents a helpful outline for the preaching course. Instead of starting with best practices, "what works," perhaps the course can, firstly, foster the theological cognition that, secondly, cultivates empathic affection and, thirdly, moves the student toward practices that are faithful to theology and empathy, love for God and neighbor. The beauty of the Wesleyan way is the equal place given to the head, the heart, and the hands. As it is with the Trinity, there is no hierarchy but mutual submission and interrelation between the different human faculties. Curricular design that sets a spacious place at the table for theology, empathy and practice, the cognitive, affective and behavioral can form students well in the Wesleyan way.

Conclusion

Before "All You Need is Love" was a Beatles song, it was a Wesleyan homiletic. The Beatles got it from us. Empathic love that drives the preacher deep into the shoes of the listener is a hallmark of Wesleyan preaching. Hietzenrater makes the case that the main content of Methodism was love of God and neighbor. Then he asserts, "The topics for preaching were an extension of the Christian life that the preacher was expected to model."²⁹ The one who preaches in the Wesleyan Tradition does not just *preach* on "perfect love" but *embodies* "perfect love" in and around the preaching event.

²⁹Richard P. Heitzenrater, "John Wesley's Principles and Practice of Preaching," *Methodist History* 37:2 (January, 1999), 100.

BOOK REVIEWS

Sherman, Robert. *Covenant, Community and the Spirit: A Trinitarian Theology of the Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015. 240 pages. ISBN-978-0-8010-4974-3.

Reviewed by Gift Mtukwa, Ph.D. candidate, Nazarene Theological College, Manchester, England.

Covenant, Community and the Spirit: A Trinitarian Theology of the Church is a well-written, well-researched work that is accessible to both laypersons and undergraduate theology students. The book is an exposition of the Church as a Trinitarian community. For Sherman, the Church is “a community that befits God’s own triune communion and majesty” (xi). The Church as we experience it today is polarized by political, generational, racial, socio-economic, educational, and/or other demographic divisions. This, for the author, is the reason “we need our ecclesiological imaginations reclaimed and reignited by a more biblical, theological, and pastoral vision of the Church” (xii). He claims that his approach is a “Trinitarian, spirit focused approach” (xii). However, throughout the book one gets the impression that what he claims as Trinitarian turns out to be only a Spirit-filled approach, as the other persons of the Trinity are diminished in his discussion of the Church. Nevertheless, the strength of his approach lies in the fact that he sees the work of the Spirit not only in individuals but communities, including institutional structures.

Sherman also discusses the Church in light of denominations, as he believes that “Christianity can survive a post-denominational age, but it cannot survive a post-ecclesial age” (xvi). He ably demonstrates that denominations are not ecclesial. However, one wonders whether it is possible to rid the Church of denominations, considering the price at which unity was achieved prior to the Reformation. Sherman grounds his understanding of the Church in the fact that humanity was created for community and are by nature social. Thus, he recognizes that all human persons owe their existence to others, affirming what African theologian John Mbiti expresses, “I am because we are, and because we are therefore I am.” With this, Sherman challenges Western individualism, noting that no single individual can define humanity fully.

The author affirms that the community God created has been disrupted by human sin. He defines sin as when "humans seek to define themselves by themselves . . . in isolation from this proper relation to, and true fulfillment in God" (20). At the same time, God does not leave humanity to its own devices; rather, he initiates a mechanism for redemption "from the power and consequences of sin and evil in the world" (21). Here Sherman, although thoroughly Reformed in his theological beliefs, affirms the Wesleyan doctrine of prevenient grace. He understands salvation as both social and individual, the result of that being covenant. Sherman supports this from both the Old and New Testaments.

In the second chapter, Sherman elaborates on the Trinitarian understanding of God. He affirms that the immanent Trinity is the essential/economic Trinity; however, for the author the immanent Trinity is prior to the economic Trinity. He states, "The economic Trinity reveals the Immanent Trinity, which the Immanent Trinity is the basis for the economic Trinity" (40). The doctrine of Trinity matters because it is intensely practical. At the same time, the work of the Trinity is undivided; all that God does involves all the persons of the Trinity. That also becomes a paradigm, in that salvation embeds individuals in communities. For Sherman, the Father sets the agenda, which is carried out by the Son and the Holy Spirit. Although he affirms that "the divine work proceeds in absolute unity and perfect harmony" (44), one gets the impression that there is a hierarchy in the Trinity, a fact he affirms (44). Still, one is left wondering about the implications of such a doctrine for the Church. It has to be recognized that just because humanity fails to mirror God in its community does not mean God is not egalitarian or non-hierarchical.

Sherman utilizes three images of the Church, namely, the body of Christ, the people of God, and the Temple of the Holy Spirit. He justifies his choice of these by seeing their use in clarifying the work of the Triune God. The body of Christ image comes about through the work of the Holy Spirit who forms a community that continues to function as Christ's body. This body is formed through worship, in which Word and Sacrament are central. Considering the centrality of worship to the life of the Church, Sherman does not discuss how one joins the worshipping community. The closest he gets to this is when he says, "the Church is a community that has left behind its old life and entered into a new life and joyous reality" (80). His understanding of Scripture is influenced by Neo-Orthodoxy, in that he says the Scripture does not possess intrinsic authority but is "made such by the Word revealed" (86). However, one wonders what

Sherman would say about inspiration. Indeed, Christ can override what was written by biblical authors, but does he need to do so?

The author regards baptism as prior to the Lord's Supper, with the implication that the person who is not baptized should not partake of the Supper. Even though that is the order in the Gospels, should we excluded those who are not baptized and yet have put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? The Trinitarian God is a hospitable God, and exclusion of others is not consistent with his nature. If we regard the Supper as a means of grace, the benefits can still accrue even for believers who are not baptized. In relation to worship, he concludes that "worship shapes and orients us at the deepest level, both by calling us into our truest selves" (105).

Concerning the image of the people of God, Sherman affirms that Jesus redefines the people of God, as the Holy Spirit calls a people to be the people of God. For him, God is now blessing the nations as he promised to Abraham. The community God calls is a "holy nation, a royal priesthood" in which there is reconciliation with fellow human beings. Citing Jonathan R. Wilson, Sherman rightly recognizes that the America culture is fragmented rather than pluralistic. In such a culture, an individual "inhabits multiple cultures sequentially and simultaneously" (135). He recognizes that the increase of humanity results in the increase of sin to the extent that as "new generations are born into what has come before, they inherit the assumptions, the tendencies, and predilections of their ancestors" (137). For Sherman, this is the reason God calls individuals "from everyday reality . . . out to a new reality" (137).

Holiness entails being set apart, as God is the one who sets apart. This is true of the Old Testament heroes of faith, and it is true of the Church, which is "counter culture" (138). For Sherman, the Church is not only the people of God but also "the people of God's reign." As such, the Church does not exist for itself but bears witness to God's reign in Christ through the Holy Spirit. He grounds the institutional nature of the Church in the fact that human beings are by nature "embodied, social, and historical beings" (142). At the same time, "the people of God are called to be the humanity of the 'last Adam,' Christ rather than the 'first Adam'" (152). What God is calling the people to be is what he created them to be. Consequently, to be holy is to be fully human. Thus, Wesleyans can affirm much of what Sherman has to say about Christian holiness.

The last image of the Church discussed by Sherman is the Temple of the Holy Spirit. He connects this image with Christ as a Prophet rather

than as Priest. He justifies this by recognizing that these offices served “the same ends of communion and holiness.” The Spirit moved the prophets to speak for God against injustice and idolatry. Since the Spirit is given to all, Sherman adopts what he calls the “Prophethood of all believers” (175). Yet this Spirit does not leave the temple as it is; the Spirit sanctifies it holy. He states, “The presence and glory of God is ‘located’ no longer in a place (the temple) but in *persons*, the assembly or *ekklesia* of Christ” (184). In the Wesleyan Spirit, the indwelling Spirit is indeed the Holy Spirit, a fact often overlooked by many writers and traditions.

The work of the Spirit in the *koinonia* is seen in the fruits and gifts produced by the Holy Spirit. In making a distinction in the place of law in both Christianity and Judaism, Sherman completely misunderstands covenantal nomism to use Sanders’ words. Jews did not keep the law for its sake but as an expression of their obedience to God. This notwithstanding, Sherman rightly recognizes the place of the temple and ceremonial law to the Christian faith in that it provides “the grammar and vocabulary for understanding what Christ has done and our appropriate response to that accomplishment” (200). Sherman concludes by affirming the Church is called to be a “witnessing pilgrimage” (215). The wilderness motif helps the Church to live out this aspect of its nature. This pilgrimage is a “perilous” one.

Sherman has accomplished what he set out to accomplish, namely to understand the Church and its life from a Trinitarian perspective. His use of biblical passages to ground his theology is commendable. His work can properly be termed a biblical theology of the church. I recommend this book for those who seek to understand the life of the Church and how it is shaped by the Trinity.

Leithart, Peter J. *Delivered from the Elements of the World: Atonement, Justification, Mission*. Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Press, 2016. 368 pages. ISBN-13: 978-0830851263.

Reviewed by Aaron Perry, Assistant Professor of Pastoral Care and Christian Ministry, Wesley Seminary at Indiana Wesleyan University, Marion, IN.

What do atonement, justification, and mission have to do with one another? Peter Leithart's *Delivered from the Elements of the World* is an overarching, theologically astute, sociologically informed answer to the question that centers on community/society. Atonement is about the death of practices of one community/society and the establishment of practices that sustain another community/society; justification is about the deliverance of Jesus from death through resurrection that establishes this new community/society; and mission is about living out the identity of this community/society in its mutually shared practices, provided through the Spirit of Christ. This review will provide a summary of the book, its presence in the atonement field, and, finally, an assessment of its use in Wesleyan contexts.

I am using community/society above in such a way because the reader should not take it that Leithart is referring to an existential kind of belonging to a community of warm-hearted people, nor should the reader simply think of society as a cold, abstract concept. Instead, every interconnected group has elements or underlying rules and practices that are effective at creating existentially meaningful bonds. Leithart argues that all societies are religious. It is not whether or not a society is religious, but how it is religious. Societies function according to socio-physical laws, which Paul calls the "elements of the world," *ta stoicheia tou kosmou* (Gal. 4:3; Col. 2:8, 20), which are part of the fallen yet created order. The form that these social laws take varies according to cultures, but they all point to something bigger than themselves and to the fact that something is broken. Perhaps we could say that all societies live and move and have their being under these elements.

The Israelite community provides a kind of parody community. In being under the law, the Israelites are not in a qualitative state. Instead, being under law and being under the elements of the world are both lives of bondage, existing by rules for purity, exclusion, and social connection. The law was an improvement on the elements of the world because it unmasked the ineffectiveness of the elements to transform the fleshly

nature of the person and cultures. Circumcision is that literal action of cutting off that part of the flesh that often was a display of power to show how foolish it was to trust in the flesh. However, ultimately the law was powerless to do what was needed. Both the elements of the world and the law were lives of *flesh*. It takes a new covenant for new rules of social binding. For Leithart, this is the life of the Spirit.

But who would rescue people from bodies of death, people who are slaves to flesh (Rom 7:23)? Who will provide access to the Spirit of life? Jesus Christ. The death of Christ is the death of flesh, unfolding in the story of Israel so that Israel's representative is the place where flesh is killed. Leithart makes a case for a kind of penal substitution: Jesus takes the death deserved by those who live out the life of flesh in their conspiracy against him, but also condemns the fleshly nature that is at work in them in this same death. The death is punitive because it takes the law's punishment for its misuse; and it is substitutionary because the one deserving death does not die (164-165). Instead, the death and resurrection of Jesus establish the new community of Spirit. Perhaps we could say, with a Girardian nod, that Jesus' death remakes the world, even for those who do not yet know it.

Because Jesus is the only one who did not live according to the flesh, who lived the life of faithful obedience unto death, he was validated, vindicated by resurrection. This whole process of Jesus' death as the death of flesh and his resurrection as the validation of his faithful life is *justification*. Justification is both the condemnation of flesh in Jesus' death and the reversal of death's sentence in the resurrection (188). Leithart calls this, cleverly, the *deliverdict*. It is both a deliverance from death and a verdict of righteousness, rolled into one act and necessarily joined. If Jesus was not raised from the dead, then we cannot proclaim his righteousness. The aftermath of the resurrection is the gift of the Spirit—God's Spirit put into flesh so that "human beings can begin to live by the Spirit while in flesh" (207). In so doing, Jesus is bringing together a people who are not under law and not under the elements of the world, but a new community infused with the Spirit. This kind of community is a necessarily missional community, empowered to live according to new social rules and warned against returning to old social rules (the Galatian heresy).

Delivered from the Elements of the World appropriates, critically, several insights of the New Perspective on Paul, specifically N. T. Wright. Leithart makes the connection between atonement and justification in his affirmation that Paul is talking about the faith *of* Christ rather than faith

in Christ. The radically different way of living shown by Jesus that culminates in the cross is the life that unmask the weakness of the law and fulfills its aims, all at once, thereby creating atonement. Atonement and justification happen because of Christ's faith.

Leithart's work is best understood as a sociologico-theological work on atonement that is developed with a method of biblical theology. Readers appreciative of Scot McKnight's *A Community Called Atonement* (Abingdon, 2007) will find a meatier theory of atonement with no less appreciation for the sociological sensitivities required of such a theory if it is to take seriously the role and nature of the church in the wake of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. Further, readers familiar with Mark Heim's *Saved from Sacrifice* (Eerdmans, 2006) will also have a text interested in the sociological effects of sacrifice and public crucifixion, but with a stronger evangelical focus and greater concern for New Testament theology.

Delivered from the Elements of the World is useful in a Wesleyan context in a number of ways. First, its emphasis on the Holy Spirit will provide Wesleyan theologians new resources for discussing sanctification and its connection with ecclesiology and Christology. Second, critics and proponents alike will find a thoughtful, biblical approach to penal substitutionary atonement (PSA). Leithart's work avoids the typical, even crass criticisms of blood-thirsty deities and divine child abuse, and it shows how such critiques are not helpful and misleading when discussing robust versions of PSA. Finally, beyond just the Wesleyan interest, missiologists will be given a new lens to understand Islamic cultures and contemporary western cultures. Although at first these cultural expressions might seem at odds, Leithart argues that both these communities are suffering from the Galatian heresy—returning once again to the life of flesh—to the bondage of the elements of the world for society and cultural promulgation and identity, rather than living in the life of the Spirit. Subsequently, a different approach might be developed for mission to these cultures.

Leithart has produced a fresh and creative book on atonement that is deeply rooted in Scripture and intentionally theological while utilizing a sociological lens consistently. Leithart shows how theology is multi-disciplinary and can still be courageous enough to speak about God and what God is continuing to do in the world.

Smith, Kay Higuera, Jayachitra Lalitha, and L. Daniel Hawk, eds. *Evangelical Postcolonial Conversations: Global Awakenings in Theology and Praxis*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014. 271 pages. ISBN-13: 978-0-8308-4053-3.

Reviewed by William T. Purinton, Professor of Humanities, Seoul Theological University, Bucheon, Korea.

The end of this book tells its beginning. It all started as a “round-table” at Gordon College. It was as well organized as any academic conference, with the caveat that allowed the winds of dialogue (“a unique form of conversation with potential to improve collective inquiry processes”; 251) to blow freely. Although its genesis was unique, the end product appears as a collection of conference papers with more than half being co-authored. There is a mixture of some philosophical theology, historical theology, constructive theology, with the underlying academic strand being biblical studies.

As with any academic book that attempts to stimulate a “conversation,” it is essential that some of the new terms be defined. Postcolonial studies have been around since the 1970s, having followed the growth and expansion of cultural studies and liberation theologies that began in the 1950s. The history of evangelicalism (always with a lower-case “e” in this book) covers a longer period; however, its interaction with postcolonial studies is even shorter. The book attempts, as its subtitle indicates, to create or construct “global awakenings in theology and praxis.” Now for evangelicals who read “awakenings” as revival, rather than enlightenment, this is more than a monumental task.

The three editors hold doctorates in biblical studies and two of them (Kay Higuera Smith and L. Daniel Hawk) are Americans and teach in the United States. Jayachitra Lalitha teaches New Testament at Tamilnadu Theological Seminary in South India. In addition to Lalitha only one other contributor currently resides outside the United States. The text is structured with five parts and a total of fourteen chapters, after five contributors introduce the volume itself. In order to navigate the text some markers are defined early on. Those include “metanarrative,” “evangelical,” “hybridity” and the distinctive hyphen-less spelling of “postcolonial.” In the editors’ introduction the aim of postcolonial “theories and theologies” is named: “to decolonize the established colonial remnants of Western hegemony” (25). The next page lists the need for evangelicals to listen carefully and to remain on the receiving side as being implicated along with the colonial powers.

Although race is central to this conversation on postcolonialism and evangelicalism, there is limited treatment of gender issues and near silence on class issues/struggles. These forms of cultural criticism have become almost standard idiom in the secular academy, but they remain new (or even foreign) jargon for “mainstream” evangelicalism. This book did well at introducing the terms and concepts related to postcolonial studies, but whether or not evangelicals will be reading their Bibles and history with the “newly cleaned lenses” of “postcolonial perspectives” (21) remains to be seen. For many evangelicals the book presents some blurring and smears that prevent a clear reading of either the Bible or history. Let me identify three problem areas.

First, a challenge is presented to criticize and to discard the Christology that has been received through the historical creeds of the church as in Chapter 4 (“Converting a Colonialist Christ: toward an African Postcolonial Christology”). The second and third are found in Chapter 9 (“Recovering the Spirit of Pentecost: Canon and Catholicity in Postcolonial Perspective”). Readers are encouraged both to abandon the Protestant canon and adopt the Syrian one and also to “recover” feminine language for God. Many evangelicals will find it difficult to adopt these three major changes as part of the postcolonial prescription.

The strength of this book lies in the chapters from part one, dealing with the historical record that calls us all to reconsider mission and what it means to be missional today. One critique of this book includes its depiction of the West and “whiteness.” Empire and colonization were present outside Western Europe and North America, as many Asians, including Koreans, know about the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. It would have been helpful also if the discussion of “whiteness” had included the cultural history done by David R. Roediger.

Toward the end of the book, Kay Higuera Smith offers an important contribution in her essay entitled, “Embracing the Other: A Vision for Evangelical Identity.” After she considers the past failures and present challenges for evangelicals, she offers a way forward, suggesting three important steps: “interrogating power,” criticizing their “patterns of essentializing or objectifying the Other,” and hearing and reading “other stories and collective memories” (208). She suggests that these changes in attitude can be “worked out in small local church groups.” Small groups indeed are within the cultural matrix of evangelicalism, however, these particular steps or topics would be less familiar, posing some constraint on the therapeutic aim of this three-step program.

Robert Heaney's essay "Prospects and Problems for Evangelical Post-colonialisms" provides six markers of evangelicalism as a guide for the book's ongoing dialogue. These six are agreed upon by the entire group of authors of this volume, indicating clarity in arriving at a level of unity necessary to format any dialogue. The six markers also fit well with the so-called Bebbington "quadrilateral," which has become the more standard guide for the study of global evangelicalism. The markers are "christocentrism," "communitarianism," "conversionism," "charism," "textualism," and "activism" (30).

One disappointment for this reviewer was the inaccurate descriptions and depictions of evangelicals (see, e.g., 153-54). Carl F. H. Henry no doubt remains as a model theologian for many North American evangelicals, but the simple merging of Henry's (Baptist) theology with the ongoing confessional and ecclesiastical debates of mainline Presbyterians and the publication of *The Fundamentals* does not reflect a careful reading of American religious history. As a result, with a less-than-historical evangelical positioned as interlocutor, the book itself was reduced—at least in my reading—to being only a collection of essays on postcolonial themes, much less than the conversations that the title indicates.

The addition of either a select bibliography or reference list would have helped the reader to go beyond the footnotes, especially in a newer and growing discipline like postcolonial studies. With that said, the book remains a valid invitation to dialogue between two groups that seldom speak to one another. This book stands out as a single text that can assist all evangelicals to hear what postcolonial means and to begin understanding its views. It is recommended specifically to evangelicals in biblical studies where postcolonialism is already an invited and welcomed member of the academy.

Hill, Matthew Nelson. *Evolution and Holiness: Sociobiology, Altruism and the Quest for Wesleyan Perfection*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016. 247 pages. ISBN: 978-0-8308-39070.

Reviewed by E. Maynard Moore, President, WesleyNexus, Inc.

This book is the product of a very ambitious project. The aim is to connect the major issues in evolutionary biology to Christian ethics, using the lens of John Wesley's concept of holiness to do so. On the whole, Matthew Hill succeeds in accomplishing this task, and he does so in a convincing way. He recognizes that the Christian church, in its attempt to be relevant in the twenty-first century in the modern West, must engage the best conclusions of science in a constructive way. Evolutionary biology has revealed volumes of new knowledge about the human being—both by unraveling our genetics and analyzing our human communities—and Hill asks how we can come to terms with this new knowledge when we describe and prescribe moral behavior.

Hill locates his treatment of the subject at the intersection of theological ethics and sociobiology. More specifically, he wants to explore how John Wesley's concept of holiness fits into this spectrum. He argues that the Wesleyan ethic provides a perspective for a fresh assessment of altruism within the human community, drawing the latest research from the field of sociobiology into the discussion. He contends that the *modus operandi* of Wesleyan bands and classes provides the structured conditions within which people can move beyond their genetic inclinations to include concern and care for others along with self. Simultaneously, Hill wants to show how our emerging understanding of the human through sociobiology can play a role in our appreciation of Wesleyan ethics. This is a tall order.

Matthew Hill is assistant professor of philosophy in the Department of Theology at Spring Arbor University and is an ordained elder in the Free Methodist Church. While completing his Ph.D. at Durham University, Hill engaged in significant work and research in the broad field of science and religion. But two books triggered his dive into the depths of sociobiology. The first was *Human Evolution and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge, 2007) by Stephen Pope, a Roman Catholic who has been widely influential on questions concerning the origins of morality. The second book, by Neil Messer, a Reformed Protestant, titled *Selfish Genes and Christian Ethics* (Hymns Ancient and Modern Ltd., 2007), builds a cogent theory of morality beyond biological predispositions. These two books

simply provide a “stepping off point” for Hill’s own constructive argument.

Hill’s treatment is filled with intriguing statements that just sit there in the text and beg for further elaboration. For instance, early on he states, “In much the same way as the Book of James discusses the connection between works and faith, altruism and morality can be linked with holiness” (20). This is a fascinating statement that requires elaboration. As Hill conceives it, one cannot become holy without seeing the fruit of altruism and moral development along the way. Although Hill maintains that practicing altruism is not tantamount to manifesting holiness in one’s actions, these two are never very far away from each other (*a la* faith and works). But we should not draw conclusions regarding cause and effect. It is simply a juxtaposition with a “givenness” dimension. I would say it is most likened to the parallels between justice and righteousness in the Old Testament. You cannot have one without the other.

Early in the book, Hill addresses the main sociobiological narrative that considers altruism as a “problem:” if altruism exists, it seems to fly in the face of evolutionary theory, and consequently, within the framework of evolutionary biology, it is a problem that needs to be solved. Does not altruism reduce individual gene fitness, and if so, how does it become a behavioral trait? In the process of discussion, Hill makes insightful comments about kin relationships and game theory. But, as he goes on to point out, biology does not hold all the answers: environmental factors, food access, and above all the framework of human community are key explanatory factors. Hill weaves into the discussion the work of Simon Conway Morris, Richard Dawkins, ethnobiologist David Sloan Wilson and primatologist Franz DeWaal, (as well as Pope and Messer) to build his case.

In Chapter four Hill moves into a discussion of human freedom and responsibility. He draws on insights from neuroscience to address the mind/body connection, drawing interesting parallels between altruistic action and sexual reproduction, all in the context of our striving to overcome environmental barriers. When we get to Chapter five, Hill turns to John Wesley: “Wesleyan Holiness against a Backdrop of Evolution.” It might be a profound understatement to say that few of us likely have ever thought about this before. But, upon reflection, one can easily see that John Wesley, although he had no inclination about gene theory, took seriously the fallibilities of the human, even the best of us with moral inclinations. Thus, Wesley saw the need for bands and classes to provide guidance and support as we slip and slide through life.

Hill shows how Wesley found a way to work within the biological constraints, providing the structure of group accountability to nurture a member's natural proclivities while mitigating egoistic tendencies and engender altruism. In Wesley's theology, holiness is a state of grace and is to be achieved within this life (not, of course, in the Latin sense of *perfectus* but the Greek concept of *teleiosis*). Hill thoroughly describes the cultural characteristics that early Methodists faced, and walks us through the systematic accountability structures that Wesley created to sustain his movement. We see how Wesley's sermons became tools for spiritual formation. Most importantly, Hill argues that Wesley's notion of prevenient grace can be specifically connected now to findings from sociobiology.

Importantly, Hill concludes his book by asking "What is at stake?" in our day and time. He answers the question this way: "What is at stake is the preservation of Christian communities to recognize the responsibility to follow what John Wesley did: capitalize on a biological phenomenon given to us by human evolution. To fail to do this would be disastrous for communities and would neglect the call to become a holy people; this would happen through succumbing to the temptation to be selfish while lacking inner transformation.... If the church can muster up an intentional community that can take the biological state of humanity and encourage it to be more holy (leading to a fuller expression of altruism), then what is at stake is not only the future of the church but also the fine tuning of human evolution" (31).

Viewing the church and the world together in this context leads to a wide range of practical implications. Within the confines of this modest volume, full exploration of these implications is not possible. But what Hill has done here is establish the groundwork for further research and constructive analysis of possibilities for those of us in the twenty-first century church. He has effectively connected the concept of Wesleyan holiness to the findings and explanations of the human coming from sociobiology. That in itself is noteworthy. Further, Hill has used the lens of Wesleyan ethics to offer a fresh assessment of the human condition. And in doing so he provides a foundation woven from the threads of faith and science to provide a theological grounding for our service to the poor and needy. But beyond the imperative for such service, here we have a conceptual basis for addressing the deficient structures of the social order that cry out for transformation.

Walls, Jerry L. *Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory: A Protestant View of the Cosmic Drama*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2015. 235 pages. ISBN-13: 978-1587433566.

Reviewed by J. Gregory Crofford, Senior Lecturer, Department of Religion, Africa Nazarene University, Nairobi, Kenya.

Rob Bell's *Love Wins* (HarperOne, 2011) re-opened a conversation on human destiny that shows no signs of abating. Jerry Walls' *Heaven, Hell and Purgatory*—while occasioned by Bell and other popular books in the “heaven tourism” genre (12-13)—draws on a lifetime of prior research on the Christian view of the afterlife. At a mere 235 pages, it successfully distills Walls' more scholarly books and essays into a popular form (16).

Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory consists of eight chapters of equally balanced length. Chapter 1 paints a beatific vision of the Trinitarian God, a reunion of “truth, beauty, and goodness” (33) as the meaning of heaven. In chapter 2, Walls critiques atheistic substitutes for the afterlife, terming them “consolation measures when the dream has died” (47). Turning to hell, chapter 3 defends a doctrine of eternal hell, relying heavily on the insight from C. S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce* that the door to hell is “locked from the inside,” the free choice of individuals whose well-established pattern of living would make of heaven an excruciating abode. The last five chapters develop in various ways Walls' central concern of the book: namely, to introduce a view of purgatory based not on divine retribution but rather on the logical extension in time of the doctrine of sanctification, the holiness prerequisite for dwelling eternally with God (Heb 12:14).

Jerry Walls' strength is as a philosopher of religion. It is apparent that he has thought deeply about objections to the afterlife stemming from atheism, including those of Bertrand Russell, Richard Taylor, and Keith Parsons. Walls correctly notes that to desire life beyond the grave is not egotistical but rather is a hope “for the redemption of the entire created order” (61). Further, grounding meaning only in the pleasurable experiences of the here-and-now begs the question of the validity of assigning those experiences ultimate value if there is no hope of them continuing beyond death (62).

A second area where Walls makes a solid contribution is his identification of last things as foundational for morality (163-86). He cites John Milbank: “Resurrection, not death, is the ground of the ethical” (184). Walls portrays heaven as a picture of the “eternal dynamic of divine love”

(184). Christian sacrifice—even unto death—can be made in the sure hope that death does not have the final word, but has been swallowed up in victory (1 Cor 15:54).

Of special interest is Walls' treatment of the question of the nature of the human being (117-38). Are we bodies animated by souls (dualism) or simply bodies (monism)? Here Walls acknowledges the recent rise of monism (or "physicalism") but surprisingly gives no critique. Instead, he references Dante's *Divine Comedy* rather than delving into what scripture has to say on the matter. This is disappointing for the reader who considers biblical theology an important measure when weighing doctrine. It stands in contrast to the meticulous exegetical work done by others, such as annihilationist Edward Fudge in *The Fire the Consumes* (Cascade/Wipf and Stock, 3rd ed., 2011).

Yet proper evaluation of *Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory* must consider Walls' view of purgatory. Here, Walls—a Protestant—effectively delineates between what he calls the "satisfaction" view of Roman Catholicism, including its attendant excesses, and the more theologically nuanced "sanctification" model (95-98). However, in developing the second model, he identifies only two possibilities: namely, our sin being "zapped" at the moment of death or purgatory as a *post mortem* "continuing process" (113). The first view appears close to that of Charles Wesley (1708-89), whose hymns frequently seemed to make death what entirely sanctifies us. For his part, John Wesley (1703-91)—in keeping with the Church of England's *Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion*—rejected purgatory. Instead, he taught a third possibility unmentioned by Walls, that entire sanctification is obtainable through faith, both an instantaneous gift of God's grace and an ongoing cleansing of sin in this life, made available through Christ's atonement (1 John 1:7-9; Heb 13:12). In Wesley's view, the holiness prerequisite for heaven—contra Walls—does not await a divine purging after death but is a work of grace available here-and-now. *Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory* is silent on the matter, seemingly unaware of this important third option offered by the Wesleyan tradition.

On-balance, *Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory* is a helpful introduction to the Christian doctrines related to destiny. Though incomplete in some ways as outlined above, it is conversant with both atheistic objections to the afterlife as well as the moral implications of personal eschatology. Instructors will find it useful to provoke classroom discussion and further investigation.

Gordon, James R. *The Holy One in Our Midst: An Essay on the Flesh of Christ*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016. 241 pages. ISBN-13: 978-1-5064-0834-7.

Reviewed by Jerome Van Kuiken, Associate Professor of Ministry and Christian Thought, Oklahoma Wesleyan University, Bartlesville, OK.

In the Reformation era, Christology became a point of contention between Reformed and Lutheran Protestants. Reformed theologians taught that, because Christ's humanity was finite while his divinity was infinite, the divine Son was omnipresently active beyond the flesh (*extra carnem*) of Jesus of Nazareth. Lutherans labeled this doctrine the *extra Calvinisticum* (hereafter EC) and denied it. They taught that Christ's humanity shared in his divine omnipresence so that, wherever he was divinely, there too he was humanly. This view supported the Lutheran eucharistic doctrine that Christ's body and blood were physically present on a thousand altars simultaneously. Traditionally, Wesleyan theologians have said little about the EC debate but have inclined toward the Reformed position (see Wesley's *Explanatory Note* on Jn. 3:13; Watson's *Institutes* I:580–82; II:663–67; Pope's *Compendium* II:193; Miley's *Systematic Theology* II:55–59; Wiley's *Christian Theology* II:183–84, 191–201). This combination of relative inattention and Reformed inclination suggests that the time is ripe for a robust Wesleyan reappraisal of EC. If so, then Reformed theologian James Gordon's *Holy One in Our Midst* is an important new resource.

Citing the paucity even in Reformed scholarship of recent studies of EC, Gordon's book seeks to build a cumulative case for it as "logically coherent, catholically orthodox, biblically warranted, and theologically useful" (22 n72). In fact, though, he defers to an earlier study to establish the catholicity of the doctrine (208). Gordon focuses his own efforts on EC's logical coherence (chs. 2 and 3), biblical warrant (ch. 4), and theological utility (ch. 5) between his introduction (ch. 1) and conclusion (ch. 6).

To demonstrate EC's logical consistency, Gordon first documents major Lutheran and Barthian objections to it: EC undermines the completeness of the Incarnation and our worship of the embodied Christ; it is Nestorian and speculative; and it turns Christ's humiliation into mere playacting. To answer these objections, Gordon employs the tools of analytic theology—surveying the range of possible explanations and probing

them for logical consistency—while taking into account both classical and actualistic metaphysical models. He shows to his satisfaction that a “part/whole Christology” (87) preserves the completeness and venerability of the incarnate Christ while dodging Nestorianism. The charges of speculation and false humiliation turn out, in Gordon’s eyes, to beg the question of what deity and kenosis must entail.

Moving from analytic theology to biblical theology, Gordon grieves that traditionally the scriptural case for EC has been “radically underdeveloped” (114; cf. 21, 54, 206). To rectify this omission, he offers an argument from analogy: the New Testament identifies Jesus as the true temple (e.g., John 2:19-21); in biblical theology, God specially indwells the temple while remaining unconfined and transcendent in relation to it; and EC similarly describes God the Son as specially indwelling Christ’s incarnate existence while simultaneously transcending it. Such *extra carnem* transcendence appears in Jesus’ long-distance miracles (e.g., Mark 4:39; John 4:46-54), which Gordon takes as evidence of the Son’s omnipresence (144). Gordon is aware of a Nestorian version of the temple analogy in which God the Son indwells an independent human being; consequently, he insists that it is not merely Christ’s humanity but “the whole person of Christ” in his divinity and humanity that is the true temple (147).

Gordon’s final goal is to display EC’s theological fecundity. Here he offers several proposals. First, EC is a specific instance of the broader pattern of God’s ontological relationship to the world: just as the divine Son is unconfined by his incarnation, so “God’s being is not exhausted by or subsumed into the world process by graciously electing to be for humanity” (183). Second, EC protects a proper theological epistemology: God gives Godself to be known in Christ without that revelation ever becoming reduced to something that we can manipulate. Third, EC can support a Christocentric natural theology: study of the natural world is study of the Son’s works *extra carnem*, yet those works always harmonize with his manifestation in the flesh. Fourth, EC may ground a soteriological inclusivism: the Son’s salvific activity is not confined by the limits of Jesus’ earthly ministry or, analogously, by the boundaries of the visible church. Lastly, EC helps us to think rightly of divine omnipresence: because deity is indivisible, the divine Son is not partly in Jesus’ body and partly outside it; rather, wherever the Son is, he is fully present. Thus, the divine Son *extra carnem* is no different in character than Jesus of Nazareth. Also, the Son can be spiritually present in the Eucharist even while physically absent. Gordon warns against dividing the Son’s activity beyond the flesh

from his activity in the body: to do so is to fall into Nestorianism by positing two distinct agents in Christ.

Gordon's book impresses by its breadth and depth of scholarship. His case for EC and his attendant proposals are well worth weighing by Wesleyans, as they have implications not only for Christology but also for a whole range of doctrines from providence and prevenient grace to scripture and sacrament. Yet I have some preliminary concerns. The first regards language: Gordon uses the term "person" to refer to the incarnate Christ *over against* the Son/Word existing *extra carnem* (1 n1, 60–61, 68–70, 209; cf. 147), which suggests that the latter is either impersonal or else a distinct divine Person as in Nestorianism. Then there is the opaque phrase "the person of the missions of the Son and Spirit" (95). My second concern regards methodology: Gordon starts with a received doctrine, shows its logical coherence, and only then turns to scripture, there to find an analogy that can be made to support a doctrine already believed on the basis of tradition and reason. This pattern of argumentation raises the worry that scripture is being made the handmaid of the doctrine instead of its source and judge. A final concern regards exegesis: although I find Gordon's temple analogy attractive, his attempt to prove Christ's omnipresence from his long-distance miracles is unconvincing. If true, it would prove that Moses and Elisha were omnipresent (hence divine) too, for they both performed miracles at a distance (Exod 14:16, 27; 2 Kgs 4:1–7; 5:1–14). Contrary to Gordon's contention, the centurion who requested a long-distance miracle from Jesus did so precisely to keep him personally absent from a Gentile house (Matt 8:8). A better appeal would have been to verses that describe the Son/Word as cosmically present and active (Matt 18:20; 28:20; John 1:3–5; Eph 1:22; 4:10; Col 1:17; Heb 1:3, although these arguably refer to his preincarnate or post-resurrection state rather than his earthly career). Despite these concerns—or indeed, due to them—Gordon's *Holy One in Our Midst* deserves careful reflection to determine if the *extra Calvinisticum* should also be the *extra Wesleyanicum*.

Callen, Barry L., ed. *The Holy River of God: Currents and Contributions of the Wesleyan Holiness Stream of Christianity*. Spring Valley, California: Aldersgate Press, 2016. ISBN 978-1-60039-309-9.

Reviewed by Don Thorsen, Professor of Theology, Azusa Pacific Seminary, Azusa Pacific University, Azusa, CA.

The Wesleyan Holiness tradition of Christianity continues to thrive, and *The Holy River of God* testifies to its breadth in embodying and promoting biblical holiness. Barry Callen edited this book, which is an anthology that contains a compendium of beliefs, values, and practices, reflective of historic Wesleyan and Holiness churches, parachurch organizations, and contemporary advocacy groups for social concerns.

Although some Christians may fail to appreciate the Wesleyan Holiness tradition, contributors to *The Holy River of God* talk about its spiritual and ministerial vibrancy in the present world context as well as in the past. Tributaries to the stream of Wesleyan and Holiness Christianity have recently revived their interconnectedness through participation in the Wesleyan Holiness Connection (WHC). The WHC regularly brings together pastors and laity, including denominational and academic leaders. In addition, it sponsors regional networks—nationally and internationally—for the sake of proclaiming, celebrating, and applying biblical holiness to the real-life needs of a complex, ever-changing world. (For more information about the WHC, see its website: <http://holinessandunity.org/>.)

The lead chapter in *The Holy River of God* is written by Kevin Manioa, who founded and continues to spearhead the networking of the Wesleyan Holiness Connection. The chapter is entitled “Our Guiding Vision Forward,” which lays out the core principles of the Wesleyan Holiness tradition, how it has contributed to Christianity throughout the centuries, and how it is currently meeting the needs of people—individually and socially, spiritually and physically, and with love and justice. Just as God is holy, Christians are called to be holy, and to minister holistically in the world today.

The Holy River of God is composed of four sections. The first section deals with the various streams of holiness, drawing upon scripture and church history, especially focusing upon pastoral and theological themes found in John Wesley. The Wesleyan Holiness tradition is then discussed in light both of its American context and of the international Holiness and Pentecostal movements.

The second section talks about currents within the Wesleyan Holiness stream of churches and denominations. Each chapter is written by leading spokespeople from each church tradition: Assemblies of God, The Brethren in Christ, The Christian and Missionary Alliance, The Church of God (Anderson, IN), The Church of God (Cleveland, TN), The Church of the Nazarene, The Free Methodist Church, Grace Communion International, The International Pentecostal Holiness Church, International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, The Salvation Army, The United Methodist Church, and The Wesleyan Church. Not only do these churches draw from the Wesleyan Holiness tradition, they contribute to it through their respective ministries, and they are increasingly cooperating with one another through the Wesleyan Holiness Connection. Each church tradition adds distinctive value, regardless of whether they are mainline or evangelical, revivalist or Pentecostal.

Section three highlights important developments within the Wesleyan Holiness tradition. To begin, chapters are written about the Wesleyan Holiness Connection and its publishing enterprise—the Aldersgate Press. Of interest are several of the WHC networks, including chapters about Regional Networks in the United States, and also global networks, for example, in Brazil. In Christian higher education, the WHC developed a Presidents' Network, bringing together college, university, and seminary leaders in promoting biblical holiness.

Prior to the networking of the Wesleyan Holiness Connection, other ministries united members of the tradition, for example, the multi-denominational missionary work of the World Gospel Mission. In addition, a chapter on the Wesleyan Theological Society talks about the long-standing tradition of scholars who publish and teach in order to promote biblical holiness. More recently, the Wesleyan Holiness Women Clergy and its conferences have provided much needed networking along with advocacy on behalf of women in church leadership. In further advocacy for women, there is a chapter about the Junia Project, which originated in order to edify and empower women.

If truth be told, a variety of associated entities support and advance the work of the Wesleyan Holiness Connection. A chapter on America's Christian Credit Union highlights an important financial partner in the modern-day revitalization of churches and their ministries alongside the WHC. In addition, a chapter on The Freedom Network talks about social justice advocacy, which initially organized to fight human trafficking, and

has expanded its advocacy for others who are oppressed, as articulated in its “Declaration for Freedom.”

The fourth and final section contains documents formulated by the Wesleyan Holiness Connection, which deal in detail with today’s critical issues. The first two documents are fast becoming classic statements about biblical holiness: “Holiness Manifesto” and “Fresh Eyes on Holiness.” These brief documents may be used by churches as well as by academic institutions in defining and applying the beliefs, values, and practices of the Wesleyan Holiness tradition. Other documents include instructive statements about contemporary issues: “A Call to Full Participation: Women in the Wesleyan Holiness Tradition,” “Gracefully Engaging the LGBT Conversation,” and “Declaration for Freedom,” mentioned above.

Finally, the editor Callen did an excellent job in recruiting expert authors, who provide brief (6-8 pages) and readable chapters that provide insightful breadth and depth about the Wesleyan Holiness tradition. As such, *The Holy River of God* could be used for teaching about biblical holiness in churches as well as in academic institutions. No doubt, the book will become an invaluable historical and theological reference to the ongoing vibrancy and relevance of the Wesleyan Holiness tradition in ministry to the world.

Shea, Mary Lou. *In Need of Your Prayers and Patience: The Life and Ministry of Hiram F. Reynolds and the Founding of the Church of the Nazarene*. Eugene: Resource Publications/Wipf and Stock, 2015. 550 pages. ISBN-13: 978-1-4982-2386-7.

Reviewed by David Bundy, Research Professor of World Christian Studies, New York Theological Seminary; Honorary Fellow, Manchester Wesley Research Center.

During the last three decades of the nineteenth century, the Holiness Movements definitively fractured, many withdrawing or being expelled from the Methodist Episcopal Church (North and South). These new groups of Holiness Christians shared the traditional Holiness convictions regarding sanctification and mission, but on other issues were quite open to theological strains from others who appeared to share those same values. They understood themselves as “Apostolic” or “Pentecostal” or simply “Holiness.”

Hiram F. Reynolds was a Methodist Episcopal clergyperson, devoted to the teachings and experiences of sanctification and mission. He withdrew from the Methodist Episcopal Church. He did not leave angry; he just left so that he could focus on his passions of sanctification, mission, and evangelism. He became the leader and mission director of a Holiness group with minimal infrastructure, The Association of Pentecostal Churches of America. Located primarily in the northeastern part of the United States, this became one of the original constitutive groups of the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene. With P. F. Bresee, he was elected a General Superintendent and General Mission Secretary. The argument of Mary Lou Shea is that Reynolds provided the stable leadership needed for the fractious “Pentecostal Nazarenes” to develop structures and trust, and that he was the driving and maintaining force of the mission programs.

Shea presents the data, in wonderful detail and carefully documented, molding it into a massive narrative. The resources in the Reynolds Collection at the Church of the Nazarene Archives have been skillfully used. In some ways, it is a happily disconcerting book in its brutal honesty. At times, the reader is astounded that the Nazarene missions in Japan or India or The Azores, or Caribbean survived the all-too-often expressed pettiness, greed, and un-Nazarene escapades of the missionaries as well as the penuriousness, poverty, and politics of the USA churches.

Readers will find new perspectives on the various Nazarene mission fields, the history of educational institutions, the difficulties of cohesion,

and the lack of people with the vision, physical strength, and moral capacity for leadership. Scholars of the Holiness Movements of the early twentieth century will find important information about Seth Cook Rees, whose attempt to take over the Southern California Church of the Nazarene (having failed to take over the Metropolitan Church Association) Reynolds helped block, and who then turned his sights on the network around God's Bible School, founding the Pilgrim Holiness Church. The excellent index will make this book a sort of encyclopedia for scholars, genealogists, and laity interested in "the rest of the story" about saints of the Church of the Nazarene.

The volume, as does any useful book, on occasion leaves the reader wishing for more. As such, it will hopefully spawn a number of theses and dissertations to further explore the history of the Church of the Nazarene around the world. One would wish that the huge book had been even longer so that more time could have been devoted to critical reflection of the events and their contexts; one is often left with hints, but more would have been helpful.

The result of years of Shea's working with archival sources has produced an extraordinary work. The volume will take a well-deserved place on the shelf beside the works of Timothy Smith, Stan Ingersol, Floyd Cunningham, and others as a standard work for the history of the Church of the Nazarene and of the Holiness movements. It will also be an important benchmark in the developing field of "World Christian Studies."

Brian, Rustin E. *Jacob Arminius. The Man from Oudewater*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015. 113 pages. ISBN-13: 978-1-4982-1976-1.

Reviewed by W. Stephen Gunter, Associate Dean and Research Professor, Duke Divinity School, Durham, NC.

This manuscript first came to my attention in 2012 when my book on Arminius (*Arminius and His 'Declaration of Sentiments'*, Baylor University Press) was going to press, while at the same time Keith Stanglin and Tom McCall were making copy edits for their Oxford Press book, *Jacob Arminius, Theologian of Grace*. I suggested to the publisher that it might be prudent for Brian to let the larger, more technical pieces appear first so that he might benefit from our content. Now that I have his book in hand, any reservations I might have about its contribution to the conversation have disappeared. His book fits where both of the aforementioned books do not—namely as an introduction to the life and teachings of Arminius in a form accessible to laity and undergraduate students that are not trained in formal theology. This description should in no way be interpreted to mean that Brian's scholarship is of a lesser quality. Indeed, the book reflects sustained study and reflection on Arminius' life and theology, and he distills marvelously a vast amount of information into the small confines of 100 pages. The three sections of the book overview his life, his theology, and the trajectory of his influence. There is also a provocative chapter on how Arminius and Karl Barth might have similarities in their Christology and doctrine of election.

The Introduction describes how Brian's personal knowledge of Arminius was lacking, largely due to theological training that either failed to discuss Arminius or else misrepresented him as at worst a Pelagian or at best a semi-Pelagian. While studying in Aberdeen, he gained a curiosity about Arminius, and through a friendship with and the tutelage of the late Tom Findlay, to whom the book is dedicated, Brian engaged in the serious study that has produced this book. The chapters on Arminius' early life as well as his pastoral and academic career are a concise distillation of what we know in much more detail in biographical essays from the volumes mentioned above.

Brian is especially helpful in his chapter on Arminius' interpretation of Scripture. It is an oft-repeated phrase that Arminius was a biblical rather than a dogmatic theologian. That is a bit too easy. Brian properly explains:

Arminius's biblical interpretation has several key characteristics: he held firmly to the classical divine attributes, read Scripture in a literal sense, employed a christologically focused hermeneutic, and relied upon the church's classical interpretation of Scripture, as outlined by the church councils, when he believed that Scripture was not entirely clear. (40)

Within this hermeneutical framing, Brian correctly observes that first to last Arminius always had pastoral concerns in view. While scholastic in his method, a product of his age, Arminius' inclinations were always practical. The ultimate purpose of the Scriptures is to edify, instruct, and produce faith in the reader. Taking with utmost seriousness the scriptural teachings about the brokenness of humanity (thoroughly Augustinian here), it is only due to "God's ever-present grace [that] we are able to choose to be open to God" (43). Brian is to be commended for his consistent sounding of this grace note in Arminius. He thereby avoids the trap of getting caught up in predestinarian structures that reduce divine election and salvation to predestinarian schemes. This is a quintessential Arminian move.

Chapter eight is insightful for the novice theologian, as Brian dismantles the shallow accusations that Arminius was Pelagian. The reader is instructed as to who Pelagius was as well as what he taught. We also gain insight in what came to be known as semi-Pelagianism, and we are taught that Arminius was neither of these. These pages will not dispel the ages of misrepresenting Arminius, but the simple clarity with which Brian sets out the differences between Pelagianism and original Arminianism leaves the scholarly student without excuse for not knowing better. Even the great Karl Barth fell largely victim to this misrepresentation of Arminius, but before we get to Brian's comments on Barth, it important to reflect on his summary judgments about the importance of Arminius.

Brian sets these out as "five key characteristics of Arminius' theology" (104f.). First, as has already been noted, Arminius' theology was a biblical theology—more concerned with being biblical in his assertions, even when the assertions were not strictly logical: "Arminius refused to begin his theology in logical axioms, insisting upon beginning only with the Word of God." In accord with his scriptural orientation as a Christian theologian, Arminius' theology is christologically focused. This is especially apparent in his *Declaration of Sentiments*, where Arminius counters the logical system of divine decrees with a christologically based understanding of predestination and election. This Christology Arminius con-

sistently and firmly plants within a Trinitarian frame. Upon these foundational assumptions Arminius constructs an eminently pastoral theology: "His is a kind, compassionate, and evangelical theology." Even his preoccupation with working out the doctrines of election and predestination are rooted in his experience as a pastor in Amsterdam, where the sterile logic of much predestinarianism produced deep anxiety and distress among his parishioners. It follows then that Arminius' theology was also ecumenical in spirit as well as in certain points of emphasis. He warmed the hearts of moderate Calvinists by refusing to toe the logical lines of Beza's constructs on predestination, but his emphases on sanctification and saintliness as potential byproducts of his optimistic doctrine of grace at times lead to the accusation that he was more Roman Catholic than Protestant. Indeed, this optimism of grace is the fifth and key characteristic of a consistent Arminian theology. This universality of the offer of salvation to all is rooted in Christocentricity. Christ died for all. To be sure, all have sinned and fallen short, but equally sure is the universality of God's gracious overture in Christ that, by a divine enabling, even the most sinful may open themselves to God saving grace.

Brian has given us a faithful representation of Arminius, and it falls now for us to consider his references to similarities between Barth and Arminius. These assertions are of special interest to this reviewer, as I have had some similar thoughts. Carl Bangs did as well a half century ago. The question is how far Brian's comments grant greater clarity of these queries.

Brian references the *Dogmatics* (III/2) as well as Barth's Gifford Lectures (*The Knowledge of God and the Service of God*, 1938), in the latter lectures the specificity with which Barth discusses sections VII and VIII of the Scots Confession of 1560: "They wish the whole body of material which is called the *doctrine of predestination* to be explained through *Christology* and conversely *Christology* to be explained through the doctrine of *Predestination*" (99). I am not sure that Arminius would agree with the second part of this assertion, but he would certainly have agreed with the assertion that predestination must be explained through Christology.

It is not often that an introductory essay on a theologian contains such intriguing proposals as the connection between Arminius and Barth. Brian is to be commended, and the book is highly recommended.

McCready, John, ed. *John Wesley Haley and Building the Indigenous Church: Reflections on Self Determination in Twentieth Century Burundi*. Foreword by Howard Snyder. Toronto: Clements Publishing, 2015. 210 pages. ISBN-13: 978-1-926798-71-4.

Reviewed by David Bundy, Research Professor of World Christian Studies, New York Theological Seminary; Honorary Fellow, Manchester Wesley Research Centre

The Free Methodist Church in Burundi is an important part of the world-wide Free Methodist Church and a significant presence in the nation of Burundi. The numerical growth of this Burundi church has remained significant despite the regional challenges. Of the 1.126 million Free Methodists worldwide (2014), Burundi reported 141,213 of those. It is the third largest Free Methodist General Conference, after India and Congo. For comparison, the United States reported 72,940 and Canada 6,989 members.

The growth is due at least significantly to the mission policies, practices, and personality of John Wesley Haley (1878-1951), who worked for years to obtain permission even for an exploratory venture (1932) into the Burundi from his South African base. One suspects that if it had not been for the Depression and the fact that tickets were cheaper to Burundi than to the United States or Canada, the mission venture might never have been approved. Haley had in the meantime obtained permission from the Belgian colonial officials, the support of missionaries in Burundi (especially the Holiness-influenced Swedish Pentecostals and Danish Baptists), and the approbation of the World Dominion Movement, an ironically named organization established to promote the indigenous church ideals articulated by Roland Allen.

The impetus of this book was the recovery of an unpublished manuscript by Haley in which he reflected on his life in mission, with reference to his reading. It grew out of an address he was invited to give at an early meeting of the Evangelical Foreign Mission Association. After his death, it was separated from some of his other papers, and it was later given to the Robb Free Methodist Historical Centre in Thamesford, Ontario. The manuscript was too short to stand on its own as a book and too long for an article.

John McCready, whose persistent search led to the re-discovery of the document, provides an "Introduction" (1-9) to the investigation, the document, and the resulting book. Burton Hamilton, in his essay "Haley:

A Man before His Time" (11-57), offers a useful biographical study of Haley. It is useful to read before venturing into John Wesley Haley's work entitled "The Manuscript" (59-133), which received some annotation by McCready.

After the document is a very interesting chapter by Bishop Deogratias Nshimiyimana, and Pastors Evariste Harerimana and Desire Mpufubusa, "The Indigenous Church in Burundi" (135-153). The essay all too briefly discusses the structures, governance, and financial policies of the Burundi Free Methodist Church. The argument is that it is congruent with the vision of Haley. It would have been good to have more Burundian voices speaking of their family's experiences of J. W. Haley.

The essay by Dan Scheffield, "The Mission Temporary, The Church Permanent" (155-203), endeavors to place Haley's "Manuscript" in the context of mission theory during the first decades of the twentieth century. While there is some attention to the lack of interest of most Free Methodist missionaries and the Mission Society in either the concept or practice of indigenous mission as advocated by Rolland Allen and Oswald Smith of the People's Church, Toronto, almost no attention is given to the (Holiness) Methodist Episcopal Missionaries (E. Stanley Jones), who were making the same arguments at the same time, or to the Pentecost Bands, who earlier had made similar radical claims in the Free Methodist Church, inspired by William Taylor. The founder of the Pentecost Bands, Vivian Dake, died on the way to Africa with William Taylor. The Pentecost Bands were forced out of the Free Methodist Church, but individuals who stayed in the Free Methodist Church used the same strategies for church planting, including Harmon Allen Baldwin. One of the quotes from Oswald Smith (184) is a direct quote of William Taylor's classic *Pauline Missions* (1879). It is not surprising that Smith as well as Allen and Haley all owed a debt to Taylor yet did not cite him: he was judged a failure by the advocates of "Modern Mission" who Haley was trying to influence!

At the end of the volume, Burton W. Hamilton provides "Notes on Haley's Journal" (205-207), still unedited; there is also a "Select Bibliography" (209-210), which conveniently includes material written by and about Haley. The volume is enhanced by the judiciously selected photographs. Some readers will be troubled by the repetitiveness of the text, a hazard of three individuals using the same text. Occasionally a footnote is less than clear.

Despite any shortcomings, the volume is a significant contribution to the neglected field of Holiness and specifically Free Methodist mission

history, thought, and practice. It offers a window into the origins of the Free Methodist Church in Burundi and usefully places Haley in the context of his period. It is clear that he was a remarkable individual who trusted the people of Burundi, tenaciously struggled to obtain permission and occasionally forgiveness for his actions, and who at crucial periods worked hard to earn a living for his family. Hopefully, this book will provide inspiration for dissertations on Free Methodist mission history and on the Free Methodist Church in Africa, especially Burundi.

Peckham, John C. *The Love of God: A Canonical Model*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015. 295 pages. ISBN-13: 978-0830840793.

Reviewed by Bradford L. McCall, Graduate Student in Philosophy, Holy Apostles College and Seminary, Cromwell, CT.

John C. Peckham is Associate Professor of Theology and Christian Philosophy at Andrews University, a Seventh-Day Adventist institution in Berrien Springs, MI. He is the author of *The Concept of Divine Love in the Context of the God-World Relationship* (Peter Lang, 2014) and has published multiple articles on systematic theology issues in various journals.

“God is love,” the apostle John tells us (1 John 4:8). How are we to understand this affirmation? Does God choose to love? Or does God love necessarily? Is God’s love emotional? Does the love of God include desire or enjoyment? Is God’s love conditional? Can God receive love from human beings? Peckham contends that God’s character itself is love, and that God is therefore essentially loving in all that God does. Whereas most conceptions of love tend to move from divine ontology to love, the latter being constrained and shaped by the former, Peckham inverts the order by first investigating the canonical depiction of divine love, while bracketing out ontological presuppositions. In so doing, he displays a high regard for scripture, affirms the dual authorship of the canonical text (divine and human), and employs grammatical-historical procedures of exegesis.

Whereas conceptions of divine love vary wildly, the primary features of the contemporary debate can be characterized by an examination of two recent and prominent models, which are inherently irreconcilable. One widely held position is the transcendent-voluntarist model, which is descended from the classical theism of Augustine, Aquinas, and Luther. This model understands God as necessary, self-sufficient, perfect, simple, timeless, immutable and impassible. In this view, God is entirely unaffected by the world, and God’s love is thus sovereignly willed, unmotivated, unmerited, unconditional, unilateral and arbitrary; it is exemplified by Christ’s self-giving love. In the twentieth century, an immanent-experientialist model, held for example by process panentheists, largely replaced classical theism with an understanding of God as bound up essentially with the world and therefore partially dependent on it. In this latter view, God necessarily feels all feelings and loves all others, because they are included within himself; it is characterized by Hartshorne’s dipo-

lar theism, in which God is partially determined and self-determined, the eminently moved mover of all, and the universal and supreme subject.

The conclusions arrived at in Peckham's foreconditional-reciprocal model of divine love point toward significant tensions and sometimes contradictions with the underlying ontologies supposed by the transcendent-voluntarist as well as the immanent-experientialist models. According to his model, God's love in relation to the world is: (1) volitional, (2) evaluative, (3) emotional or passible, (4) foreconditional, and (5) ideally reciprocal. Indeed, it is volitional but not merely volitional in that includes a free, volitional aspect that is neither essential nor necessary to God's being yet also not arbitrary. It is also evaluative, which means that God is capable of being affected by, and even benefitting from, the disposition and/or actions of his creatures. Moreover, it is profoundly emotional, though not to the exclusion of volitional and evaluative aspects. Further, divine love is foreconditional, not altogether unconditional. Additionally, God's love is ideally reciprocal in that he works toward a bilateral love relationship with creatures via his universal relational love, but does not unilaterally determine that anyone love him in response.

The above-mentioned five aspects of divine love in the foreconditional-reciprocal model are bound up with significant ontological issues, including: (1) the relationship of divine love to God's essence or character, (2) the nature of divine perfection, (3) the sovereignty of God's will, (4) the position one takes on divine immutability, and (5) the extent and use of divine power. According to Peckham's model, the intra-trinitarian love relation does not extend to creatures or creation, which means that he differs with a large swath of Wesleyan-Arminian believers today who advocate such a notion. His model asserts that God is ontologically independent from the world as its Creator and is thereby self-sufficient. However, God nevertheless takes enjoyment in the goodness of the world and displeasure in evil. His model suggests that God possesses significant freedom and bestows it to creatures and creation toward the goal of a reciprocal love relationship. Accordingly, God is not omnicausal, but voluntarily limits his power instead in order to allow significant freedom such that creatures and creation in general impact history with their/its decisions. God is passible, in this view, being profoundly affected by and concerned with the world he has created, yet is not essentially bound to it nor passive.

In *The Love of God*, John Peckham offers a comprehensive canonical interpretation of divine love in dialogue with, and at times in contrast to,

both classical and process theism. God's love, he argues, is freely willed, evaluative, emotional and reciprocal, given to creatures and creation but not without conditions. According to his reading of scripture, the God who loves the world is both perfect and passible, both self-sufficient and desirous of reciprocal relationships with each person, so that "whosoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life." This book is recommended to those who have interests in the study of systematic theology at an academic level, as it is geared toward an academic audience.

Allison, Dale C., Jr. *Night Comes: Death, Imagination, and the Last Things*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2016. 174 pages. ISBN: 978-0802871183.

Reviewed by John Daniel Holloway III, Union Theological Seminary, New York, NY.

Dale Allison is best known as a New Testament scholar, particularly of historical Jesus studies. He is one of the leading names in the field and on the frontlines of the camp that maintains that Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet who proclaimed the imminent coming of the kingdom of God. His long-lasting acquaintance with apocalypticism makes his latest book, *Night Comes: Death, Imagination, and the Last Things*, a natural theological reflection for him.

Anyone familiar with Allison's work knows that opening one of his books means encountering an earnest friend of truth, and this is no less so in his new book. It becomes clear in the first chapter, "Death and Fear," that Allison is someone who has genuinely struggled with reflections on death, and who has experienced many a dark night of the soul because of such reflections. Anyone who has struggled with this most serious of issues will find in Allison a companion. But do not expect a cynical philosopher. He is not a philosopher of suspicion. Throughout the book, Allison can be found using *edification* as a valid guide to truth (or, at least, as harmless and not worth deprecating). That is to say, if a belief helps people along, if it brings people comfort and joy, then it has some measure of truth-value. Indeed, it is often made glaringly obvious that *this guy is a believer!*

And yet, his is no blind faith. This is not a monological thinker, but one who has purposefully made himself intimate with all kinds of perspectives, even especially skeptical ones. In every chapter, we find a range of opinions with which Allison dialogues. The book is a valuable resource if only for the variety of assertions throughout human history concerning death and the last things that Allison packs into it. In his chapter, "Resurrection and Bodies," we find a fascinating host of interpretations of the Christian doctrine of resurrection, some of which are quite hilarious. In the chapter, "Hell and Sympathy," we find a range of interpretations of the Christian problem of hell, some of which are quite horrifying. In all of his chapters, Allison leaves us with much to ponder, and often more questions than we had before.

A lot of the questions Allison raises might come uninvited. Some seem trivial (Why am I even thinking about this?), while others strike one speechless (What do I even say to *that*?). The numerous accounts of near death experiences found in his chapter, "Judgment and Partiality," fit the latter description. Whatever your worldview, much of what you encounter in Allison's book will be strange and difficult to incorporate into a fixed philosophical framework.

Allison is perhaps at his strongest when he takes on the traditional criticisms of belief in life after death. Allison is no naïve fideist, but he is also no Enlightenment rationalist. For example, in his chapter, "Ignorance and Imagination," he says that, while he recognizes belief in an afterlife could simply be wish-fulfillment, the inverse could be said of its rejection: "Maybe some who are so strongly set against a life to come are victims of what the psychoanalysts term reaction formation . . . exchanging a rejected impulse for its opposite" (78). The point of saying this is not to dismiss skeptical criticism, but to resist the tendency to assume negative conclusions on principle. Allison has no interest in positivist Christian interpretations of life, but neither is he for relentless skepticism. Skepticism can be just as bankrupt as blind faith and has no final word against hope.

Allison also astutely criticizes the notion that eschatology demeans the present age and leads believers to other-worldly, anti-ethical stances of passivity and fatalism. If you believe in the coming of the kingdom of God, so the argument goes, you neglect the world you inhabit. On the contrary, Allison asserts, "eschatology is ethics" (76). He provides several examples of theologians and groups for whom eschatological expectation inspired greater emphasis on doing good. Wesleyan and Holiness theologians would do well to engage Allison here, for he suggests that eschatology, rather than inspiring passivity, collapses the means-ends binary and declares the kingdom of God not just as a coming reality, but as a call to action. Eschatology is a way of saying we only have means, for the end is not the telos of human achievement, but an ultimate and final in-breaking of God. "The kingdom of heaven is at hand!" is followed by, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord!" (Matt 3:1–3). In this way, eschatology is life-affirming. Additionally, it is further life-affirming, Allison says, because it denies the idea that we simply die and cease to exist. It is a way of saying that life is *more*, that "we are more" (88). Hope, he claims, is more life-affirming than unbelief.

Hope is the song Allison most consistently sings in *Night Comes*. He is not a stranger to skepticism, but he also displays a capacity for child-

like faith. Both believers and unbelievers alike will encounter statements by Allison that rub them the wrong way. He is not bothered by saying the Christian tradition has it wrong, or orthodoxy has it wrong, or the Bible has it wrong. He himself often makes the negative conclusion concerning traditional doctrines of the faith. At the same time, however, to more atheistic or agnostic thinkers he will still end up sounding at times overly fideistic, especially in his final chapter, "Heaven and Experience." I too was sometimes bothered by what struck me as idealistic or simplistic thinking. And yet, his occasional simplicity might be the most profound thing about the book. A lot of thinkers talk about having epistemological humility, but Allison provides us with a genuine example of it.

Stanglin, Keith D., Mark G. Bilby, and Mark H. Mann, eds. *Reconsidering Arminius: Beyond the Reformed and Wesleyan Divide*. Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2014. 190 pages. ISBN: 9781426796548.

Reviewed by Jermaine J. Marshall, Ph.D. candidate, Regent University School of Divinity, Virginia Beach, Virginia.

One of the most controversial theological figures of the sixteenth century was Jacobus Arminius. Often viewed as the primary opponent of the Reformed tradition, Arminius is generally characterized as the catalyst for the theological divide within Christendom today in the twenty-first century. The edited work, *Reconsidering Arminius: Beyond the Reformed and Wesleyan Divide*, is a compilation of essays aimed to eradicate the misnomer which argues that Arminius' theological thought was antithetical to Reformed orthodoxy. The contributors of this edited work actually seek to demonstrate how Arminius' theology was actually compatible with the Reformed theological tradition. These contributors further attempt to demonstrate how the Arminian thought of the Remonstrants and Wesleyans possessed theological points of departure from the theological propositions of Arminius.

In the first essay, Richard A. Mueller concludes that the work of Arminius is rooted in the Reformed tradition. This conclusion is based on the mutual covenant between God and humanity that determines divine actions and human response. Mueller contends that Arminius identified God's act of creation as a self-limiting act (4). Although this identification of divine creation affirms the notion of humans possessing volition from birth, which is at the heart of Remonstrant thought, Mueller's rejection of the notion of Arminius as a universalist and argument that Arminius affirmed the notion of Christ atonement being limited to the elect are attempts to prove that Arminius concurred with Reformed orthodoxy (15).

In the second essay, Thomas McCall argues that Arminius was opposed to determinism. McCall supports his argument utilizing the propositions of Eef Dekker, who asserts that Arminius' modal logic obligates him to the affirmation of determinism based on his interpretation of Arminius' letter to Johannes Uytenbogaert (24-25). However, Dekker does concede that, although Arminius was committed to determinism, he still opposed the determinism of his opponents. The point of departure for McCall is related to Arminius' understanding of salvation and damnation. McCall contends that Arminius opposed the attempt to make salva-

tion and damnation compatible, asserting that “for some person *x*, *x* is saved” and “for some person *x*, *x* is damned” are contradictory postulates (24). He identifies the common belief that makes divine foreknowledge and human freedom compatible and concludes that, for Arminius, they are incompatible (29). This conclusion is based on the assertion that God cannot be perfectly free and omniscient, possessing knowledge of God’s future free actions (30). Rejecting libertarian freedom in order to logically preserve divine foreknowledge would situate Arminius in the Reformed tradition.

In the third essay, Jeremy Bangs argues that Arminius taught a moderate and evolving Calvinism. Bangs places Arminius in conversation with Reformation thinkers such as Luther and Calvin, which functions as the basis for his primary argument. He identifies the protest of John Robinson against the Arminians. Robinson reflected the theology of the Protestant reformers possessing a robust distrust of anything other than scripture, particularly tradition (45). He believed that attributing an act of evil to libertarian freedom was a heretical attack on divine omniscience (47). Robinson was a student of William Perkins, and Bangs contends that Arminius argued that Perkins’ view of God fore-ordaining the fall of humanity, which was adopted by Robinson, made God the author of sin (46). Although Arminius promoted the positive role of tradition, Bangs concludes that Arminius and Robinson are compatible in method and logic (44).

In the fourth essay, W. Stephen Gunter offers the most consequential challenge for Wesleyans within this edited volume. Gunter analyzes Wesleyan soteriology in relation to the soteriological presuppositions of Arminius. He contends that Arminius’ soteriology began to disappear after his death due to the agenda of the Remonstrants and Contra-Remonstrants (73). However, Gunter concludes that John Wesley was faithful to Arminian soteriology (71). The challenge for Wesleyans is the appeal of Augustine’s theological anthropology to Arminius. This appeal causes problems for Wesleyan soteriology, which Gunter argues attempts to avoid the problem of predestination (81). Gunter argues that Wesley seeks to liberate the doctrine of predestination from the captivity of theological speculation (84). Due to his commitment to Arminian soteriology, Wesley situates election in divine foreknowledge. Yet even the affirmation of the notion of a general election proves problematic for the libertarian freedom traditionally attributed to Arminian thought. Wesley’s proposition revives the tension between Augustine and Pelagius on the notion of

free will. Gunter asserts that Wesley believed that humans possessed a “freed will” as opposed to free will (84). Wesley’s theological contentions reflect Reformed orthodoxy, which is evident in Gunter’s conclusion related to Arminius view of predestination. Gunter concludes that Arminius possessed a robust belief in predestination and argues that he believed that salvation occurred through grace alone and was not based on human initiative (88).

In the fifth essay, Oliver Crisp examines Arminius view of creation as the product of divine goodness and Jonathan Edwards view of creation as panentheistic and continuous fostering *theosis* for the elect of humanity. Crisp identifies the ways in which Arminius and Edwards deviate from Reformed orthodoxy. He concludes that Edwards and Arminius share a common theological heritage and commitment to the classical doctrine of God. The common theological factor is the affirmation of human volition. Crisp argues that Arminius’ teaching of soteriological synergism and rejection of absolute divine sovereignty undermines orthodox Reformed theology (91). Arminius’ point of departure from the classical view of sovereignty causes Crisp to conclude that Arminius was the progenitor of middle knowledge. This form of knowledge correlates human volition and divine knowledge under certain circumstances being “God’s knowledge of all that would be” (98). Crisp contends that Edwards equates divine freedom with determinism (100). The notion of determinism is imperative to Crisp’s contention that Edwards asserts that God creates as a result of divine freedom, which is possible because God is independent of all creation (100). Crisp concludes that middle knowledge plays a pivotal role in Arminius’ doctrine of creation.

In the sixth essay, E. Jerome Van Kuiken analyzes what he characterizes as the Reformed theologies of T. F. Torrance and Arminius. Kuiken argues that Torrance’s theology constitutes the Neo-Reformed orthodox tradition. Torrance’s point of departure from classical Reformed theology is his rejection of the Reformed notion of limited atonement. He equates limited atonement with the heretical doctrine of Nestorianism and argues that Christ’s atonement is objectively sufficient and efficacious for all humans. Torrance concludes that those rejecting Christ’s atonement are damned (117). Kuiken contends that Arminius sets the foundation for Reformed federal theology. Arminius makes Christ the ground of predestination as opposed to its executor and equates predestination with the “revealed gospel as opposed to the hidden divine will” (120). Kuiken concludes that Arminius and Torrance advocate a version of monergistic syn-

ergism, as both affirm the notion of free will within human creation and that humans are unable to choose God, so that grace is imperative in order to counter human depravity (125). The theological integration of monergism and synergism solidifies Kuiken's notion of Neo-Reformed theology as evident in the theological thought of Arminius and Torrance.

In the final essay, John Mark Hicks offers the most innovative proposal, which demonstrates the compatibility between the thought of Arminius and Reformed theology. Hicks contend that correlating open theism with Arminianism benefits both Reformed theology and open theology (137). He builds on the work of John Sanders, who advocates the notion of "open Arminianism" as correcting some of the logical problems in Arminianism (139). Hicks correlates Arminius' notion of divine providence with meticulous providence, and Sanders equates meticulous providence with Reformed theology (141). He concludes that Arminius' affirmation of meticulous providence is based on three factors: divine concurrence, sovereign divine permission, and divine governance (145-53). Open theists identify meticulous providence with Reformed theology and contend that God's decision to create humanity with libertarian freedom eradicates meticulous providence (141-42). Although the tension between Reformed orthodox thought and open theism is evident, Hicks' argument correlates the two theological traditions and demonstrates how Arminianism adheres to both. This adherence is evident in Hicks' conclusion of Arminius. Hicks' concluding argument is that, for Arminius, evil is subject to specific sovereignty as God permits sin and concurs with the effects of sin, so that nothing occurs through chance or by accident (151).

This edited volume challenges classical theologies and attempts to situate Arminius within the Reformed tradition. The notion of human volition is evident in the theological thought of Arminius and places him at odds with the Reformed tradition. However, the contributors of this edited volume contend that Arminius believed that God permitted and enabled the utilization of human free will for divine glory. Such a contention places Arminius and John Calvin on common ground in that everything for Calvin is solely for the glory of God.

Hansen, Ryan Leif. *Silence and Praise: Rhetorical Cosmology and Political Theology in the Book of Revelation*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014. 184 pages. ISBN-13: 978-1-4514-7011-6.

Reviewed by Ryan K. Giffin, Ph.D. candidate in Biblical Studies, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY; Pastor, Paris Church of the Nazarene, Paris, KY.

In *Silence and Praise*, Ryan Hansen engages in a study of Revelation that focuses on John of Patmos's use of what Hansen refers to as "rhetorical cosmology" in service to John's theopolitical vision. This volume, published in the notable Emerging Scholars series of Fortress Press, is a revision of Hansen's doctoral dissertation completed at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary under the guidance of K. K. Yeo. In this work, Hansen gives extended attention to the three cycles of the seven seals, trumpets, and bowls in John's Apocalypse (Rev 6:1—8:5; 8:6—11:19; 16:1—19:8).

The book is comprised of an introduction followed by seven chapters. Hansen introduces his work with an overview of how scholars have previously addressed cosmology in Revelation, locating his own approach as one that views John as employing cosmology in order to construct a symbolic universe, but with the caveat that John himself still "does expect the world order of Rome to end, not simply as a subjective experience in the minds of his audience, but in a way that those inside and outside his community will experience somehow objectively" (6). Hansen's approach attempts to "account for both a construction of a symbolic world and a participation that is already 'out there.'" (7). John, Hansen argues, constructs his symbolic-participatory world and the political theology it presents by means of cosmological discourse, i.e., "rhetorical cosmology."

Beginning in the first chapter with an overview of John's "apocalyptic technique" and how meaning is made in Revelation (including a discussion of genre and an introduction to the importance of socio-rhetorical interpretation for his investigation), Hansen continues in chapter two by showing how John's cosmic rhetoric clashes with the rhetoric of the empire, particularly with the discourse of the Roman imperial cult. Among other things, Hansen argues that John was advocating for full non-participation in the Roman economy and a breaking of the social contract with Rome by refusing to participate economically in the world established by Caesar.

In chapter three, Hansen introduces the three cycles of seven as a collective object of interpretation, arguing for a slightly modified recapit-

ulative view of the cycles as representing one basic set of phenomena. This chapter paves the way for the exegetical focus of Hansen's monograph in the next three chapters. In chapter four, Hansen argues that the silence accompanying the breaking of the seventh seal (Rev 8:1) amounts to John's depiction of prayerful endurance and "non-participation as an instrument of judgment and dismantling" of the Roman world order and "is the specific vocation that John seeks to persuade his audience to take up" (84). Hansen makes the case that this silence is "a multivalent image denoting a range of ideas from judgment to liturgy and prayer to the new creative work of God" (98). Next comes a treatment in chapter five of the cycle of the seven trumpets. The loud voices of praise in heaven accompanying the seventh trumpet (Rev 11:15-18) should, according to Hansen, "be understood as the flip side of the coin of 'silence.' This hymn of praise is the positive content that the silence enables. If the silence is the endurance and resistance that brings an end to the world, praise is the counter-vision of the world that brings the new creation into expression" (127). The cycle of bowls is examined in chapter six, in which Hansen argues that at the pouring out of the seventh bowl John brings the two images of silence and praise together in his image of God's work of unmaking the present world order and making it new. Each of these chapters makes the case that John is calling his audience to embrace the cosmological, political, and liturgical activities of "silence" and "praise." These activities of faithful witness and perseverance are the marks of faithful participation in the unmaking and making new of the world, the activities of the saints who follow the slain Lamb into the new creation.

In the final chapter of the monograph, Hansen reflects briefly on the implications of his study for an apocalyptic political theology, suggesting that a theology that takes John's rhetorical cosmology seriously will be uncompromising in its ethical thrust and will resist being categorized as merely one viable political option among several. Hansen observes that "John calls the saints to witness in silence and praise, therefore their concern should be with developing the necessary practices and skills to perform this task" (165-66). This task is a necessarily communal, liturgical, missional, and embodied task, one that requires humility, patience, and uncompromising courage to follow the Lamb wherever he goes.

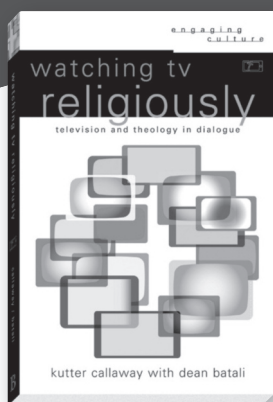
Silence and Praise has much to commend to it. As a preliminary observation, one of its truly great strengths is how Hansen astutely engages notoriously complex biblical texts with an unusually amicable style for a biblical studies work. Without sacrificing any sophistication, Hansen has delivered a delightfully engaging volume, complete with

quotes from the likes of Flannery O'Connor, Wendell Berry, Phineas F. Bresee, and Bob Dylan grafted in. Whatever critiques readers may have with specific exegetical points or overall argumentation, they should appreciate the pleasant reading experience Hansen provides for them.

As for those exegetical points, though some may wish Hansen had taken a stronger position on some issues (e.g., Hansen leaves the authorship question open), the hermeneutical judgments that he does make are sober and defensible. I found myself disagreeing with Hansen on a few minor points of interpretation with respect to some of Revelation's obscure imagery (a common happenstance among NT exegetes), but none of my disagreements does damage to Hansen's overall proposal, which I found utterly convincing. In particular, Hansen's interpretation of the interludes of silence and praise found among the cycles of seven as a call to active counter-political, counter-imperial nonparticipation and praise on the part of the people of God makes very good sense of these curiosities in John's text. That throughout Revelation John is communicating his political theology by means of rhetorical cosmology likewise makes for an appealing way of interpreting the three cycles of seven.

I suspect that most readers of this journal will be especially interested in the contemporary theological implications of *Silence and Praise*. Though not limited to these, the major implications are two-fold. First, if Hansen is anywhere near the mark, those who take Revelation seriously as a resource for theology will embrace active nonparticipation in and resistance to empire-sponsored activities and processes as a form of faithful witness to the slain Lamb and the kingdom of God—in other words, as deeply *political* activities. Second, the liturgical act of praise as an acknowledgment of the victory of the slain Lamb and his followers will likewise be engaged in as a deeply *political* act. All too often Christians in the modern west have looked disparagingly on their Christian brothers and sisters who choose the path of active resistance to imperial systems as “unpatriotic” and have conceived of praise and worship as altogether non-political activities. Such attitudes and views are directly and, in my view, refreshingly challenged by Hansen's perceptive study. For these reasons and more, *Silence and Praise* deserves a wide readership among those interested in NT studies, biblical theology, and Wesleyan theology. Hansen has provided a model monograph for how the horizon between biblical studies and contemporary theology can once more be bridged. Readers especially interested in how a single biblical book can be engaged for its theopolitical implications will be hard pressed to find a more exemplary work.

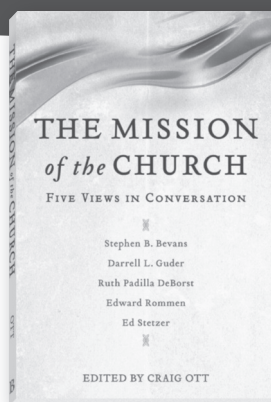
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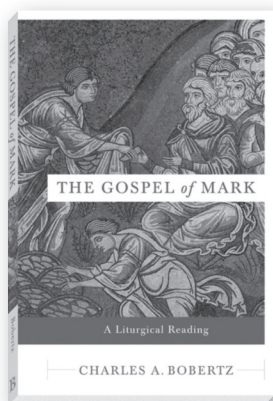
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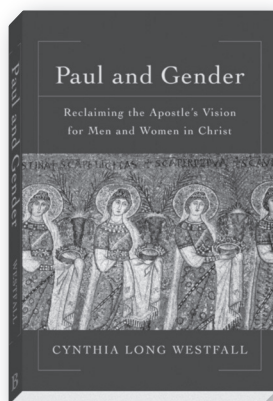
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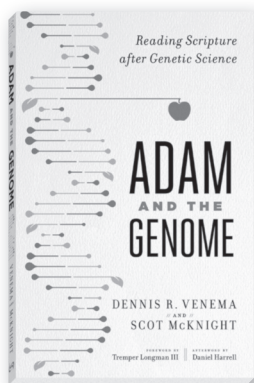
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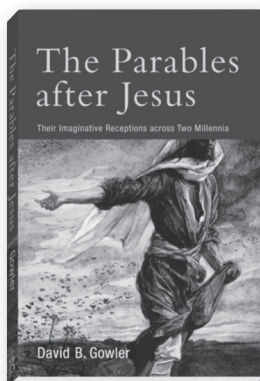
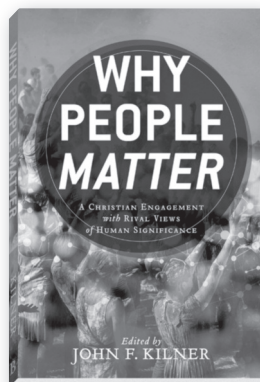
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