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EDITOR'S NOTES

This issue of the *Wesleyan Theological Journal* begins with a special symposium in honor of John Webster. A gifted essayist, Professor Webster wrote several significant articles that raised the question, what makes theology theological? Following an editorial introduction to the symposium, Daniel Castelo, John Drury, Justus Hunter, and Beth Felker Jones have each taken up and responded to a nuanced form of Webster's question, namely, what makes Wesleyan theology theological? Collectively, their work suggests that a re-orientation of Wesleyan theology is now well underway. Following the symposium, readers will discover articles treating themes and topics ranging from the new birth to homosexuality, Christian perfection, and church unity. The issue concludes with a tribute to the late Dr. Dennis Kinlaw.

Finally, please note the following three corrections to Natalya Cherry's otherwise splendid article on doctrinal distinctions in the faith that marks the new birth (Spring 2017). First, the sentence beginning at the bottom of p. 103 and continuing on the top of p. 104 should have read, "What appears to be that 'moment,' generating a shift in Wesley's concept of faith that will become evident in his preaching, arrives on 24 May 1738; however, the short duration of that expectation's consummation ensures that the next conceptual shift is merely a transitional one." Second, the last sentence of footnote 21 (p. 104) the word "and" should have appeared between "here" and "in." Third, the word "between" was inadvertently inserted between "distinguish" and "faith" in the sentence on p. 106 that concludes with footnote 29.

Jason E. Vickers, Editor
Fall 2017

WHAT MAKES WESLEYAN THEOLOGY THEOLOGICAL?

A SYMPOSIUM IN HONOR OF JOHN WEBSTER

Jason E. Vickers

Introduction

For more than half a century, Wesleyan theologians have been hard at work recovering, publishing, and promoting the writings of the beloved founder of our tradition.¹ The work began in the early 1960s, when Albert Outler published a one volume collection of some of John Wesley's most important theological writings and subsequently called for a critical edition of all of Wesley's literary works, including sermons, theological treatises, letters and diaries, and the like.² Today, thanks to the efforts of numerous scholars, including Frank Baker, W. Reginald Ward, Richard P. Heitzenrater, Henry Rack, Randy L. Maddox, Kenneth J. Collins, Paul Chilcote, and others, the critical scholarly edition of Wesley's works is nearing completion.³ In addition, several collections of Wesley's sermons and other writings have been published with the theological and spiritual nourishment of clergy and laity in mind.⁴ These publications are a monumental achievement, making available the writings of John Wesley for an entire new generation of scholars and Christians alike.

¹Beginning in the late nineteenth and continuing through much of the twentieth century, the writings of Wesley exerted minimal influence in much Wesleyan theology, especially in North America. For more on this, see Randy L. Maddox, "Respected Founder/Neglected Guide: The Role of Wesley in American Methodist Theology," *Methodist History* 37 (1999): 71-88.

²See *John Wesley*, edited by Albert C. Outler (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964). For more on Outler's legacy and influence on Wesleyan theology, see Jason E. Vickers, "Albert Outler and the Future of Wesleyan Theology: Retrospect and Prospect," in *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 42:2 (Fall 2008), 56-67.

³*The Works of John Wesley*; begun as "The Oxford Edition of The Works of John Wesley" (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975-1983); continued as "The Bicentennial Edition of The Works of John Wesley" (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984-); 20 of 35 vols. published to date.

⁴For example, see *The Sermons of John Wesley: A Collection for the Christian Journey*, edited by Kenneth J. Collins and Jason E. Vickers (Nashville: Abingdon, 2013). Also noteworthy is Seedbed Publishing's series *The John Wesley Collection*, edited by Andrew Thompson.

While it is hard to overstate the significance of the recovery, publication, and widespread promotion of John Wesley's writings, an unsettling fact remains: it has not led to theological cohesion or unity among Wesleyans. On the contrary, we Wesleyans are as divided as we have ever been.⁵ This fact was on a display in a most acute way in 2008, when the Wesleyan Studies Group of the American Academy of Religion hosted a panel discussion entitled, "What Makes Theology 'Wesleyan?'" In a splendid summary of the event, Justus Hunter writes:

Panelists were selected from a variety of contemporary schools of academic theology: constructive, evangelical, process, liberationist, analytical. And yet they all, in one way or another, self-identified as Wesleyan. The panel organizers, faced with the diversity of theologians and theologies, attempted to unify the discussion by offering a typology of senses "in which Wesley can be claimed as a source for theology today." The senses ranged from "theologically prescriptive" to "theologically irrelevant."⁶

To be sure, as Hunter himself notes, disagreement among theologians is not necessarily a bad thing. Like other academic disciplines, theology is nourished by argument. And yet, good argument requires at least some agreement. In the AAR panel and in many subsequent conversations, we Wesleyans have tried to find agreement amidst our many disagreements by focusing on our Wesleyan identity.⁷ In other words, we have tried to identify what is necessary and/or sufficient for theology to be considered *Wesleyan*. To date, we have sought some kind of minimal cohesion primarily by turning to Wesley or to the Wesleyan quadrilateral as a necessary, if not sufficient, condition for calling theology Wesleyan. Unfortunately, as the AAR panel made clear, there is little agreement about which aspects of Wesley's writings, if any, should be regarded as normative for Wesleyan theology. Similarly, there is widespread disagreement about how, if at all, the quadrilateral should function in theology. For instance, there is disagreement concerning the normative relationship among the four compo-

⁵This was the point of William J. Abraham's plenary address at the 2004 annual meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society. For a transcript of the address, see William J. Abraham, "The End of Wesleyan Theology," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 40:1 (Spring, 2005): 7-25.

⁶See Hunter's contribution to this symposium below. Revised papers from the AAR panel were subsequently published in *Methodist Review* 1 (2009), 7-26.

⁷Tellingly, "Wesleyan identity" was selected as the theme of the 50th anniversary annual meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society.

nents of the quadrilateral, and there is considerable disagreement over what precisely constitutes scripture, tradition, reason, and experience.

My own view of our current situation is that the source of our division and disunity, if not incoherence, may lie deeper still. Put simply, if we disagree over how, if at all, Wesley's writings should be construed as normative for Wesleyan theology, then it may be because we have an unnamed disagreement concerning what constitutes theology in the first place. Indeed, it is far from clear to me that there is anything approaching deep agreement among Wesleyan theologians concerning the nature and purpose of theology.

A different way to put this point is to suggest that we may be asking the wrong question. Instead of asking, "What makes theology *Wesleyan*?" perhaps we need to be asking, "What makes Wesleyan theology *theological*?" I first began to think about this alternative question around the time of the aforementioned AAR panel. During those days, I was immersed in the writings of John Webster, a theologian who, in his own words, had left "watery suburban Methodism" for "a tough version of Calvinistic Christianity."⁸ Despite his less than flattering view of Methodism (a view, I'm afraid, we may have earned), what initially drew my attention to Webster's work was his persistent focus on holiness.⁹ To be sure, Webster was a self-described Calvinist, but I found myself discovering profound insights about the nature of God's holiness scattered throughout his work—insights that, in my judgment, are too frequently absent in Wesleyan discourse about holiness. This led to a question: what was it that enabled Webster to think about holiness as having first and foremost to do with God and only derivatively with personal and social ethics (the dominant focus in much Wesleyan discourse on holiness)? I eventually discovered the answer to this question in two peculiarly titled essays, namely, "Theological Theology," and "What Makes Theology Theological?"¹⁰ For Web-

⁸John Webster, "Discovering Dogmatics," in *Shaping a Theological Mind: Theological Context and Methodology*, edited by Darren C. Marks (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), 129.

⁹See especially, John Webster, *Holiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003). Also see, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

¹⁰See John Webster, "Theological Theology," in *Confessing God: Essays in Christian Dogmatics II* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2016); and John Webster, "What Makes Theology Theological?" in *Journal of Analytic Theology* vol. 3 (May, 2015): 17-28.

ster, the “principle object or matter of Christian theology is God,” in both an “absolute” and a “relative” sense, which is to say, God “in himself” and God “in his works toward creatures.”¹¹ It is this view of theology that undergirds and ultimately makes Webster’s conception of holiness so rich and compelling. For example, he writes:

Holiness, because it is the holiness of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ now present in the Spirit’s power, is pure majesty in relation. God’s holy majesty, even in its unapproachableness, is not characterized by a sanctity which is abstract difference or otherness, a counter-reality to the profane; it is majesty known in turning, enacted and manifest in the works of God. Majesty and relation are not opposed moments in God’s holiness; they are simply different articulations of the selfsame reality. For if God’s relation to us were merely subordinate to his primary majesty, then God’s essence would remain utterly beyond us, forever hidden; and if God’s relation to us were not majestic, then that relation would no longer be one in which we encountered God. An essential condition, therefore, for making dogmatic sense of God’s holiness is to avoid the polarizing of majesty and relation; the divine distance and the divine approach are one movement in God’s being and act.¹²

When John Webster passed away on May 25, 2016, I set about almost immediately to write an obituary for the *Wesleyan Theological Journal*. However, in the weeks and months that followed, I decided that a most fitting tribute would be a symposium in which Wesleyan theologians took up Webster’s question (“What makes theology *theological*?”) on behalf of our own tradition. Accordingly, I asked Daniel Castelo, John Drury, Justus Hunter, and Beth Felker Jones to write essays addressing Webster’s question. I have personally benefitted enormously from what they have written, and I believe the readers of this *Journal* will as well. Above all, however, my hope is that, by beginning to think carefully together about the true nature and purpose of theology, the focus of our theological work might in time shift away from ourselves and toward what Webster and Wesley both regard as the only true source of unity, namely, the Triune God who, though majestic in holiness, condescends to be known and loved by us.

¹¹“What Makes Theology Theological?”, 18.

¹²Webster, *Holiness*, 41-42.

I.

Daniel Castelo

When I first read “Theological Theology” by John Webster,¹ it was like a “bombshell” for me. Not that the piece disrupted what I was doing in an unsettling way; rather, it brought clarity to a situation that I had long been familiar with but that I could not narrate with the same precision that Webster had. It is the kind of piece one reads repeatedly for the sake of intellectual reorientation. I was so impacted that I drew inspiration from the piece by titling one of my books similarly, i.e., with the qualifier “theological” to a noun that also had something “*theo-ish*” about it.²

At work in Webster’s title is not redundancy. Quite the contrary, the qualifier is needed to highlight that the *theos* in question in “theology” (or in the case with my book, “theodicy”) is not at all clear in the current situation. The added qualifier “theological” raises the following: “If this move is not blatantly redundant, then why make it? What are the warrants for making this ‘double affirmative’ of the etymological *theos*?”

In my estimation, the move is warranted for reasons similar to why this symposium is necessary as it highlights the question, “What makes Wesleyan theology theological?” Wesleyan theology particularly, like academic theology generally, is internally difficult to navigate. The two sets of difficulties are of course connected. When broaching a subject like “Wesleyan theology,” operative are assumptions about what constitutes “theology,” and these come to the fore in terms of how matters are valued and defined, what criteria are used to measure coherence and intelligibility, the outcomes one expects from such endeavoring, and so forth. There-

¹The piece can be found in *Confessing God* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2005), 11-31. It was his inaugural lecture as the Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at the University of Oxford, delivered 28 October 1997.

²*Theological Theodicy* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012). I am grateful that Webster wrote a blurb in support of this book. Let me just add that I had the great pleasure of meeting and interacting with Webster before his untimely passing. I have never met someone who was simultaneously so elegant and accessible. The theological landscape is not the same without him. “Theological Theology” is just a small sample of his great legacy. Interestingly enough, my relationship with him formally began when I first showed him in draft form an article that was eventually published in the *Journal*; see “Holiness *Simpliciter*: A Wesleyan Engagement and Proposal in Light of John Webster’s Trinitarian Dogmatics of Holiness” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 47.2 (2012): 147-164.

fore, “Wesleyan theology” is a difficult topic to consider in large part because “theology” on the whole is. The same would be true for other theologies of a particular sort. This situation is why Webster’s piece is helpful: It clarifies some of these difficulties associated with the theological scene. We will return to them shortly.

Additionally, the qualifier “Wesleyan” only makes the situation more difficult because if the referent is to John Wesley primarily (as it usually is), he himself is a difficult person to characterize and understand in theological terms. Wesley was not an academic *per se* given the course of his career, but he was academically inclined given his studies and interests. He traveled extensive distances on horseback to preach to people of all kinds, *and* (as an example of his erudition) he not only referenced the original biblical languages in his published sermons but on occasion made reference to textual critical issues. The point to stress here is that he was a preacher, yes, but not simply a preacher. He was learned, yes, but not enclosed in the ivory tower. Wesleyans have extensively tried to clarify how Wesley can be understood as a theologian, adopting at times neologisms (for instance, Albert Outler’s option of “folk theologian”³) or modifying available options (as in the case of Randy Maddox’s alternative of “practical theologian”⁴). Are these efforts suggestive of the point that Wesley was an especially unique figure? Yes and no. Luther is challenging to define given both his training and his scholarly products; the same can be said *tout court* for Calvin. These three—Luther, Calvin, and Wesley—were preachers and expositors of scripture. They were worried for their followers and attempted to refute threats to them. They were occasional in their writing at times. All of this evidence leads me to believe that at work in the difficulty of defining Wesley as a theologian (and his legacy as “theological”) is not so much the unique characteristics of Wesley’s contributions as much as the way these have difficulty finding a place in the modern theological academy. The difficulty is widely felt. At moments in the course of my own career, I have been a voice in that wide chorus of scholars who has said Wesley “is not a systematic theologian” by way of introducing him in an academic setting. The effort is one part reluctant, one part apologetic, but rarely self-aware at the conditioning at work.

³John Wesley, ed. Albert C. Outler (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

⁴Randy L. Maddox, “John Wesley—Practical Theologian?” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 23.1-2 (Spring/Fall 1988): 122-147.

At those times in the past, I often missed the opportunity to press deeper into what has led me and others to question or second-guess Wesley's pedigree as a theologian. That process of interrogation would involve at least the following questions: What, after all, is a systematic theologian, and is that a good thing? I believe here is partly where the work of Webster can be of aid. Webster did find such language appealing, as is evidenced by his founding of the *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, but this linguistic appropriation was not undertaken without a kind of historical and conceptual contextualization. "Theological Theology" does that kind of work (as do other pieces by Webster⁵), and it will operate in the following as a guide for the discussion of the question, "What makes Wesleyan theology theological?"

1

Webster's first line in the chapter is indicative of a larger matter worth extensively exploring. Webster begins, "One of the signs of health of a university discipline is its ability to sustain lively self-critical disagreement about its intellectual processes."⁶ Webster, of course, is an academic⁷ speaking to an academic audience about an academic *discipline*. And so the tensions begin. Is theology an academic discipline, a discipline of the university? It is, of course, in that courses in theology are offered and people are hired to teach them at certain institutions of higher learning. But let us look beyond the empirical to the conceptual and definitional. What does something have to be and how must something be pursued and evaluated if it is to be an academic discipline in today's context? And given the constraints and standards involved, can theology be such without losing something of its integrity?

These questions are not easy to answer, and history shows us partially why that is. One of the issues involves accounting for various migrations. Theological inquiry has shifted significantly over the centuries in

⁵Another piece I have found exceedingly helpful has been his introductory chapter in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, eds. John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1-15.

⁶"Theological Theology," 11.

⁷It should be noted that Webster was also ordained in the Church of England and this was obvious to those of us who knew him. His great intellectual aptitude was accompanied in his self-presentation with a gentle, pastoral sensitivity, which again, was a remarkable and rare combination.

terms of the “spaces” in which it has been pursued and its practitioners have flourished. The ideal early on in Christian history was that the theologian proper would be a bishop. Then came the time when the theologian proper was a monk. And finally in modernity on up to the present day, the theologian proper is understood to occupy the role of a professor. Diocese, Monastery, University—such are the different locations where theologians proper have been understood to ply their trade. Each migration, each shift has meant different expectations and norms, different ideals for practitioners, different kinds of theological products, and different aims and goals. As such, “Christian theology” is an internally contested subject. On account of these migrations alone, what counts as “theology” varies from one space to another.

One of the lamentable legacies of these migrations still with us today is the divide between church and academy. This divide has implications for how one defines the “theological.” If theology is understood as strictly an academic discipline, then those in the church may find it obscure and unrelated to what they do on the front-lines of ministry. As an ordained minister myself who has taught in a variety of church settings and functions, I have had to confront this perception repeatedly, both in and out of Methodism. On the other hand, those in the academy may find that theology rightly resides with them and that they have something that the church needs but at some level cannot have because it is an area of specialization that those in the academy have proven capable of wielding. This approach of the academy—of having something that the church needs but cannot simply have—is a power dynamic, one of privilege that only widens the chasm between church and academy further. As an academic, I have seen this repeatedly happen as well, both in and out of Methodism. Such is the minefield in which “Wesleyan theology” finds itself.

And a further complication worth noting in the particular case of this symposium is that within the theological academy, the field of “Wesleyan theology” has repeatedly been understood more generally as “Wesleyan studies.” Again speaking from personal observations so as to avoid sweeping generalizations, it has been my experience that Wesleyan-Methodist studies within academic settings (usually ones tied to Wesleyan-Methodist ecclesial bodies who in turn require these settings to offer specialized courses for their ordinands) is a field pursued from a variety of disciplinary angles but usually the historian’s. Of course, the academic disciplines of history and theology are separated by a number

of distinct methodological conventions proper to each, and this only complicates the viability of “Wesleyan theology” if it is located within “Wesleyan studies” and yet trying to find a home within an academic field known as “Christian theology.”

2

But let us return to the chasm between church and academy, and this from the academic side for a moment. Webster highlights that “universities work with conventions about what constitutes learning and what are appropriate methods of inquiry.”⁸ Given the massive success of certain methods in certain fields (especially the natural and social sciences) as measured by their explanatory and durational power, these prevalent methods reflect a kind of “anthropology of enquiry” which operates out of a number of modern ideals, including the “ideal of freedom from determination by situation.”⁹ Webster highlights broadly that a bias exists towards interiority or inwardness in the ethos of this “anthropology of enquiry,” and the endeavoring of such inwardness is reflected in the production of “representations of the world.”¹⁰ As such, *Bildung* (which involves training and formation) has given way to *Wissenschaft* (which involves free inquiry), and argumentation by way of citation (which operates out of a kind of contextualization and an assumed, shared sense of a “canon” of authorities) lends itself to free discovery *de novo*. Granted that Webster is making some broad claims here, but I believe, on the whole, he has a point.

What is theology’s fate in all of this? Webster believes that operative is a “certain failure of theological nerve” in these conditions in that theology has not been more critical of these shifts within modern intellectual inquiry in the Western university.¹¹ Again, speaking as an academic to an academic setting, Webster highlights that theology in the university has managed to allow itself to be marginalized by these conventions of thought and method. The consequences from this failure are severe. One consequence, which is more implied than extensively stated by Webster, is that pursuits of theology have oftentimes shifted from a *Bildung* model to a *Wissenschaft* model of inquiry to fit the prevalent “anthropology of

⁸“Theological Theology,” 13.

⁹*Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹*Ibid.*, 17.

enquiry” method in the university. When pursued this way, theology becomes an ongoing contestation of various “representations of the world” with “God” thrown in to boot. The battleground, then, becomes methodological in that a flurry of alternatives are offered (oftentimes through qualifiers associated with particular persons or movements—liberationist, feminist, Barthian, and so on) within this broader “anthropology of enquiry” rubric.

Wesleyan theology has suffered from this situation. When those of us gathered for years prior to the annual meetings of the Wesleyan Theological Society under the name of the “Wesleyan Catholicity” working group, one of our concerns was that Wesleyan theology oftentimes has yielded to methodological proposals *du jour*. Wesleyan theology, when it has been pursued in a self-identified manner or described by others, has oftentimes felt like *Wissenschaft* and not *Bildung*. A concomitant matter is that the pursuit of something titled “Wesleyan theology” sounds like the perpetuation of another “representation of the world and God” that pivots on some methodological piece of ingenuity. This, too, has been a matter of debate within Wesleyan circles since many have been prone to ask, “What is unique about Wesleyan theology?” We offered our volume as a way of encouraging Wesleyans and Methodists to think of their theological identity as constituting a theological tradition that is grounded in the larger tradition of the church catholic.¹² But obviously, that perspective goes against the grain of theological convention, especially given the chasm between church and academy.

3

A second (and tied to the first) consequence coming out this “certain failure of theological nerve” is what Webster describes as theology’s “steady alienation from its own subject matter and procedures.”¹³ Webster continues, “Tracing the history of that alienation of theology from its own habits of thought would mean identifying how it came about that Christian theology began to argue for its own possibility without appeal to any specific Christian content.”¹⁴ Webster references Michael Buckley’s *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* to make the point that there was a departure

¹²See *Embodying Wesley’s Catholic Spirit*, ed. Daniel Castelo (Eugene: Pickwick, 2017).

¹³“Theological Theology,” 17.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 18.

on the part of theology when it “left its ground in order to debate with natural philosophy over the existence of God.”¹⁵ Webster subsequently quotes Buckley to this effect: “In the absence of a rich and comprehensive Christology and a Pneumatology of religious experience Christianity entered into the defense of the existence of the Christian god without appeal to anything Christian.”¹⁶ Naturally, Buckley’s is an observation made in light of many complex factors, but the shift is detectable. Webster remarks the following about the situation: “Far from ensuring the survival of Christian theology in the face of challenges to its plausibility, the relinquishment of specifically Christian doctrine in favour of generic theism in fact hastened its demise.”¹⁷ The implication here is that talk of God ceased being talk of God, or more specifically, the object of God-talk shifted: from the Trinity who is active and worshipped to a generic proposition that is argued and debated. Such is theology’s “alienation from its own subject matter.”

One of the blatant challenges that I have witnessed in Wesleyan theology over the years is a kind of corollary to all of this. When one thinks of “Wesleyan theology,” one does not necessarily first think of a doctrine of God, a doctrine of the Trinity. This is unfortunate because, if anything, Wesley was a theologian of the economic Trinity. Jason Vickers rehearses the point: “Above all . . . Wesley was a theologian of the economic Trinity insofar as his theology revolved around the sheer generosity and gratuity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in rescuing, redeeming and rehabilitating fallen humanity.”¹⁸ By highlighting the *economic* Trinity, Vickers is pointing to the activity of the God of Christian worship—God’s identity and work going hand in hand. In fact, one could say that it is through God’s self-manifestation in the work of the economy that the Trinity comes to be revealed and known.¹⁹

But is Wesleyan theology attentive to the economic Trinity? In other words, can Wesleyan theology speak confidently about the God of its worship as being One at work among the Wesleyan fold?

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Michael J. Buckley, SJ, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 67.

¹⁷“Theological Theology,” 18.

¹⁸Jason Vickers, *Wesley: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2009), 103. I extend this sensibility further in *Confessing the Triune God* (Wesleyan Doctrine Series; Eugene: Cascade, 2014).

¹⁹In what has become a modern classic on this point, see Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991).

4

For me, this last question is the crux of this symposium, one that asks, “What makes Wesleyan theology theological?” I am of the persuasion that Wesleyan theology is theological to the extent that it attends to the economic Trinity, that is, to the extent that it attends to the presence and operation of the God worshipped by Methodists and other Christians. I believe Wesleyan theology—given the legacy of Wesley and those who follow him—ought to be “theological theology,” that is, theology grounded in the confession that the *theos* in question is doubly affirmed as the Trinity and none other. And yet there is a need for this statement to be drafted in the conditional, with the language “to the extent that.” And because of the conditional nature of the remark, there is a hortatory dimension to it as well. Wesleyan theology is in some sense “theological” given its heritage, but it is also to be “theological” in terms of its mission and call. What follows are some implications of what it would mean today for Wesleyan theology to claim itself as “theological” as we have defined it thus far.

One implication would be that Wesleyan theology has to be committed to bridging the gap between academy and church. This is no small matter, given the issues discussed above. But when one also takes into account the currently fractured nature of both ecclesial and political bodies in the USA and beyond, the task feels overwhelming. There is plenty of polarization all around (including within Wesleyan and Methodist constituencies), and the chasm between academy and church can feed into and perpetuate this condition. If Wesleyan theology is committed to the triune God of its worship, if it is to be “theological theology,” then it will need to detect and identify God’s work on both sides of the gap. One side is not necessarily the prophetic voice to the other; one is not “truly Christian” and the other a “sell-out.” Yes, differences exist, and many of these differences do matter, but a focus on the economic Trinity should place those differences in a certain kind of light, one that is less “anthropological” and more “theological.” This exhortation is not meant to be excessively abstract or flaccid; quite the contrary, it is meant to resist a “certain failure of theological nerve” by stressing that we should seriously consider the source of our very selves (which would include everything that gives our lives meaning and significance, including our vocational and professional sense) as *beyond* ourselves. If I am inclined to locate myself within the rhythms of God’s manifest life within the economy, I

would like to think that my grip on my personal agenda (whatever it be), can lessen for the sake of the gospel's manifest logic. Such a gesture would indicate that we as Wesleyans and Methodists actually take seriously God's presence and work in our midst.

Another implication coming from the call that Wesleyan theology should be "theological" is the affirmation of a vibrant commitment to the interconnection between spirituality and erudition. It is no accident that a significant figure in the current revival of the *lex orandi, lex credendi* tag has been a Methodist theologian, Geoffrey Wainwright. This fits well with the heritage of the Wesleys, whose focus on the means of grace, hymnody, and other liturgical matters stressed the importance and centrality of worship for the *whole* person, which would include the intellect. It may be the case that the present chasm between church and academy may suggest that spirituality and erudition operate in different domains, but this is a blatant falsity when the economic Trinity's presence and work are confessed. Within this confession, the possibility is available to claim holy prompting, conviction, and inspiration just as naturally through a sermon and prayer as through a lecture or reading. God certainly is not limited by the church-university chasm, and seeing and sensing God involves the body, the affections, *and* the mind.

There could be other implications stemming from the call for Wesleyan theology to be true to itself and be "theological," but I will explore only one more, which is the commitment to personal and social transformation. It is unfortunate that at least in my own context within the USA, Wesleyan and Methodist constituencies have not escaped the modernist-fundamentalist controversies of the early 20th century. And so there is a mainline Protestant wing of Methodism as well as a conservative evangelical wing. One of the most deleterious consequences coming from this situation is that the former has a tendency to champion societal change and the latter personal change. Again, a commitment to the economic Trinity questions this divide thoroughly and defiantly. The free grace that is a hallmark of the Wesleyan movement has been picked up and championed in a variety of ways throughout history. How many Wesleyans and Methodists were involved in the abolitionist movement in the USA? How many Wesleyans and Methodists were involved in the revivalist fervor of the 19th century Holiness Movement? How did those lines cross? Thanks to the work of Donald Dayton and others, the historical documentation is available so that we should not be ignorant of these aspects of our heritage, but has this heritage challenged the problematic legacies of the

modernist-fundamentalist controversies as they are seen today? Oftentimes, no, or at least, not enough.

The Wesleyan commitment to personal and social transformation is one that is grounded in the confession of the triune God, and this God is a God of wonder, delight, and *possibility*. What this means in part is that the barriers, constraints, and limitations that seem to detain development and progress with regard to systemic and individual sin are not impervious to the presence and work of God. Wesleyans, after all, believe “change” is possible. And so, Wesleyan theology—when it is “theological”—is a hopeful theology in that it stands by the claim and lives in the reality that the Trinity reigns. What this says to me is that Wesleyan theology that is “theological” is especially needed today.

II.

John L. Drury

Wesleyan theology is theological insofar as it is of God, by God, and for God. Theology is of God if God is its subject matter. Theology is by God if God is its authorizing agency. And theology is for God if God is its intended end. To be genuinely theological, Wesleyan theology must be about God, through God, and toward God.

Each of these three elements is necessary. No matter how Wesleyan it is, theology that evades God as its object, its means, or its end is not theological. It may use the word 'God,' and so count as 'theology' in a generic, indeterminate sense. But theologically-determined theology must be of God, by God, and for God: it will recognize God as its subject matter, authorizing agency, and intended telos. Each of these three is necessary, yet none alone are sufficient. No matter how Wesleyan it is, theology that clings to just one or even two of these elements falls short of the fullness of what makes it theological.

Gladly, many instances of Wesleyan theology are partially theological, satisfying at least one of these conditions. Sadly, few instances of Wesleyan theology are fully theological, satisfying all of these necessary conditions. And so, my thesis implies an invitation: that we would work together to share more faithfully in the fullness of what makes Wesleyan theology theological. In what follows I attempt to issue this invitation by explicating the meaning, basis, expression, necessity, and insufficiency of each element in turn.¹

1

Theology is a human activity. Now every human activity is specified by its object. Therefore, theology is specified by its object. Thus it is fitting to commence our inquiry with the question: What is the object of theology? What is theology about? What is its subject matter? A simple answer presents itself: theology is about God. Simply put, theology is the human activity of discoursing about God.

¹This essay is intended as a work of scholarship, but not of research per se. My sources and influences will likely be obvious to some, but for the sake of full disclosure I'll mention three. From Aquinas I've learned how to analyze a human activity. From Hegel I've learned how to develop a dialectical triad. And from Barth I've learned how to keep theology theological.

We ought not be deceived by the simplicity of this answer. Not every simple answer is an easy answer. And this simple answer may be the most difficult one could ever conceive. Why? Because God is absolutely simple, i.e., without any composition whatsoever. Now human discourse is about composite things—to talk and think about something is to explore its inner logic, its movement from potency to act, its relation as known object to us as knowing subjects. But God by definition suffers no composition of potency and act, no constitutive relation between subject and object. God is the altogether simple act of being God. And so God is unlike any other object we know. Therefore, it seems that God cannot be the object of theology.

This is an age-old problem. Although modernity is (in)famous for problematizing the very possibility of theology, the difficulty is a recurring motif in the Christian tradition. In fact, my framing of the problem just now recapitulates arguments found in Nyssen, Augustine, and Aquinas. Although they were far less anxious about this problem, they were no less attuned to it. This question has captivated many minds: How can it be that theology is genuinely about God? In what sense, if any, is God the subject matter of theology? Is it even permissible for humans to speak of God if God is by definition not “of” anything but godself?

Nevertheless, theology is about God. What is impossible for the human is possible for God. By grace God has made human discourse about God actual. Now the actual is possible. So it must be possible for theology to be about God. Christian theologians have differed on how to best conceive this divine possibility. But they have for the most part agreed on this divine actuality: God makes godself an object for us.

This agreed upon actuality constitutes the first condition of genuinely theological theology. Theology that is not about God is not properly theological. It may vary greatly in how it conceives the possibility of God’s objectivity. But it cannot absolutely deny the actuality of God’s gift of revelation without ceasing to be theological. It may even regard this possibility as utterly inconceivable. But it cannot exchange God for another subject matter and still count as genuinely theological.

Now it seems that Wesleyan theology is not very theological. Sure, we acknowledge that God gives godself to be known and loved. But we tend to take this fact for granted and move on to the topics about which we have something distinctive to say. Such an emphasis is understandable and not damnable in itself. For although God is the object of theology, God is not exclusively so. In fact, God is an utterly inclusive subject matter, inso-

far as all things relate to God as their Creator, Redeemer, and Lord. So theology may in principle talk about anything, provided that theology talks about it in terms of its relation to God. Nevertheless, Wesleyan theology has tended to take its divine object for granted by focusing on its distinctive, mostly soteriological, doctrines. And so we may and must praise those among us who take up the doctrine of God as their theme.

Here I'd like to stick up for Wesleyan process theologians and open theists. Whatever quarrels one might have with them—and I have many—they immerse themselves in explicit and rigorous God-talk. Unlike those of us bogged down in perennial Wesleyan debates about soteriology and ecclesiology, they run little risk of forgetting that theology is about God. For this they should be praised, and in this they should be heeded as an invitation to recognize God as our subject matter and to work accordingly. This does not mean we all become process theologians. It doesn't even mean we all must take the doctrine of God as our theme. But in our research, whether biblical, historical, systematic, or practical, we ought to ask again and again: How does this relate to God? What, if anything, am I to say about God in and through my chosen topic of study? For no matter how Wesleyan it is, theology that evades God as its object is not theological.

Nevertheless, theological objectivity is a necessary but not sufficient condition for theological theology. For God ought to be not only on our lips, but in our lives as well. A theology that remembers to keep God as its object might nevertheless forget that theology is performed by theologians, i.e., persons. And as persons, theologians are accountable not only for their objectivity but also for their subjectivity. No matter how well it attends to its divine subject matter, a theology enacted by a lifeless theologian is not (yet) properly theological. Such a "rationalist" reduction of theology to its objectivity is at best a necessary correction to modern Wesleyan subjectivism and at worst a self-contradiction. For the God who is theology's object wills to be not merely known but also loved. So a thoroughgoing theological objectivity intrinsically requires an equally thoroughgoing theological subjectivity. Theology is not only of God, but also by God. And so we must turn to the second condition for genuinely theological theology. In doing so, we do not turn from God to ourselves, but rather follow God's own movement into ourselves.

2

Theology is a human activity. Now every human activity employs some means. Therefore, theology employs some means. Thus it is fitting

to continue our inquiry with the question: What is the means of theology? With what power is theology performed? What is its authorizing agency?

A simple answer does not so immediately present itself to this question. Rather, the means of theology seem to be a diffuse cluster of powers and practices. As a human activity, theology employs human powers of intellection and imagination and engages in human practices of study and creativity. All these things and many more besides are the means of theology. And yet, these are the same means employed by any field of study, and so it must be, for theology is a human activity. But these make theology an “-ology”; they do not make it theological. A properly theological answer to this question must attend to its peculiar means. What distinctively theological means does a theologian employ?

Enter the theological virtues. What makes Wesleyan theology theological? The theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity do! These are the distinctively theological means which theology employs. A theologian without faith, hope, and charity cannot do theological theology. For theology just is faith seeking understanding, hope seeking assurance, and charity seeking wisdom. A theologian makes use of a wide range of human means in this seeking, including but not limited to what Wesleyans call the means of grace. But the authorizing agency and initiating power of this seeking is the divine infusion of faith, hope, and charity in the theologian.

In other words, theology is theological insofar as it is not only of God, but also by God. To be properly theological, theology must discourse about God through God. God is the one by whom a theologian is authorized to do theology. God does so by infusing the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity. These are the peculiar means of theological work.

But herein lies a great difficulty. Just as God’s objectivity before us is not readily conceivable, so also our subjectivity before God is not immediately self-evident. It is simple to assert that theology must be enacted by means of God’s equipping; but it is not easy to discern whether one has been so equipped. The theological virtues are specified by their object: God. Faith, hope, and charity are about God. God is the object of the human acts of faithful belief, hopeful expectation, and charitable love. But God surpasses the capacity of the human. Therefore, the means of these acts must be divinely infused. Unlike the rest of the means employed by the theologian (intellection, imagination, study, creativity, etc.), these

means cannot be acquired. The utter peculiarity of God as their object entails the utter peculiarity of their mode of becoming. Faith, hope, and charity come to be in a human by the mysterious, gracious movement of God. No matter how far the human may cooperate with this movement—and according to us Wesleyans, very far indeed—this movement remains intrinsically mysterious. No matter how far God grants concomitant evidence of God's mysterious grace—and again according to us Wesleyans, very far indeed—the movement of grace cannot be “read off” one's life as an empirical fact like any other. The mysterious movement of grace stirring one to the faith, hope, and charity that authorize theological work cannot be humanly acquired and so cannot be humanly discerned. So, what good is it to assert the theological virtues as a necessary condition of theological theology, if they remain a mystery beyond our ontic or noetic control?

We ought not resolve this problem too quickly. In fact, we would be wise to embrace it as a feature not a bug. For the truth of subjectivity in part consists in its non-immediate discernibility, i.e., its indirect communication. This feature is crucial to curb the pernicious tendency of theological subjectivity to generate a merely performative piety. To say theology must be done by faithful, hopeful, and charitable theologians does not justify a demand for legalistic and/or charismatic signifiers. Rather, the indirect discernibility of infused virtue warrants an open, ongoing mutual dialogical process of co-discernment. That's the most we can expect.

But it is also the least we can expect. The classical pietists were right in principle, if not in practice, to resist unregenerate professors of theology. They were right to assert that theological theology requires theological virtues, even if they were wrong to presume they could differentiate with such ease the regenerate from the unregenerate. But it would be foolish for us to overcorrect by withdrawing into the apparent safety of theological objectivity—especially for us Wesleyans, birthed as we are from classical pietism.

Here I'd like to stick up for the more pietistic and revivalistic among Wesleyan theologians. They frequently express concern over the cold scholasticism of academic Wesleyan theology. Now these concerns are sometimes overstated, presumptuous, and uncharitable; but that does not invalidate the call contained within this concern. Properly theological theology must be done by theologians infused with faith, hope, and charity. We may and must resist demands for merely performative piety; but

we may and must receive as prophets those who wish to stir our hearts and not merely stimulate our minds.

Nevertheless, theological subjectivity is a necessary but not sufficient condition for genuinely theological theology. On the one hand, theologians infused with faith, hope, and charity who neglect God as the object of their work are not (yet) practicing theological theology. Just as a one-sided absorption in the divine subject matter does not a theologian make, so also a one-sided reliance on the divine infusion does not make one's work theological. We are called to preach the gospel at all times, using words when necessary. Note well: not if, but when. Words are necessary! We must speak of God. We must speak responsibly, i.e., as accountable to God as the object of our discourse. This accountability always includes subjective self-involvement, but never in place of objective content. Theological theology must be of God and by God. Both are necessary; neither is sufficient.

On the other hand, even these two together are not sufficient. One could recognize God as their subject matter and rely on God as their authorizing agency yet still fall short. For Wesleyan theology is theological insofar as it is not only of and by God but also for God. Theology is determined not only by its object and its means, but also by its end. Theology that discourses about God by the power of God is not (yet) theological unless and until it does so in service to God. Although it has intrinsic value, theology nevertheless is directed beyond itself as an act of service in and through the church. Theology caught up in the dialectic of subject and object remains untheological. Genuinely theological theology breaks through this polarity by way of its telic and dynamic ecclesial actuality. Which brings us to the third and final element.

3

Theology is a human activity. Now every human activity is directed toward some end. Therefore, theology is directed toward some end. Thus it is fitting to culminate our inquiry with the question: What is the end of theology? What purpose does theology serve? Toward what actuality does it tend?

Once again a deceptively simple answer presents itself: the church. Theology serves the church. And so the church is its end. This needn't be a restrictively parochial end, for theology serves the church in its mission to the world. Theology thus also serves the world—not alongside of or instead of the church, but in and through it. Theology is directed to its end insofar as it works in the service of the church.

Now this answer is correct as far as it goes. But it is not yet an explicitly theological answer. For theology is rendered theological in terms of its relationship to God. Thus the church in abstraction from God cannot be the end of theology. God is not merely theology's subject matter and authorizing agency on the way toward the church as its intended end. God is its intended end. Theology is theological insofar as it is not only of and by God, but also for God. Theology must serve God, because God is its end.

Does this contradict our initial answer? Does theology serve God instead of serving the church? No! Theology is directed to God as its end precisely in its service to the church. How can this be? In general, this can be because God is in fact the end of all things. All things are directed toward God as their end. God is not only the principle of all things but also the purpose of all things. The church is among these things, and so there is no 'metaphysical' impossibility here.

In particular, however, theology is a human activity that by God's grace intends God as its end. God is the end of theology not only as a brute fact of its existence but also as a conscious factor in its existing. Now God wishes to be glorified in and through the church's mission, which theology serves. So there is also no 'moral' incompatibility here.

But the singular reason that theology serves God in and as it serves the church is that God self-identifies with the church. God is not identical to the church. God is identical only with godself. However, God's self-identity includes God's self-identification with the human creature—hypostatically in Jesus Christ, mystically in the church. God the Holy Spirit freely and faithfully identifies godself with the human community called church—not hypostatically, but nonetheless mystically and so genuinely. And the processions contain the missions! From and to all eternity God embraces the human intersubjectivity of the church within the divine intersubjectivity of the Spirit. Ecclesial intersubjectivity is caught up in eternal intersubjectivity, barring any bifurcation of the two. Thus when theology serves the church, it serves God, for God the Spirit exists in and as the church.

Now these are bold claims in need of demonstration that would take us too far afield. But it seems to me that their motivating conviction is relatively uncontroversial: that theology serves God precisely by serving the church. Theology has one end: God. But theology finds its divine end in its service to the church. The church is not an end in itself in abstraction from God. But neither is the church a mere means. Rather, the church by grace participates in the end that God is. This conviction is widely shared, despite deep and wide disagreement regarding its conception and concrete

tion. So without further ado we may recognize that theology's end is God in and (in some sense) as the church. And since ends are co-determinative of human activity, theology is theological insofar as it is not only of and by God but also for God. Thus Wesleyan theology is not genuinely theological without being genuinely directed toward God in and as the church.

Here I'd like to stick up for the ecclesiocentrists among us. I use this term merely as a placeholder, acknowledging that it applies in a loose sense to nearly all Wesleyan theologians insofar as they are remotely Wesleyan, while in a strict sense it applies to nearly no Wesleyan theologians in so far as they are remotely theological. But somewhere between these extremes one can recognize a set of phenomena that I am here calling "ecclesiocentrism" for short. Ecclesiocentric theologians are those for whom all matters are peripheral to the lived reality of the church. No matter how indispensable, all theological questions find their orienting center in the church.

Ecclesiocentrism can take a variety forms. Nevertheless, three basic kinds are easily discerned: the doxological, the practical, and the ethical. Again, these terms are just placeholders for overlapping phenomena. Doxological ecclesiocentrists take their theological bearings from and to the church's praise before God. Practical ecclesiocentrists focus on the strategic usefulness of theological research for the church's programs among its people. Ethical ecclesiocentrists attend to the socio-political impact of the church's purpose in the world.

Now I have previously spilled much ink and wasted many words criticizing the ecclesiocentrism of Wesleyan liturgical studies, Wesleyan church growth research, and Wesleyan ethical theory. But here I want to defend them. Wesleyan theology is theological insofar as it is not only of and by God, but also for God. Theology is for God precisely as it is for the church. Ecclesiocentric Wesleyan theologians are a prophetic reminder of the necessity of theology's service to God through the church in the world. Theology is in some sense an end in itself, in that God is worthy of being known. However, theology is in another sense not an end in itself, in that God has bound it to seek and serve God in and as community. Theology has intrinsic value, but also an eccentric mission. Wesleyan theology that does not serve God in and as community is a theology bereft of its animating spirit. Even if it talks about God and lives through God, a theology that does not serve God is not genuinely theological.

I must confess that I often roll my eyes when a fellow Wesleyan presses me or my colleagues to explicitly articulate the doxological, prac-

tical, and/or ethical implications of systematic investigations into Christian doctrine. These pressings are perhaps problematically one-sided. But I say “confess” because the ecclesiocentrist is a prophet I ought to receive, whose voice I ought to hear, and whose example I ought to heed. And in this I am not alone. Not all of us are gifted to make the intersubjectivity of God our theme. But all of us are called to recognize the theological necessity of ecclesial service. This recognition entails a readiness to be held accountable to this service—an accountability frequently mediated through ecclesiocentric theologians. So, if you are an ecclesiocentric theologian: speak up! And if you are not: listen up!

Nevertheless, theological intersubjectivity is a necessary but not sufficient condition for genuinely theological theology. Although this third element in some sense sublates the previous two, it does not utterly negate them. God as intended end does embrace but does not replace God as subject matter and God as authorizing agency. Theological theology works for God precisely in discoursing about God in the power of God. Our communion with God in others and with others in God does collect but does not neglect the objective content of God’s revelation or the subjective means of God’s infusion. The mystery of God in and as community perfects but does not destroy the mysteries of God before us and God within us, just as the grace of revelation exceeds but does not erase the goodness of creation. God remains other than us, standing before us and stirring within us, even as God becomes one with us, communing in a life of service. So theology must remain of God and by God, even as its steps out beyond itself for God.

We must be very wary of ecclesiolatry. We mustn’t allow our properly ecclesial end to become an ideology that justifies anything as long as the church seems to need it. When serving God in and as community becomes an ideology, ecclesiology has fallen into ecclesiolatry. This is why ecclesiocentrism, though justifiable, is so dangerous. We need to heed Wesleyan ecclesiocentrists, for their permissible emphasis is often a necessary summons to serve. But all of us must resist the temptation to twist the church’s mission into a colonial expansion that consumes everything and everyone—even God.

So we have come full circle. Wesleyan theology is theological insofar as it is of God, by God, and for God. Each is necessary. None is sufficient. My hope is that this framework will serve as an aid toward mutual understanding and recognition among Wesleyan theologians, as well as a call to embrace the fullness of theological work. May it be so.

III.

Justus H. Hunter

In 2008, the Wesleyan Studies Group of the American Academy of Religion hosted a panel discussion entitled “What makes Theology ‘Wesleyan’?”¹ The focus of the conversation was on the final term: Wesleyan. Panelists were selected from a variety of contemporary schools of academic theology: constructive, evangelical, liberationist, analytical. And yet they all, in one way or another, self-identify as Wesleyan. The panel organizers, faced with the diversity of theologians and theologies, attempted to unify the discussion by offering a typology of senses “in which Wesley can be claimed as a source for theology today.”² The senses ranged from “theologically prescriptive” to “theologically irrelevant.”

This episode in *Wesleyana* typifies the current state of affairs in academic Wesleyan theology. Descriptively, it is surely the case that the individuals who self-identify as Wesleyan range far and wide. Descriptively, there is nothing wrong with this state of affairs. Moreover, academic discourse is nourished by disagreement, objection, response. But certain challenges arise for Wesleyan theology given such immense disagreement, such as when my students ask what it means to be a Wesleyan theologian, or how to become one.

Imagine a school of Euclidean geometry that remains undecided as to whether Euclid’s axioms should be treated as prescriptive or irrelevant. One would expect a rather confused set of students. Those of us involved in theological education in general, and seminary education in particular, know the feeling. Students come to us hoping to continue along the path of holiness, to answer a call to ordination, to be equipped for an ecclesial task. They sometimes leave rather confused. Theological education that resists a normative vision of theology is as confused as a Euclidean education that resists final judgment on the axioms.

Some will worry a normative vision of theology will entail utter uniformity. But this is not necessary. After all, Christian theologians have long debated their own axioms, the articles of faith.³ What are they? Are

¹Revised papers from the panel were subsequently published in *Methodist Review* 1 (2009), 7-26.

²*Ibid.*, 9-10.

³By “articles of faith” I do not intend any particular modern set of confessional articles, such as the Articles of Faith of the Church of the Nazarene, or the Articles of Religion or Confession of Faith of the United Methodist Church.

they warranted? If so, how? And Christians have especially debated what it is to perceive them *through faith*. But we should note, to be about *these* questions is to be about the task of Christian theology, even if it is second order discourse about what one is doing when speaking about the God Christians encounter in Christ and in worship.

We want, then, an account of theology and “theological” such that it will be both (1) helpful for shaping theologians while (2) admitting a fair measure of disagreement, objection, and response, but of the theological sort. I make a start at such an account in what follows.

But first, we should clarify our question: “What makes Wesleyan theology theological?” This ill-stated question is like asking what makes a brown dog doggish. “Brown” adds little to the question, as brownness has nothing to do with dogness. It is merely accidental. A thing is no more or less doggish if it is white or brown or, God forbid, purple.

Just as brownness has nothing to do with dogness, a thing’s being Wesleyan has nothing to do with a thing’s being theological. If you object, I will simply ask you what makes my Wesleyan website websitital.

And yet, the ill-stated question feels pressing. That it feels pressing suggests that something has gone awry. This case of wrinkled-up syntax suggests a wrinkled-up situation. In what follows, I take the question, “What makes Wesleyan theology theological?” to be a normative question (is this theological?) concerning particular phenomena (Wesleyan theology). In these pages, I am primarily interested in the normative question. I want to consider “What would make a thing (Wesleyan or otherwise) theological?” I will leave it to the reader to deal with sorting out whether or not particular phenomena described as Wesleyan theology fit the account of theological that I provide here. I will, however, suggest the Wesleys were theological theologians.

Instructors often employ a deflationary definition of theology. So the seminarian is taught theology is simply “speech about God.” Then the point is usually made that we are all theologians, in that we all speak about God, so we might as well become disciplined about it. It is a cute

Rather, I am using “articles of faith” in the sense used by medieval scholastics, like Thomas Aquinas’s use of the term in *ST* I, q. 1, aa. 2, 5: the articles of faith are the premises of sacred doctrine, received from God, perceived by the gift of faith (Aquinas’s treatment of the gift of faith can be found in *ST* II-II, qq. 1-7). As in Thomas’s treatment in *ST* II-II, q. 1, the articles would primarily be the 12 articles of the Apostles Creed, although other items could be included as well.

point, helpful for setting aside the first-year seminarian's trepidation—though it is not self-evident that such a thing ought be desired—but so deflated to be of little use for our question. In this deflationary sense, any number of utterances and utterers would be theological. My son issues theological utterances in this sense both when he recites the Apostles Creed and when he declares his longest-bearded Lego minifigure to be God. But you could not train a coherent theologian while holding out the possibility that both utterances are true.

Christian theological utterances about God are of two kinds. Some are only uttered in virtue of God's self-revelation. For instance, we can only utter "God is Triune" in virtue of the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Left to the mere light of our natural intellect, we would never think God exists as three persons in one nature.

Other utterances about God, it seems, are uttered independent of God's self-revelation. Many Wesleyan theologians have thought the utterance "God exists" is such a case, often on empirical grounds, such as that God's existence is warranted by the miraculous. In fact, many Wesleyan theologians have thought the utterance "God's self-revelation is to be believed" is warranted by the light of our natural reason. Part I of Richard Watson's *Theological Institutes* is a lengthy attempt at this argument. The verity of such claims does not concern us for the present. The distinction does.

We might be tempted to think this distinction between theology independent of revelation and theology dependent on revelation rather uninteresting. We may find it instructive, warding off rationalism. Or we may find it destructive, neglecting our rationality, or consigning us to idolatry. Whatever our assessment, the distinction itself can help us ascertain an account of "theological" suited to our task.

In the Prologue to his *Ordinatio*, "ordained" Parisian lectures on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, Duns Scotus asks whether or not we, in our present state, "need to be supernaturally inspired with some special knowledge we could not attain by the natural light of the intellect."⁴ The

⁴Allan Wolter gives a helpful commentary and translation of *Ord.* prol. 1 in "Duns Scotus on the Necessity of Revealed Knowledge," *Franciscan Studies* 11 (1951), 231-272. Wolter's article opens with an explanation of the *Ordinatio* in general and the first question of the Prologue in particular, helpful to those unfamiliar with scholastic theology. The Latin text is available in *Joannis Duns Scoti Opera Omnia*, vol. I (Vatican City: Typis Vaticanis, 1950). Unless otherwise noted, I will use Wolter's translation in this article.

question marks a distinction between two kinds of knowledge: one supernatural, the other natural. This supernatural knowledge he calls special; it is special in the sense that it is inspired from something beyond the “natural light of the intellect.” Natural knowledge, on the other hand, derives from the “natural light of the intellect.”

The image of light is helpful. It calls to mind vision, made possible by the presence of light. At the moment I write this, I can see the computer upon my desk. We might say that I attain this sight by the natural light of my eyes. That is, there is nothing extra-ordinary about my seeing the computer on the desk. There is simply the miracle of sight itself, a miracle I and the majority of other human beings rely upon on a regular basis. There is no further story to tell about this instance of seeing.

Now imagine I were dozing in my chair, and in my sleep I see with perfect clarity my brother, teaching in his classroom in Shanghai. Imagine the sight is of such clarity that I could describe certain details of his classroom and students, although I have never visited or seen pictures of his classroom or students. “The student sitting in the third seat of the far left row had a bandage on his right cheek. At the back of your classroom is a chart of pronouns.” And so on. The story to tell about this instance of seeing is rather extra-ordinary. Though there is definite evidence that seeing happened, it is not a natural way of seeing. It is supernatural. And in this case, it is difficult to say what role our eyes have in the matter.

Scotus’s question, then, is whether we humans have *a need* for some other way of knowing than our ordinary, natural way of knowing.

There was, in Scotus’s day, a prominent debate between the theology and philosophy faculties at the University of Paris. The philosophers insisted there was no need for an extraordinary, supernatural way of knowing in this life. The theologians give the opposite response. Scotus puts it thus: “The philosophers insist on the perfection of nature and deny supernatural perfection. The theologians, on the other hand, recognize the deficiency of nature and the need of grace and supernatural perfection.”⁵

John refines the question and offers a characteristically subtle response. He refutes the philosophers’ confidence in our natural abilities to know, specifying a question the natural intellect cannot know, and yet *needs* to know:

Natural reason merely shows us that it is necessary for us to know definitely one part of this contradiction: “The enjoyment

⁵*Ord. prol. 1, par. 5.*

[of God] is [our] end; [the enjoyment of God] is not our end.” In other words, our intellect must not remain in doubt or ignorance on . . . whether [the enjoyment of God] is our end, for [the doubt] would prevent us from seeking the end.⁶

When it comes to questions about what humanity is for, about what our true human happiness consists in, our intellects cannot *remain* doubtful. If it is enjoyment of God, we *need* to know that. We have a natural desire to find out. But this is not to say that everyone knows which option is true, only that those who remain in doubt will have a mental life characterized by restlessness. Is the enjoyment of God our end? It is a question our minds are eager to answer; without an answer, our reason will know no peace. Scotus continues: “But natural reason does not reveal just which part [of the contradiction] we must know. . . . Either it is this or it is that. But a definite answer is possible only from what we believe.”⁷

Scotus gives several arguments in support of his claim that natural reason cannot know which of the two statements are true. As interesting as those arguments are in themselves, let us pass them over and observe John’s own response to his primary question: whether or not we need to be supernaturally inspired with some special knowledge we could not attain by the natural light of the intellect.

By now, his answer will be obvious. Yes, we need some special knowledge we cannot obtain by our natural resources. Otherwise, our reason itself remains doubtful, restless.

Scotus is subtle. He should not be misunderstood to say that our natural reason is left behind entirely when it attains this special, inspired, supernatural knowledge. On this point, Scotus becomes quite subtle. An analogy will be helpful.

Thanks to the wisdom of the market, Play-Doh not only sells jars of colorful clay, but markets sets with a variety of molds and tools. I have often watched my sons press into the dough images of animals, plants, houses, automobiles, and so on. When the mold of, say, Mickey Mouse is pressed upon the dough, it leaves an impression, like seals impressed wax on letters prior to the mass production of affordable, pre-gummed envelopes in the nineteenth century.

You have, then, three things: the dough, the impression, and the mold. The dough receives the impression and the mold impresses the

⁶Ibid., par. 71.

⁷Ibid.

impression. The dough receives the impression, the impression is received, and the mold acts; it impresses. As a result, we have Mickey-shaped dough.

Following Aristotle's infamous *De Anima* iii 5, medieval theologians distinguished between two capacities in the intellect: an active intellect (*nous poiêtikos*) and passive intellect (*nous pathêtikos*).⁸ In their view, ordinary cases of intellection—reasoning—can be explained in terms of the interaction between these two capacities. In brief, the active intellect impresses knowledge upon the passive intellect.⁹ Like the mold upon the dough, the active intellect *acts* upon the passive intellect.

Scotus does not simply say that some supernatural knowledge is necessary. He clarifies the sense in which supernatural knowledge is necessary. The passive intellect is like the dough. It receives the impression. This is the natural way the mind works; it receives knowledge. When our intellect receives any knowledge whatsoever, it is simply doing what an intellect does. In this sense, the reception of supernatural knowledge, since it is truly knowledge, is not supernatural. The goings-on so far as the intellect receiving the knowledge are the same as the goings-on when our intellects receive knowledge of the temperature of a cup of coffee or the mathematical rule of addition.

However, this instance is unique in that the thing acting on the mind is supernatural. As we said, ordinarily the agent intellect acts upon the passive intellect, like the Mickey Mouse mold acting upon the dough. But in this case, God acts to impress higher knowledge upon the passive intel-

⁸In fact, there was significant debate about the way in which these faculties were distinguished, how they were distinguished within the soul in general, and a number of other issues. Aristotle's terse treatment of the topic in *De Anima* is notoriously open to interpretation. Moreover, the Latin theologians of the middle ages acquired, alongside Aristotle, divergent interpretations of these passages from the Muslim *falasifa*, especially Averroes. For an orientation to the Latin reception of Aristotle, see Bernard G. Dod, "Aristoteles latinus," in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, edited by Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny, Jan Pinborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 45-79.

⁹In Aristotelian psychology, there are other ways by which the passive intellect is "moved to knowledge" (as Scotus puts it). For instance, ordinary cases of perception (e.g., feeling a glass) involve the further reception of a phantasm by some faculty of sense, the abstraction of form from the phantasm, and then active intellect impressing the form upon the passive intellect. This is standard fare for Scholastic philosophy. A simple explication, with argument, can be found in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, 79.

lect. Scotus calls this higher knowledge *revelation*.¹⁰ It is revealed by God, as it must be; this knowledge is beyond the range of our natural intellects. It is knowledge from God.

Like Scotus, Thomas Aquinas locates theological knowledge, primarily, in the Divine Mind. He also discusses its presence in humans.¹¹ In the opening question of the *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas gives an account of what he calls *sacra doctrina*: “sacred doctrine,” or “holy teaching.” In the process, he distinguishes between two kinds of theology (*theologia*): “There is theology which pertains to sacred doctrine (*ad sacram doctrinam pertinet*), which is different in kind from that theology which is part of philosophy.”¹² By *sacra doctrina*, Thomas intends an account of theology along the lines of our inquiry here. It is not deflationary, as is the seminarian’s introduction to “speech about God.” It is more ramified. It is normative. It is theological theology.¹³

In *ST* I, q. 1, a. 2, Thomas asks whether or not *sacra doctrina* is a science. By “science,” Thomas has in mind Aristotle’s account of *scientia*: an axiomatized, deductive system.¹⁴ That is, all the individual items of knowledge within a science, which together comprise the whole science, are derivable (deduced) from fundamental principles (axioms).

Thomas argues that *sacra doctrina* is a particular kind of science. He distinguishes the sciences according to the source from which their principles (axioms) arise. Some sciences “proceed from principles known according to the light of the natural intellect (*lumine naturali intellectus*).” Others “proceed from principles known according to the light of a higher science (*lumine superioris scientiae*).” Theological *scientia* is of the latter sort; its principles are known according to the light of a higher science. “As the musician believes the principles handed down (*tradita*) by the

¹⁰*Ord.* prol. 1, par. 62.

¹¹In what follows, Thomas is not substantially different than Scotus, who distinguishes between *theologia in se* and *theologia in nostra*: *Ord.* prol. 3.

¹²*ST* I, q. 1, a. 7, *ad* 2. All translations of the *Summa Theologiae* are my own.

¹³By “theological theology” I have in mind a helpful article, largely commensurate with the argument of this essay, by John Webster, “What Makes Theology Theological?” *Journal of Analytic Theology* 3 (2015), 17-28.

¹⁴Bruce D. Marshall gives a helpful explanation of Aristotle’s account of *scientia* and Aquinas’s account of *sacra doctrina* as *scientia* in “*Quod Scit Una Uetula*: Aquinas on the Nature of Theology,” in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, edited by Rik van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2005), 7-14.

arithmetician, so sacred doctrine believes the principles revealed by God.” He then makes a brief, significant statement: that higher science is *scientia Dei et beatorum*—the knowledge of God and the blessed.

Theology proceeds in the light of a higher knowledge: the knowledge of God and the blessed. Scotus marks a similar distinction, between *theologia in se*, theology in itself, and *theologia in nostra*, theology in us.¹⁵ Theology in itself is the comprehensive knowledge of God, all the possible things that could be known about God, known by God about Himself.

Theology in us, on the other hand, leaps forth from the desire of our natural intellects illumined by supernatural knowledge. As we saw earlier, natural reason remains restless without an answer to the question, “are we intended for the enjoyment of God?” Doubt issues in desire to know. The Christian intellect also lives with restlessness. It also desires to know something. However, the Christian intellect also knows that, one day, it will come to rest in the knowledge it desires. One day, the Christian will attain to the higher science, “the knowledge of God *and the blessed*.”

Theological theology erupts from the desire to know the revealed God. It is generated by the gift of revelation and the faith which receives it. Unsurprisingly, then, theological theology remains utterly committed to the articles of faith. It must, as it proceeds from the desire elicited by the gift of faith.

The gift of revelation delivers a certain degree of knowledge, but it is imperfect. As Scotus says, “this knowledge is obscure and is included eminently in the clear knowledge, as the imperfect is included eminently in the perfect.”¹⁶ There is a gap between theology in us, and theology in itself. The theological exercise is propelled by a desire to close the gap, which will only finally be closed, so far as possible for creatures like us, in the life to come.

Aquinas inspired a distinction when he mentioned the *theologia beatorum*—the theology of the blessed. Later commentators would distin-

¹⁵*Ord.* prol. 3.

¹⁶*Ord.* prol. 1, par. 64. Scotus here is speaking of the relation between the supernatural knowledge delivered by the Apostles who saw Christ in His Glory, and the supernatural knowledge delivered to us through the testimony of those Apostles. In this case, he says, “the agent which reveals or causes the obscure truth (e.g., the Apostles), takes the place of the object that could cause a clear knowledge of the same (i.e., God).” But the point remains the same regarding the relation of our imperfect knowledge in this life and the perfected knowledge in the life to come.

guish the *theologia beatorum* from the *theologia viatorum*, the theology of the pilgrim.¹⁷ The pilgrim's theology rests when it obtains the knowledge of God enjoyed by the blessed. Theological theology leaps from faith and holds the hope of final rest in a direct perception of God—in seeing God face to face. This final, unitive vision of God will so suffuse the human mind that it overflows in ecstasy and in rest.

By now, you are surely wondering what my account of theological theology has to do with the Wesleyan theological tradition. I submit: the same view of theology governs the thought of John and Charles Wesley. The theologies of John and Charles arise from the gift of faith. They draw their life from the desire to attain blessedness.

John's thought erupts from his desire to understand the God encountered at Aldersgate. It moves with inexorable passion to know the God whose Spirit witnesses to his own spirit, "you are a child of God." All his central contributions, nearly all of them in the doctrine of grace, are moved by this encounter. He is like St. Paul, his thought an "impetuous torrent hurling itself against obstacles and rushing impatiently toward its goal."¹⁸ John's sermons are unsystematic in presentation, but they are never uncoupled from a vision of God so alluringly comprehensive that he could never leave off speaking about it. Neither could Charles bring his hymning to an end. In this, the brothers Wesley are united. And this accounts for the profound consonance of so much of their thought, in the doctrine of God, Trinity, Christology, and so on.

For John, all aims at one thing: holiness, sanctification, beatitude. Every ounce of Wesley's body *and his mind* was wrung with the study of life on the way to holiness. His teaching was holy teaching, *sacra doctrina*, teaching aimed at holiness. Its source and aim were like that of Thomas or the other John, from Duns. Thus, a theological Wesleyan theology, while it may differ from the Wesleys in particular matters, will share a common source and aim.

Have we now arrived at a view of theology we were seeking at the outset? Have we arrived at a view of theology that is (1) helpful for shaping theologians while (2) admitting a fair measure of disagreement, objection, and response, but of the theological sort?

¹⁷See, for instance, Cajetan, *In I S.Th.*, q. 1, a. 1.

¹⁸Jean-Francois Bonnefoy, *Christ and the Cosmos*, trans. By Michael D. Meilach (Paterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1965), 134.

I think so. First, we have specified the source of theology that propels theological thinking. Theological thinking leaps from the gift of faith. It seeks to understand supernatural revelation, which outstrips our natural intellectual resources even while it is delivered to our natural intellectual resources. For this reason, theological thinking in this life will know no end. The theologian is caught up as long as she remains in this world. And there is a necessary condition of this pursuit: assent to the articles of faith. Since it is the assent itself that propels the mind toward deeper understanding of the God revealed in Jesus Christ, the assent is never left behind, even as we come to deeper understanding of the faith received.

Second, we have isolated the aim of this pursuit, and therefore its end. It aims to know and enjoy God as one of the blessed. And since to be blessed is to be holy, this pursuit is integral to our holiness.

Does this normative view extinguish the diversity enjoyed by a descriptive account of theology like the one in the *Methodist Review*? Yes and no. Surely, given the view outlined here, Wesley cannot be considered irrelevant. Neither, however, is he strictly prescriptive, at least not in the sense that the articles of faith will be.

Let us be frank: this view of theology will not allow for the range of diversity as in the aforementioned panel. But there will be a surfeit of debate. Scotus and Aquinas disagreed on whether or not theology is a practical or contemplative science. They developed distinct philosophies of human action in order to interpret the workings of grace in a human life. Indeed, this path offers rich diversity, but all decidedly theological diversity.¹⁹ It does not, however, leave open such possibilities regarding its axioms as the descriptivist would. Why? Because the axioms are the very conditions for the possibility of theological theology. The articles of faith, delivered to the intellect, remain beyond the reach of the natural intellect. Consequently, they generate the very energy and thirst for God which makes any theology, Wesleyan or otherwise, truly theological.

¹⁹Paul Griffiths gives a helpful explanation of theological diversity in his 2014 plenary address to the Catholic Theological Society of America, "Theological Disagreement: What It Is & How to Do It," *Catholic Moral Theology*, accessed July 17, 2017, <http://catholicmoraltheology.com/paul-griffiths-ctsa-plenary-address/>.

IV.

Beth Felker Jones

0. Wesleyan theology is theological for the same reason all theology is theological. That is, Wesleyan theology is theological because it is about God.

But to be “about God” is to traverse specific content, the doctrinal content of the biblical revelation, and to do so in a way that respects, synthesizes, and loves that content. More, that loving synthesis ought to be done in such a way that the content of the biblical witness is recommended to a world in need in a way that comes as closely as possible to doing justice to the gospel nature of that content. When this happens, theology will display, to the world, the beauty and the attractiveness of the God said theology is about. I am a Wesleyan theologian because I am convinced that Wesleyan theology, as a tradition, does just this as truly, faithfully, and beautifully as theology has managed to do. In this short essay, I will unpack these claims while commenting on the state of theology as a discipline and Wesleyan theology in particular, as I see it.

1. Theology is about God.

Daniel Castelo and John Drury, in the tradition of John Webster, argue that theological theology must be about God. Castelo pleads with those of us who attempt the tasks of Wesleyan theology to center our work on the Triune God and Drury helps us to see God as the beginning, power, and end of theology. Certainly, we need to heed this plea and draw strength from this insight. Wesleyan theology, at its best, does so in characteristic ways shaped by scripture.

To be about God and for God is not to begin with a concept, it is to begin with divine revelation, and in the Wesleyan theological tradition—as a stream of Protestantism—to begin with divine revelation is to begin with scripture. It is the content of scripture that gets us to Webster’s and Castelo’s and Drury’s and Hunter’s and Wesley’s Triune God, and John Wesley, together with the tradition attached to his name, gives us a style of looking to that content that respects the wideness and richness of the “one book” we call the Bible.

2. To be about God, theology must embrace the rich, wide content of the biblical revelation.

Theology cannot just talk about God in general or in any way it chooses. It has to talk specifics. God is the God of the biblical story. God

is “the Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Ex 3:15).¹

Because God is God, because God is other, because of the holy and qualitative distinction between Creator and creation, theology cannot talk reductively of God. It has to talk, or talk around, the mystery of the One who is more than we can conceive: ineffable, inscrutable, transcendent, and holy. To discipline theological talk by talking with and through the canonical scriptures of the Old and New Testaments is to seek that specificity and that richness. More, it is to talk toward the transcendent God on that God’s own terms, seeking God’s face through the biblical revelation with which God self-identifies as the divine word.

The God who chooses self-revelation through the words of the scriptures is a God who frequently reveals the specifics of the divine character in contradistinction to false possibilities. The God of Abraham and Sarah is known, partly, because that God is not the gods of the nations. The God of Isaac and Rebekah is different from the false gods. God reveals divine specificities in revealing this difference from the not-gods and the idols created by human hearts and hands.

Theology encompasses a body of material, the content of the faith. Certainly, theology is about God, but God is up to a great many things in the world, and so talking well about God also involves talking about lots of other things in relationship to God. If we want to list the doctrinal loci, we can argue about specifics, but there is some consensus that certain things belong on that list. To do theology is to talk about God and creation, God and human beings, God in the person of Jesus Christ, God the Spirit, God’s saving work, God and the church, and God’s final good intentions for all things. Those topics emerge organically from the biblical witness.

To attend to this list and not some other list is not random, nor is it only contextual. To attend to this list and not some other is to attend to the story God attends to in scripture. It is to give disciplined attention to scripture in its full scope and unfathomable richness. When theology talks about theological anthropology, it talks about God.

Theology, then, has a recognizable shape, and while that shape takes on some differences in different contexts, it is not endlessly malleable. Theology has to have something to say about creation (and about the other major doctrinal loci). The fact that this shape of theology is hard to

¹Scripture is NRSV.

describe and contestable does not mean it does not exist. Perhaps we cannot see it if we try to look at it straight on, but it is nonetheless there and real. We glimpse it hovering in the periphery of our vision. It is there through a glass darkly, but it is there. Wesleyan theology cares about, and has always cared about, the things that theology has to care about—God, yes, but also humans and creation and sin and glory and so on—and in that care, we see that Wesleyan theology is theological.

Wesleyan theology also embraces the content of theology because of its relationship to tradition. The Wesleyan tradition is a stream of the great Tradition, and to connect to that Tradition is to connect to traditioned ways of describing and identifying the themes in revelation. Wesleyan theology does not arise out of nothing. It is a stream out of Anglicanism out of Protestantism out of Western Roman Catholic Christianity out of Augustinianism out of the early ecumenical conciliar consensus out of the earliest churches.

The particularly Wesleyan character of that stream is less important than those waters it shares with the traditions from which it flows, and that shared stuff includes some degree of consensus about and attention to those matters that are the necessary content of theology because they reflect the themes and breadth of the biblical witness. At the same time, the particularly Wesleyan character of that stream does its Wesleyan best, as it flows through Britain and North America and later around the globe, to interpret and synthesize the Tradition in a way that is faithful to revelation in the contexts in which it works. The character of that synthesis and interpretation is distinctly Wesleyan, but it is in no way unconnected from the streams from which it flows.

3. Theology must love and synthesize that content.

All theology must attend to the content of the faith, and various traditions do so in characteristic ways. Those characteristic differences between traditions are appropriate, inasmuch as different traditions attend to the faith in different contexts and respond to different needs. Such differences are also appropriate in that the content of the faith, in its richness and wideness, is big enough to include different emphases among the authentic ways it is confessed. Such differences are appropriate, but one tradition may still recommend itself over others in its faithfulness to the God of the biblical story. Theological practitioners in a given tradition had best be convinced that their tradition has good reasons, based in the content of the faith itself, for taking the shape that it does.

Every good theological tradition attends to the whole of the content of the faith and does so in a way that makes plain how that content speaks to, meets the needs of, and challenges the contexts in which that tradition speaks. The characteristic shape of the Wesleyan theological tradition synthesizes the content of the faith in ways that speak to the contexts in which that tradition arose and continue to speak in the global contexts of the present. It speaks to the world's deep need for the empowering love of God.

The Wesleyan synthesis of the biblical themes focuses on the power of grace to redeem and transform sinners. It claims the possibility that we may become able to love *because* God "first loved us" (1 Jn 4:19). It claims a thoroughgoing Protestantism on the freedom of justifying grace together with a thoroughgoing confidence in the transforming power of sanctifying grace. If, as I am convinced it is, this is the heart of revelation, then Wesleyan theology is being theological in forwarding this synthesis.

Wesleyan theology is characterized by an insistence on holding together the content of the faith, by a refusal to divide parts of the faith against one another. There is a profound holism to the Wesleyan tradition, a synthetic power that recognizes the unity of aspects of the faith that we might be tempted to divide. Faith and works, for Wesleyan theology, are one. Justification cannot be divided against sanctification, even as justification is the only and necessary ground of sanctification. Personal and social holiness are both necessary and both flow from the spring of redemption in Christ. Heaven and earth together belong to the Lord.

The content of the faith finds its fundamental unity in the one God. Every good theological tradition recognizes this unity, but the Wesleyan tradition is especially good at testifying to that unity and refusing any claim to the contrary. In this way, Wesleyan theology is theological because it allows the content of the faith to be what it is. In this way, Wesleyan theology respects and loves the content of the faith as revealed by the living God in a way that is properly theological.

4. In synthesizing the contents of the biblical revelation, theology must display that content as what is is, that is: the gospel.

The unified content of the faith is the good news of God for all humanity. When theology respects that content by discerning and speaking to the unity of that content, it is then able to make the gospel nature of the faith clear. Theology has a public task in clarifying the gospel nature of the faith and must equip God's people for their public task of faithfully

displaying the Christian faith *to* the world as the good news *for* the world that it is.

Characteristic emphases in Wesleyan theology help it to do this. Wesleyan distinctives in soteriology grow from a reading of the biblical witness that foregrounds God as the God-of-good-news-for-all-the-world. Wesleyan insistence on the unity of atonement and holy lives works toward the display of the Christian faith as gospel, for holy living is the visible and tangible evidence of the gospel nature of Christian faith.

Evangelism, revival, renewal, and conversionism cluster at the roots of Wesleyan theology. While despisers might see this practical focus as evidence against the theological nature of Wesleyan theology, the opposite is true. The unity of faith and practice are not only one more instance of the oneness of faith in the one God, the unity of faith and practice are also necessary to the theological enterprise. We cannot tell the truth about God without telling the nature of gospel, and we cannot show gospel for what it is without, practically, wishing and working to invite the world for which that gospel exists into relationship with that same God.

5. In displaying the truth about God as gospel, theology must bear witness to a world in need.

Some other styles of doing theology are more likely than the Wesleyan style to suppose that the fact that theology *must* be about God somehow also requires that theology *not* be about us. This is an error, one I am grateful Wesleyan theology seems characteristically less prone to compared to some other theological traditions.

It is an error because it acts as though we could know anything about God outside of relationship with God. Theology is about God, but theology is done by us, humans, in human relationship with God. Theology is about God, but our knowledge of God is *our* knowledge of God. It is knowledge available only through the gift of revelation, and it is relational knowledge. It exists, for us, only in our relationship with the Triune God. It exists for us “who have been chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ and to be sprinkled with his blood” (1 Pet 1:2). There is no theology without God, but the Triune God chooses relationship with humans. There is no theology, for us humans, without us humans.

God shows this most decisively in becoming incarnate for our sake. We see the humanness of theology in the human Jesus, as he is the one in whom “the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Col 2:9). When the

very divine takes on flesh, making our human condition God's own condition, we are granted access to knowledge of God made really human. It is only because "the Word became flesh and lived among us," that "we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:14).

The scandal of particularity calls theology to attention to particularity as the discipline goes about its tasks. The scandal of particularity means that theology must bear witness to a world that stands in desperate need of that witness. It means that theology must attend to the particularity, the diversity, and the contextual nature of that world. Christian theology is inescapably human and inescapably contextual because it is theology for the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God who took on the fullness of our humanity—including contextuality—in the person of Jesus Christ, the God who also goes into and loves every context in the person of the Holy Spirit.

The way God treasures contexts, particularity, and human diversity is clear as we learn of the nature and person of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit takes on Jesus's taking on of particulars and spreads that taking on to "all flesh," including "sons" and "daughters," "young" and "old" (Acts 2:17) and to "every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev 5:9). Jesus makes the particulars of first century, male, Jewish flesh God's own. The Holy Spirit makes the particulars of all flesh God's own, making temples of bodies of every context, taking on flesh of every century and every race, and enabling diverse flesh—all bought with the same price—to respond to Paul's invitation to "glorify God in your body" (1 Cor 6:20). Wesleyan theology is theological because it makes much of the Holy Spirit, glorifying the Spirit and relying on the Spirit in the work of bringing the gospel to the world and seeking conversion. The Holy Spirit has a habit of attending to flesh that the world finds unworthy of attention. Theological theology will learn from this habit.

This means that properly theological theology must be contextual. Despisers exist. There are those who claim that for theology to really be about God, it must refuse to be about matters such as race, gender, class, ethics, culture, and justice. These despisers have it backwards. Because God is the God who made context God's own in the body and soul of Jesus Christ, theology can only be about God when it pays attention to context and witnesses to God's goodness in the many, many ways those contexts are crying out for.

Wesleyan theology characteristically resists that snobbery that would turn a blind eye to a world in need. If it is to continue to be theological, it will have to continue and amp up that resistance. It will have to pay close attention to the contextual ways that sin ravishes this world, and it will have to continue to bear witness to the holistic good news of God, good news which would and will undo those ravages of sin and restore the world, in all its contexts, to that God. Wesleyan theology makes a theme of God's love for the whole world. Its characteristic soteriological emphases work to make the wholeness of that love clear. In Charles Wesley's hymn, all are bid to the gospel feast; "ye need not one be left behind/for God hath bid all humankind."

Wesleyan theology is public and populist in the best senses. It holds fast to the Reformation notion of the priesthood of all believers, to the Christological notion that God cares about particulars, and to the pneumatological power which would take contexts and make them luminous for God. Theology is the work of the people for the world. Because Wesleyan theology loves context, from the coal miners of 19th century England to charismatic global Christians of 21st century revival, Wesleyan theology is able to pay attention to the world and so to do the job of telling the good news of God to the world.

In this essay, I have spoken of Wesleyan theology descriptively, though I am aware that many bits of that description are contested and contestable. But I am also speaking prescriptively, speaking of what I hope Wesleyan theology may continue to do and be in the world, the world God "so loved . . . that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). I am a Wesleyan theologian because I believe that Wesleyan theology is particularly good at being theological, that it has in its constitution the potential to be especially good at loving God and loving the world.

JUSTIFICATION, THE NEW BIRTH, AND THE CONFUSING SOTERIOLOGICAL PASSAGES IN JOHN WESLEY'S WRITINGS

by

Scott Kisker

Introduction

Considerable scholarly disagreement concerning the development of Wesley's soteriology has been due to Wesley's own seemingly contradictory statements about the nature of justification, the new birth, "real" Christianity, and their relation to each other. The discussion is further complicated by Wesley's assessments of the eschatological states of those who have not had such spiritual experiences. This paper will argue that many of Wesley's inconsistencies disappear if one assumes that a "degree of justifying faith" or even "justifying faith" is not the same as being justified. Wesley's references to "degrees of justifying faith" instead refer to the process of growing in faith (confidence in the promise of forgiveness) that begins with the crisis of conviction and culminates in assurance and the new birth. A person may have justifying faith, which is identical to the "faith of a servant," without being justified. Such a person does not have assurance, a sense of God's pardon, but is not under the wrath of God. Ecclesiologically speaking, such people may be included in the sacraments, and welcomed into the discipline of the Methodist society through its classes. They are not however Christians nor do they have "proper Christian faith."

The Standard Model

Wesley seems fairly consistent in his understanding of the way of salvation if one confines oneself to the Standard 44 Sermons. By grace¹ one who knows herself to be a sinner, who has the "faith of a servant"² is pardoned

¹ *Works* 1:120 (Salvation by Faith, 1738, I.I.4); *Works* 1:196 (Justification by Faith, 1746, IV.6); *Works* 1:202, 213 (Righteousness of Faith, 1746, I.II.8).

² *Works* 1:225 (Way to the Kingdom, 1746, II.1); *Works* 1:278 (Witness of the Spirit I, 1746, II.4); *Works* 1:250 (Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption, 1746, 2.4).

or justified by faith in the promise of forgiveness.³ This faith is a divine “evidence,” whereby she is assured⁴ of present salvation “from sin and the consequences of sin.”⁵ This is properly Christian faith which “purifyeth the heart.”⁶ She is in that moment born again⁷ and having the witness of the Spirit that she is a child of God, enabled to cry “Abba, Father.”⁸ She is freed from the guilt and power of sin,⁹ has the fruits of the Spirit,¹⁰ and begins to love God (whom she now knows first loved her) and to love neighbor.¹¹ She has begun to run the “race set before” her, begun to be sanctified, made holy, perfected in love.¹² This is the salvation for which Christ was manifest and only those who have been so justified and born again, have begun to be Christians in the proper sense of the word.¹³

Even after 1760, for example in “The Scripture Way of Salvation” (1765), Wesley continued to restate much of this *via salutis* using similar language. “Justification is another word for pardon.”¹⁴ Justification is by faith that “necessarily implies an assurance,”

³Works 1:161-2 (Scriptural Christianity, 1744, I.1-2); Works 1:189,195 (Justification by Faith, 1746, II.5; IV.3); Works 1:208 (Righteousness of Faith, 1746, I.9); Works 1:230 (Way to the Kingdom, 1746, II.9); Works 1:394 (Means of Grace, 1746, V.1); Works 1:405 (Circumcision of the Heart, 1733, I.7); Works 1:634-5 (Sermon on the Mount IX, 4-6); Works 2:41-2 (Law Established through Faith II, 1750, III.3); Works 2: 143-4 (Satan’s Devices, 1750, I.8).

⁴Works 1:146 (Awake Thou that sleepest, 1742, I.11); Works 1:223 (Way to the Kingdom, 1746, I.10); Works 1:484-5 (Sermon on the Mount I, 1748, II.3-4).

⁵Works 1:124 (Salvation by Faith, 1738, II.7).

⁶Works 1:139 (The Almost Christian, 1742,II.6); Works 1:402-3 (Circumcision of the Heart, 1733, I.1).

⁷Works 1:142-3 (Awake thou that sleepest, 1742, I.2); Works 1:279 (Witness of the Spirit I, 1746, II.5); Works 431-2 (Great Privilege of Those that are Born of God, 1748, 1-2); Works 2:187 (The New Birth, 1760, 1).

⁸Works 1:161 (Scriptural Christianity, 1744, I.1); Works 1:260,262 (Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption, 1746, III.1,6); Works 1:274, 276 (Witness of the Spirit I, 1746, I.7, I.12); Works 1:425 (Marks of the New Birth, 1748, III.1).

⁹Works 1:419-20 (Marks of the New Birth, 1748, I.4); Works 1:559-60 (Sermon on the Mount V, III.9); Works 2:105-6 (Christian Perfection, 1741, II.1-2).

¹⁰Works 1:273-4 (Witness of the Spirit I, 1746, I.6).

¹¹Works 1:193 (Justification by Faith, 1746, III.6); Works 1:274-5 (Witness of the Spirit I, 1746, I.8).

¹²Works 1:187, 189-90 (Justification by Faith, 1746, II.1,5); Works 1:479 (Sermon on the Mount I, 1748, I.7); Works 1:239 (First Fruits of the Spirit, 1746, II.5); Works 2:198 (The New Birth, 1760, IV.3).

¹³Works 1:154 (Awake Thou that sleepest, 1742, III.6); Works 1:265-6 (Spirit of Bondage and Adoption, 1746, IV,3-4).

¹⁴Works 2:157-8 (Scripture Way of Salvation, 1765, I.3).

(which is here only another word for evidence, it being hard to tell the difference between them) that Christ loved me, and gave Himself for me. For "he that believeth" with the true living faith "hath the witness in himself": "the Spirit witnesseth with his spirit that he is a child of God." "Because he is a son, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into his heart, crying, Abba, Father"; giving him an assurance that he is so, and a childlike confidence in Him. . . . It is by this faith we are saved, justified, and sanctified.¹⁵

Wesley also continued to maintain that justification and the new birth happen simultaneously. "At the same time that we are justified, yea, in that very moment, sanctification begins. In that instant we are born again, born from above, born of the Spirit: there is a real as well as a relative change."¹⁶ Wesley did articulate in this sermon a clearer appreciation for the work of the Holy Spirit prior to justification and new birth "from the first dawning of grace" as part of the overall process of salvation, than he seemed to in earlier sermons. Nonetheless, he was clear that justification and the new birth are what "the Apostle is directly speaking of" in Ephesians 2:8 when he speaks of salvation.¹⁷

This connection between assurance, the new birth, and real Christian faith is stated even more firmly in Wesley's 1788 sermon "Walking by Faith and not by Sight":

How short is this description of real Christians! And yet how exceeding full! It comprehends, it sums up, the whole experience of those that are truly such, from the time they are born of God till they remove into Abraham's bosom. For, who are the we that are here spoken of? All that are true Christian believers. I say Christian, not Jewish, believers. All that are not only servants, but children, of God. All that have "the Spirit of adoption, crying in their hearts, Abba, Father." All that have "the Spirit of God witnessing with their spirits, that they are the sons of God."¹⁸

¹⁵*Works* 2:161-2 (Scripture Way of Salvation, 1765, II.3-4). Wesley's wording is nearly identical to that in *Works* 19:136 (Journal, Jan. 25, 1740).

¹⁶*Works* 2:158 (Scripture Way of Salvation, 1765, I.4).

¹⁷*Works* 2:157-8 (Scripture Way of Salvation, 1765, I.3).

¹⁸*Works* 4:49 (Walking by Faith and Not by Sight, 1788, 1).

Similar articulations of the way of salvation and the definition of real Christian faith are found in “God’s Love to Fallen Man (1782),¹⁹ “On Charity” (1784),²⁰ “Working Out Our Own Salvation (1785),²¹ “Unity of the Divine Being (1789),²² “On Living Without God” (1790),²³ “Heavenly Treasure in Earthen Vessels (1790),”²⁴ and “On Faith” (1791).²⁵

Revision of the Standard Model

Despite this seeming consistency within the published sermons, numerous scholars have noted Wesley’s deviations from this standard model particularly with regard to justification, the place of faith that implies assurance, and who Wesley considers a Christian. One of the main pieces of evidence for Wesley’s soteriological shift is his evaluation of his own religious experience. In 1738, Wesley wrote that before his Aldersgate experience, “‘alienated’ as I am ‘from the life of God,’ I am Child of Wrath, an heir of hell.”²⁶ Wesley later modified this statement in the 1774 edition of the *Journal* adding to it the footnote, “I believe not.” Wesley also included footnotes earlier on the same page stating that he “had even then the faith of a servant though not the faith of a son.”²⁷ Later in the same entry he defines the “faith of a son” in a footnote as “‘a sure trust and confidence in God, that through the merits of Christ my sins are forgiven and I reconciled to the favour of God.’”²⁸

Scholars have also noted Wesley’s attribution of “A degree of justifying faith” to the state prior to the new birth (and assurance). The language appears as early as 1740 in Wesley’s controversy with the Moravians over who may receive the sacrament of communion.

I assert: (1) “that a man may have a *degree of justifying faith* before he is wholly freed from all doubt and fear, and before he has (in the proper sense) a new and clean heart”; (2) “That a

¹⁹*Works* 2:426-7 (God’s Love to Fallen Man, 1782, I.2-3).

²⁰*Works* 3:295 (On Charity, 1784, I.2).

²¹*Works* 3:203-4 (Working Out Our Own Salvation, 1785, II.1).

²²*Works* 4:67 (Unity of the Divine Being, 1789, 17).

²³*Works* 4:171-173 (On Living Without God, 1790, 8-11).

²⁴*Works* 4:163-4 (Heavenly Treasure in Earthen Vessels, 1790, I.1-3).

²⁵*Works* 4:188 (On Faith, 1791, 1).

²⁶*Works* 18:215. (*Journal*, Feb. 1, 1738, footnote j).

²⁷*Works* 18:215. (*Journal*, Feb. 1, 1738, footnote i) It is important to note here that Wesley does not say he was then a “Christian.”

²⁸*Works* 18:215-216 (*Journal*, Feb. 1, 1738, footnote k).

man may use the ordinances of God, the Lord's supper in particular, before he has such a faith as excludes all doubt and fear, and implies a new, a clean heart."²⁹

Wesley referred to this faith, prior to assurance, again in "The Duty of Constant Communion" (1787). The only "preparation that is absolutely necessary" for communion, he wrote, "is contained in those words, 'Repent you truly of your sins past; have faith in Christ our Saviour' (*and observe, that the word is not here taken in its highest sense!*)" This lower sense faith implies only "believing that Christ died to save sinners."³⁰ It is not a conviction or assurance that Christ died for one personally, but only that the doctrine is true.³¹

Edward Sugden noted in his edition of the Sermons that Wesley seemed to have contradicted his assertion in "The Almost Christian" that assurance is necessary to full Christianity. Sugden suggested that Wesley came to believe that while assurance is a gracious gift of God it is not essential to being a Christian.³² Both Albert Outler,³³ and Colin Williams³⁴ noted Wesley's waffling on the same issue, and Theodore Jennings argued in 1988 that sometime in the 1740s Wesley came to hold that assurance is not necessary to justification.³⁵

In 1993, I published an article entitled "Justified but Unregenerate" in which, in continuity with Sugden, et al., I argued that there appears to be a state of justification without assurance. That "Wesley (in the 1774 footnote) . . . conceived himself as justified prior to Aldersgate, although he did not then have assurance."³⁶ I also argued that Wesley maintained

²⁹*Works* 18:220 (Journal, Preface, written Sept 29, 1740).

³⁰*Works* 3:436 (The Duty of Constant Communion, 1787, II.14), emphasis mine.

³¹This is how Wesley records his own state in his conversation with Spanenberg. *Works* 18:146 (Journal, Feb 7, 1736).

³²Edward Sugden, ed. *Wesley's Standard Sermons*: vol. 1 (London: Epworth Press, 1921), 61. Sugden is correct that assurance is not necessary to escape damnation, which is not the same as being a Christian.

³³Albert Outler, ed. *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 59.

³⁴Colin Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1960), 112-114.

³⁵Theodore Wesley Jennings Jr., "John Wesley Against Aldersgate," *Quarterly Review* (Fall 1988): 3-22.

³⁶Scott Kisker, "Justified but Unregenerate? The Relationship of Assurance to Justification and Regeneration in the thought of John Wesley" *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 28 (Spring-Fall, 1993): 55.

the pivotal role of the new birth in his soteriology and the essential nature assurance to new birth. Thus I posited that there was a state where one could be justified but not born again.

In 1994 Randy Maddox published *Responsible Grace* in which he also stated that

The mature Wesley rejected his immediate post-Aldersgate assumption of an absolute connection between being the recipient of God's pardoning grace and having a clear assurance of that pardon. He allowed for a *broader variability in the manner that the Holy Spirit effects justification in individuals*. But this is not to say that he rejected the importance of assurance itself.³⁷

Maddox argued developmentally that Wesley first allowed for "degrees of justifying assurance short of full assurance." Wesley then granted that there might be a few "exceptional cases (due to bodily disorder or ignorance) where a person might have justifying faith while lacking conscious assurance." Finally, with Wesley's greater appreciation of the faith of a servant, he designated it as justifying faith. "With each of these concessions," argued Maddox

It became more difficult to assert an exclusive twice-born model where all believers would be able to date their "conversion experience. This is not to say that Wesley rejected or came to impugn the twice-born model. It remained his favored model—as most expressive of the common Christian *privilege* of assurance, but he no longer considered it exclusively *normative*. Indeed the clarifying footnotes that he added in 1774 to his original account of Aldersgate suggest that Wesley had gravitated toward such a gradualist reading of his own spiritual journey. He now viewed the transitions in his spiritual life as more incremental in nature, and God's justifying acceptance as present prior to Aldersgate (he was already a "servant of God").³⁸

With all of these scholars coming to similar conclusions after close reads of Wesley's texts, what is the problem?

One problem is theological. The assertion that "the Holy Spirit effects justification in individuals" without assurance almost certainly undermines Wesley's understanding of justification as the beginning of

³⁷Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace* (Nashville: Kingswood, 1994), 127.

³⁸Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 155.

the restoration of the image of God—particularly the moral image (that one becomes righteous through love, loving God and neighbor).³⁹ Such a transformation is only possible, Wesley asserted throughout his life, if a person knows she is loved, is in God's favor. "We love because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19) is one of Wesley's favorite prooftexts on this point, and such knowledge that one is loved and forgiven by God is the definition of assurance.⁴⁰ To assert that assurance is not necessary to being a Christian, implies a Christianity without the transformation of the affections by the love of God to love God and neighbor.

Another problem is chronological. It does not seem that Wesley changed his mind over time. Wesley has an understanding of "degrees of justifying faith" without assurance already by 1740. And yet, even after 1760, "Wesley repeatedly links justification with regeneration in his writings."⁴¹ Justification and the new birth (the beginning of sanctification and "real Christianity") happen simultaneously. This was one of the critiques leveled by Ken Collins in his 1997 *The Scripture Way of Salvation*.

The problem with Collin's critique however is that he failed to deal adequately with Wesley's identification of "degrees of justifying faith" or even simply "justifying faith" with the stage Wesley identifies as the faith of a servant.

Kisker confuses the degree of acceptance that pertains to those who have the faith of a servant with the reality of justification which is quite a different matter. . . . Wesley realized that those sinners were in process so to speak; that is, though not justified, they were responding—painfully no doubt—to *the convincing grace of God*.⁴²

³⁹ *Works* 2:410-11 (On the Fall of Man, 1782, II.8).

⁴⁰ *Works* 1:230-1 (The Way to the Kingdom, 1746, II.11-12); *Works* 1:274-5 (Witness of the Spirit I, 1746, I.8-9); *Works* 1:289-90 (Witness of the Spirit II, 1767, III.4-6); *Works* 1:481 (Sermon on the Mount I, 1748, I.11); *Works* 1:510 (Sermon on the Mount III, 1748, I.1); *Works* 1:578-9 (Sermon on the Mount VI, 1748, III.4); *Works* 2:144 (Satan's Devices, 1750, I.8); *Works* 2:232 (Heavenness through Manifold Temptations, 1760, IV.4); *Works* 2:314-15 (Reformation of Manners, 1763, III.7-8); *Works* 2:427-8 (God's Love to Fallen Man, 1782, I.4-5); *Works* 2:598 (Case of Reason Impartially Considered, 1781, II.8); *Works* 3:207-8 (Working Out Our Own Salvation, 1785, III.5); *Works* 3:336 (On Family Religion, 1783, I.2).

⁴¹ Ken Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 104.

⁴² Collins, 105, emphasis mine.

According to Collins, the measure of grace one has prior to justification is “convincing grace.” Collins concludes his critique, “If sinners are “continually under conviction of sin as Kisker intimates, then it is clear that although they have a measure of grace (*convincing*) and a degree of acceptance (as they respond to the grace of God) they can hardly be deemed justified.”⁴³

An Alternative Reading

A common assumption in Maddox’s, my (in my previous article), and Collins’ work is that having justifying faith in response to justifying grace is the same thing as being justified. In Maddox’s and in my previous article the assumption forces us to assume some sort of justification prior to the new birth. In Collins’ it forces him to assume prior to justification, people are responding to the convincing grace of God. What this paper argues is that, when Wesley referred to justifying grace, he was generally referring to grace in the process of justifying the penitent sinner up until they are justified.

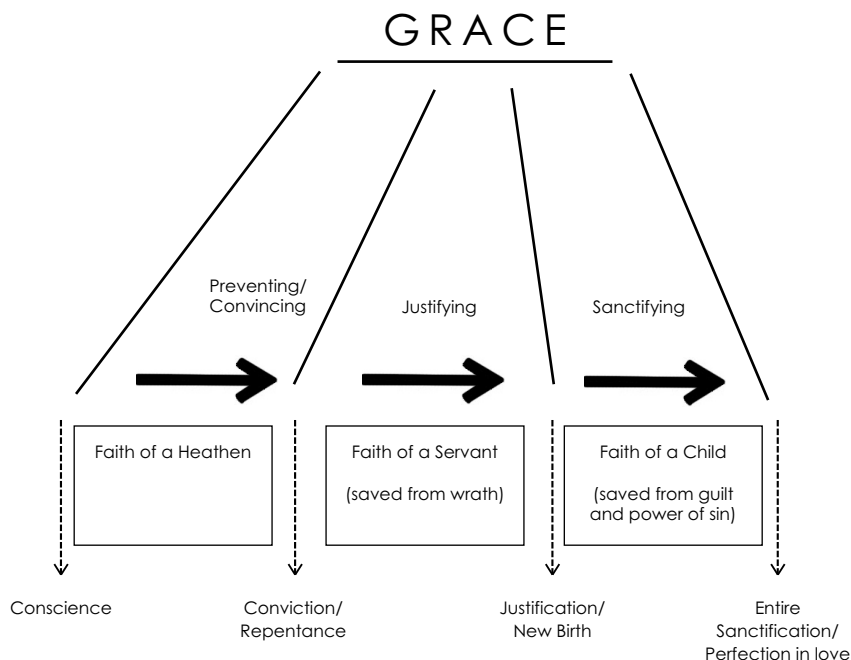
For Wesley grace is one thing. Grace is the love of God, the activity of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁴ However, God’s grace works differently in individuals depending on their spiritual condition. Those who are asleep need to be convinced. Those who are convinced need to be justified. Those who are justified need to be sanctified. Wesley’s descriptors for grace thus serve as diagnoses of the spiritual conditions of individuals, describing the way God is actively loving them at that time. Wesley designates grace not by what it has accomplished, but by what it is working to accomplish. Grace is convincing, justifying, or sanctifying.

This is indeed what we see in Wesley’s references the work of grace in phases other than justification. Preventing/convincing grace begins from the first awareness of conscience and extends by degrees until one is convinced/thoroughly awakened/repentant. Sanctifying grace begins from the moment of the new birth and extends by degrees until one is sanctified/made perfect in love. If Wesley’s thinking with regard to justification is parallel to his thinking with regard to conviction and sanctification, then the work of justifying grace shifts from the moment of justification to the entire process from conviction to justification. Likewise, justifying faith (the response to God’s justifying grace) grows by degrees from conviction until justification.

⁴³Collins, 105.

⁴⁴*Works* 2:544 (Free Grace, 1739, 2).

Preventing/Convincing grace works to convince (and there are degrees of conviction short of a “thorough awakening”⁴⁵). Justifying grace works to justify (and there are degrees of justifying faith short of justification and the degree of faith that includes assurance and new birth). Sanctifying grace works to sanctify (and there are degrees of sanctification short of sanctification/perfection).⁴⁶



In this possible model of Wesley's thinking, a person is simultaneously convinced (past tense) and is the object of justifying (continuing present) grace. In the post-conviction pre-new birth stage, a person has “eyes a little opened.”⁴⁷ She is able to see “by degrees . . . (the veil being in part removed).”⁴⁸ This perception of God's light is real justifying faith. It

⁴⁵*Works* 1:380 (Means of Grace, 1746, I.6).

⁴⁶*Works* 1:325-6 (On Sin in Believers, 1763, IV.1); Outler, *John Wesley*, 165-7 (*Minutes*, 1747, Q.5.).

⁴⁷*Works* 2:246 (Self-denial, 1760, II.3).

⁴⁸*Works* 1:255 (Spirit of Bondage and Adoption, 1746, II.1).

is “a divine ‘evidence and conviction of things not seen’; . . . a divine evidence and conviction of God, and of the things of God.”⁴⁹ And this faith is “properly saving.” It “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.”⁵⁰ Such justifying faith is giving God “our heart, in the lowest degree,”⁵¹ but is not justification.

Practically speaking, those who have justifying faith may join a class and become members of the society. They are expected to make use of the means of grace, including the sacraments of the Church.⁵² For the person with justifying faith “‘the wrath of God’ no longer ‘abideth on him’ ” and “whosoever, in every nation, believes thus far . . . is ‘accepted of [God].’ That person actually is, at that very moment, in a state of acceptance,”⁵³ even though they do not perceive it. Wesley means by this is that God is pleased when people repent.

Penitents are not, however, “real Christians.” Such a person is “at present only a servant of God, not properly a son.” They are, in Wesley’s words, “Jewish believers”⁵⁴ or proselytes “of the Temple.”⁵⁵ Christian faith, on the other hand, is that degree of justifying faith that works justification and implies assurance. It marks the boundary between justifying and sanctifying grace, linked by the new birth. This justification “is the taking away the *guilt* . . . of sin,”⁵⁶ which happens not simply when God looks favorably on the sinner, but when the sinner “conceives of the wrath of God being turned away.”⁵⁷ “Only these [believers] ‘hath [God] quickened; and made alive; given you new senses,—spiritual senses,—senses

⁴⁹*Works* 3:492 (On Faith, 1788, 1).

⁵⁰*Works* 3:497 (On Faith, 1788, I.10). Here Wesley’s use of the term “eternal salvation” does not refer to his usual use of the term “salvation,” a present salvation from the guilt and power of sin, but rather to “the going to heaven, eternal happiness.” *Works* 2:156 (Scripture Way of Salvation, 1765, I.1).

⁵¹*Works* 3:282-3 (An Israelite Indeed, 1785, I.1).

⁵²*Works* 19:32 (Journal, January 25, 1739). Wesley comments that the recipients of the sacrament of baptism had not even been “born again in a lower sense,” by which he means justified. See *Works* 2:106 (Christian Perfection, 1741, II.3).

⁵³*Works* 3:497 (On Faith, 1788, I.10).

⁵⁴*Works* 4:49 (Walking by Sight and Walking by Faith, 1788, 1-2).

⁵⁵*Letters* (Telford) 5:16 (Letter to Charles, 27 June 1766).

⁵⁶(The Great Privilege of Those that are Born of God, 1748, I.6)

⁵⁷*Works* 2:187 (S.45, The New Birth, 1760, 1).

exercised to discern spiritual good and evil.' ”⁵⁸ Only in these does true Christian faith appear, faith that begins to transform the affections. This Christian faith perceives not only the righteousness of God, but also the love of God, and begins “working by love”⁵⁹ toward God and neighbor.

The process of justifying (of reconciling sinners to God) begins at the moment of conviction. A sinner has turned toward God. She believes the promise of judgment. A person who believes in the promise of judgment is not an enemy of God. But her faith must mature, by the grace of God, into trust (assurance) that she is truly loved. She must believe the promise of forgiveness. Only then can she truly love God and neighbor. Only thereafter, with the experience of the new birth as a child of God, can she begin to believe in the promise of holiness.

Rereading Inconsistent Statements on Justification

One of the advantages of this model is that many seemingly contradictory statements become less so if we assume that justifying faith is not justification, but rather the gradual response to justifying grace prior to justification. In terms of Wesley's 1774 clarifications in his journal, it is no longer surprising that they were added, but that they were not added earlier.

As mentioned, the move to a non-Moravian view of “degrees of justifying faith” prior to assurance and the new birth is present by 1740. The unassured are welcomed at the Lord's Table (evidence of His favor). And with the introduction of class meetings in the societies in 1742, Wesley's appreciation of the spiritual state of repentant sinners, desiring to “flee the wrath to come” yet without assurance, is institutionalized. What is significant about his 1774 clarifications is that Wesley, while he stated that he was not under the wrath of God, did not claim he was a Christian, only that he had “the faith of a servant.”⁶⁰ He was still an almost Christian.

With this model, the clear statement in the 1744 *Minutes* connecting justification, assurance, and being a true Christian which read:

That all true Christians have this faith, even such a faith as implies an assurance of God's love, appears from Rom. 8:15, Eph.

⁵⁸*Works* 4:49 (Walking by Sight and Walking by Faith, 1788, 1-2).

⁵⁹*Works* 1:139 (The Almost Christian, 1741, II.6).

⁶⁰*Works* 18:215. (Journal, Feb. 1, 1738, footnote i) It is important to note here that Wesley does not say he was then a “Christian.”

4:23, II Cor. 13:5, Heb. 8:10, I Jn. 4:10 and 19. And that *no man can be justified* and not know it appears farther from the very nature of things—for faith after repentance is ease after pain, rest after toil, light after darkness—and from the immediate as well as distant fruits⁶¹

no longer conflicts with the 1745 statement on assurance.

Q1. Is an assurance of God's love absolutely necessary to our being in his favor, or may there possibly be some exempt cases?

A. We dare not positively say there are not. Q2. Is such an assurance absolutely necessary to inward and outward holiness?

A. To inward, we apprehend that it is: to outward we apprehend that it is not.⁶²

As long as being “justified” (a true Christian) and “being in [God's] favor” are not equivalent, the two are easily reconciled.

The model also sheds light on the *Minutes* of June, 1747. “Q.1. Is justifying faith a divine assurance that Christ loved me and gave himself for me? A. We believe it is.” In this question “justifying faith” is used to refer to that highest degree of justifying faith that implies assurance and justification. That there are lesser degrees of justifying faith is clear from Question 10 of the same minutes which mentions a state where people are not completely “void of justifying faith,” not “under the wrath and under the curse of God,” yet without the faith of assurance. Such people, who have a degree of justifying faith, nonetheless, “if Christ is not revealed in their hearts, they are not yet Christian believers.” Thus Conference recognized there could be “such a person as J.A. or E.V.,” who while not properly Christian, is not void of justifying faith and not under the curse of God.⁶³ Such a person has justifying faith responding to justifying grace, but short of justification and the new birth.

Indeed, Wesley's letter of July 31, 1747 to Charles, who was apparently confused by the *Minutes*, makes sense as a clarification only when we assume the alternative model of John's thought.

By justifying faith I mean that faith which whosoever hath is *not under the wrath and curse of God*. By a *sense of pardon* I mean a distinct, explicit assurance that my sins are forgiven. I

⁶¹Outler, *John Wesley*, 137.

⁶²Outler, *John Wesley*, 149.

⁶³Outler, *John Wesley*, 165-7.

allow: (1) that there is such an explicit assurance; (2) that it is the common privilege of real Christians; (3) that it is the proper Christian faith, which purifieth the heart and overcometh the world. But I cannot allow that justifying faith is such an assurance, or necessarily connected therewith.⁶⁴

"Justifying faith" is faith in the process of justifying, the faith of people under conviction. It is not the same as assurance, because it is prior to it. At the same time "justifying faith" is not "proper Christian faith."

Several years later, Wesley revisited the same topic in a letter to Mr. Richard Thompson (1755). Again his views appear consistent if we assume justifying faith is prior to justification, and assured Christian faith.

As to the nature of [assurance], I think a divine conviction of pardon is directly implied in the evidence, or conviction, of things unseen. But if not, it is no absurdity to suppose that, when God pardons a mourning broken-hearted sinner, His mercy obliges him to another act—to witness to his spirit, that he has pardoned him. . . . I agree with you, that a justifying faith cannot be conviction that I am justified; and that a man who is not assured that his sins are forgiven may yet have a kind or degree of faith, which distinguishes him, not only from the devil, but also from a heathen; and on which I may admit him to the Lord's supper. But still I believe the proper Christian faith, which purified the heart, implies such a conviction.⁶⁵

Here assurance is implied in the definition of "proper Christian faith." Yet there is "A kind or degree of faith" which "distinguishes a person "not only from the devil, but also from a heathen."⁶⁶ If Wesley still holds his opinion of 1740, this degree of faith by which Wesley "may admit him to the Lord's supper" is justifying faith. It is not however "proper Christian faith."

Finally, only by assuming that one without assurance is not properly a Christian can we make sense of Wesley's own struggles as he examined his spiritual state both in the early and later years. In 1739⁶⁷ and 1766,⁶⁸ it

⁶⁴*Works* 26: 254-5 (Letter to Charles Wesley, July 31, 1747).

⁶⁵*Works* 26:574-5 (Letter to Richard Thompson, July 25, 1755).

⁶⁶This is the faith of a servant. *Works* 1:250 (Spirit of Bondage and Adoption, 1746, 2).

⁶⁷*Works* 19:29-31 (Journal, Jan 4, 1739).

⁶⁸*Letters* (Telford)5:16, (Letter to Charles, 27 June 1766).

is precisely this lack of assurance, a lack of the love of God shed abroad in his heart that causes Wesley to conclude that he himself is not a Christian, not born again. In his letter to Charles on June 27, 1766, Wesley claims he lacks the evidence “of the eternal or invisible world.” He does not “believe in the Christian sense of the word.” Despite his experience at Aldersgate (and consistent with his musings following the experience) he claims he does not have assurance, he is only “one of the god-fearers.”

[I have no] direct witness, I do not say that [I am a child of god], but of anything invisible or eternal. And yet I dare not preach otherwise than I do, either concerning faith, or love, or justification, or perfection.⁶⁹

If we are to take Wesley at his word, it seems he was convinced that what he preached about justification and the new birth was biblical, and that it coincided with the experience of believers in his own day. He simply was not sure he had experienced it. One may question whether Wesley’s self-perception is accurate. Likely he was having a bad week. Nonetheless his comments are consistent with his theology of grace and of faith.⁷⁰ Those who have a degree of justifying faith are not objects of wrath, but, at the same time, they are not Christians. Wesley’s comment to Melville Horne in 1788 rings true. “We preach assurance as we always did, as a common privilege of real Christians; but we do not enforce it, under pain of damnation, denounced on all who enjoy it not.”⁷¹

Justification Worked by Preventing Grace?

Wesley is not always consistent. The best argument against the above model is found in “The Witness of the Spirit II” (1767). While exhorting none to “rest in any supposed fruit of the Spirit without the witness,”⁷² Wesley stated that what sounds like a description of a degree of justifying faith is worked by the “preventing grace” of God.⁷³

⁶⁹*Letters* (Telford)5:16, (Letter to Charles, 27 June 1766).

⁷⁰In statements where Wesley does claim to be a Christian, it is also based on a sense of assurance, because he has “some measure of this faith, which bringeth salvation, or victory over sin, and which implies peace and trust in God through Christ.” *Works* 25:575-8 (Letter to Samuel Wesley, Jr., 30 Oct 1738).

⁷¹Robert Southey, *The Life of Wesley* (New York: W.B. Gilley, 1820), 1:258.

⁷²*Works* 1:298 (Witness of the Spirit II, 1767, V.4), emphasis mine.

⁷³Wesley may be using the word “preventing” to describe a general attribute of grace “coming before,” no matter how it is presently working in a particular

There may be foretastes of joy, of peace, of love, and those not delusive, but really from God, long before we have the witness in ourselves; before the Spirit of God witnesses with our spirits that we have "redemption in the blood of Jesus, even the forgiveness of sins." Yea, there may be a degree of long-suffering, of gentleness, of fidelity, meekness, temperance, (not a shadow thereof, but a real degree, by the *preventing* grace of God,)⁷⁴

This may indeed contradict the above model, or Wesley may simply be using the term preventing grace in a general way here, to indicate God's prior action.⁷⁵ Whatever Wesley means, he is clear in this sermon:

It is by no means advisable to rest here; it is at the peril of our souls if we do. If we are wise, we shall be continually crying to God, until his Spirit cry in our heart, "Abba, Father!" This is the privilege of all the children of God, and without this we can never be assured that we are his children. Without this we cannot retain a steady peace, nor avoid perplexing doubts and fears. But when we have once received this Spirit of adoption, this "peace which passeth all understanding," . . . when this has brought forth its genuine fruit, all inward and outward holiness, it is undoubtedly the will of Him that calleth us, to give us always what he has once given; so that there is no need that we should ever more be deprived of either the testimony of God's Spirit, or the testimony of our own, the consciousness of our walking in all righteousness and true holiness.⁷⁶

God wants us as children not as servants.

person, as he does in "Circumcision of the Heart" *Works* 1:411 (Circumcision of the Heart, 1733, II.4). In this sense all grace is preventing grace: convincing grace comes before we are convinced, justifying grace comes before we are justified, and sanctifying grace comes before we are sanctified.

⁷⁴*Works* 1:298 (Witness of the Spirit II, 1767, V.4).

⁷⁵What is odd about these "foretastes" and "degrees" is that they happen not only "before we have a testimony of our acceptance," which one would expect if they are a degree of justifying faith, but also "before we 'are accepted in the Beloved,'" [*Works* 1:298 (Witness of the Spirit II, 1767, V.4)], which may indicate they are prior to even a degree of justifying faith, prior to conviction. In Elsewhere Wesley talks about similar "drawings of the Father" which may occur before "conviction of sin; which in the nature of things, must precede that faith whereby we are justified." [*Works* 2:230-1 (Heaviness Through Manifold Temptations, 1760, III.9)]

⁷⁶*Works* 1:298 (Witness of the Spirit II, 1767, V.4).

Conclusions

The process of justifying and experience of justification (the doorway of Christianity) may, in Wesley's thinking, be parallel to the processes of convincing or sanctifying and the experiences of conviction or sanctification. These processes proceed by degrees but cross certain markers, when a person is said "be" what she has been becoming. Although theoretically all aspects of salvation can happen in an instant, a person is usually convinced after God's grace has been convincing for some time, sanctified after God's grace has been sanctifying for some time. Just so, a person is usually justified after God's grace, by increasing their faith by degrees, has been justifying for some period of time.

If the above model of Wesley's thought is accurate, we should be careful not to overstate the development in Wesley's soteriology after 1740. Clearly, sometime after the break with the Moravians or the establishment of the class system, Wesley began to value the faith of a servant as evidence of justifying faith, the work of God's justifying (not convincing) grace. He came to doubt God's wrath toward those God was in process of justifying. Such people were welcome at the Lord's Table. Their degree of faith qualified them for membership in classes and societies. This is, in practice, consistent with what Wesley said in 1786 of those who fear God. They are not of the world. They are "the lowest character of those that 'are of God.'" ⁷⁷ However, they are "not properly sons, but servants."⁷⁸

Thus, Wesley's concern for salvation from sin (guilt and power) on this side of the grave never changed, nor did his assertion of the centrality of love for this to be effected. In Christians this love must be "shed abroad in [their] hearts by the witness of the Holy Spirit." One must be assured of God's love before one is able to love God and freely love neighbor. Assurance is essential to Christianity. Only with God's assurance has one's faith crossed the threshold (into the house of religion) where one has become a Christian. Ecclesiologically, Christians (by Wesley's definition) are a relatively small subset of those who participate in the institutional church and receive its sacraments. They are a subset of those who call themselves Methodists. Indeed, at times Wesley may not have counted himself among them.

⁷⁷ *Works* 3:118-9 (On Friendship with the World, 1786, 7).

⁷⁸ *Works* 3:118-9 (On Friendship with the World, 1786, 7).

FROM SECOND WORK TO SECONDARY STATUS: THE SHIFTING ROLE OF HOLINESS THEOLOGY IN THE BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

by

Devin C. Manzullo-Thomas

In 1995, the Wesleyan Church leader Keith Drury published a scathing article in the *Holiness Digest*, the publication of the Christian Holiness Partnership. In this article, Drury flatly declared, “The holiness movement is dead.”¹ He pointed to multiple reasons for this movement’s untimely demise: It had sacrificed prophetic witness for respectability. It had plunged itself into the evangelical mainstream. It had failed to convince a younger generation. It over-reacted against the abuses of the past.² He did not deny the existence of holiness infrastructure: of churches, of institutions, of publications. Nor did he deny the presence of “many wonderful holiness people” within those institutions; he even wryly noted that “[some] people are still getting sanctified here and there.”³ Rather, he denied the ongoing vitality and evangelistic power of a singular holiness movement as well as the ongoing, consistent, and distinctive emphasis on holiness within church preaching or within members’ personal lives.⁴

Less than a year after Drury’s jeremiad appeared in print, one small affiliate of that allegedly defunct holiness movement—the Brethren in Christ Church—convened a study conference centered on exploring

¹Keith Drury, “The Holiness Movement is Dead,” *Holiness Digest* 8, no. 1 (Winter 1994): 13-15. The article was reprinted, with responses, in Drury, *Counterpoint: Dialogue with Drury on the Holiness Movement* (Salem, OH: Schmul, 2005), 17-35. Subsequent citations will be from the 2005 reprinting.

²*Ibid.*, 18-25.

³*Ibid.*, 18.

⁴In subsequent years, others Wesleyan and holiness church leaders and scholars echoed Drury’s grim conclusion about the holiness movement. See, for instance, Richard S. Taylor, “Why the Holiness Movement Died,” *God’s Revivalist and Bible Advocate*, March 1999, 6-27, and Kenneth J. Collins, “Why the Holiness Movement is Dead,” *The Asbury Theological Journal* 54, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 27-35.

denominational identity.⁵ Scores of church leaders, pastors, scholars, and laypeople gathered together at Messiah College, the denomination's liberal arts college in Pennsylvania, for the two-day event. The keynote speaker was Luke Keefer Jr., a professor at Ashland Theological Seminary and a Brethren in Christ theologian and church historian.⁶ On its face, Keefer's keynote address centered on objectively interpreting the "three theological streams" or traditions by which the Brethren in Christ had traditionally defined their religious heritage: Anabaptism, Pietism, and Wesleyanism. Yet like Drury, Keefer also took the opportunity to critique his tribe.⁷ The Brethren in Christ, he averred, have entered in the final decades of the twentieth century "with a badly eroded sense of identity."⁸ As evidence, he pointed to the erosion of the church's commitment to a Wesleyan theology of sanctification.⁹ He acknowledged the persistence of Wesleyan-holiness thought in denominational discourse: doctrinal statements continued to use the language of "full surrender," "consecration," and "the holy life," and denominational statements continued to identify Wesleyanism as one of the theological traditions shaping the Brethren in Christ character. And yet, he observed, those who identify "with the Wesleyan . . . side of our heritage . . . are minority voices. . . . If our denomination were suddenly deprived of members above age sixty, there would

⁵The conference was held in November 3-4, 1995 on the campus of Messiah College, a liberal arts institution founded by the Brethren in Christ Church in the early twentieth century, and sponsored by the Center for Brethren in Christ Studies. For background and manuscript versions of the papers presented at the conference, see *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 19, no. 1 (April 1996).

⁶For a biography of Keefer, see Devin C. Manzullo-Thomas, "Luke Jr. and Doris Bowman Keefer," in E. Morris Sider, ed., *Worthy of the Calling: Biographies of Paul and Lela Swalm Hostetler, Harvey and Erma Heise Sider, and Luke Jr. and Doris Bowman Keefer* (Grantham, PA: Brethren in Christ Historical Society, 2014), 223-351.

⁷Luke L. Keefer, Jr., "The Three Streams in Our Heritage: Separate or Parts of a Whole?" *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 19, no. 1 (April 1996): 26-63. The article was subsequently reprinted, with modifications, as "Brethren in Christ: Uneasy Synthesis of Heritage Streams," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* (Spring 1998): 92-110. My citations are from the original article in *Brethren in Christ History and Life*.

⁸*Ibid.*, 44.

⁹Keefer also identified other evidences of this erosion of denominational identity, including sharp declines in adherence to the church's position of peace and nonparticipation in war, and to its commitment to simple living, both embodied in its Anabaptist heritage. See *Ibid.*, 42, 56-60.

scarcely be a Wesleyan note in our understanding of sanctification.”¹⁰ Keefer blamed this devolution on the church’s gradual acculturation into the dominant cultures of North American society, as well as its increasing investment in American evangelicalism. He claimed that “[m]any pastors in recent years would find the Evangelical stance [of progressive sanctification in this life, culminating in entire sanctification at glorification] more palatable than Wesley’s doctrine of entire sanctification.”¹¹ These forces, he concluded, have “substantially blunted our Wesleyan voice.”¹²

These two diatribes, each published or presented in the same twelve-month span, share many differences—but at least one similarity: They both stress the imperiled position of the doctrine of holiness within their respective contexts. At the same moment in which Drury found no heart-beat in the corpse of the holiness movement, Keefer could find only a thready pulse of holiness in his own denominational body.

Sanctification in Brethren in Christ Scholarship

Since the 1960s, Brethren in Christ intellectuals have produced a steady stream of historical and theological scholarship on their denomination.¹³

¹⁰Ibid., 44, 40.

¹¹Ibid., 40.

¹²Ibid., 41.

¹³An early, hagiographic history of the denomination is A. W. Climenhaga, *History of the Brethren in Christ Church* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel, 1942), but the majority of critical history appeared at least two decades later. The standard denominational history of the Brethren in Christ is Carlton O. Wittlinger, *Quest for Piety and Obedience: The Story of the Brethren in Christ* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel, 1978). Other major studies include Owen H. Alderfer, “The Mind of the Brethren in Christ: A Synthesis of Revivalism and the Church as Total Community” (PhD dissertation, Claremont Graduate School, 1964); Martin H. Schrag, “The Brethren in Christ Attitude Toward the ‘World’: A Historical Study of the Movement from Separation to an Increasing Acceptance of American Society” (PhD dissertation, Temple University, 1967); E. Morris Sider, *The Brethren in Christ in Canada: Two Hundred Years of Tradition and Change* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel, 1988); Keefer Jr., “The Three Streams in Our Heritage”; and Devin C. Manzullo-Thomas, “Born Again Brethren in Christ: Anabaptism, Evangelicalism, and the Cultural Transformation of a Plain People,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 90, no. 1 (April 2016): 210-217. A revisionist study providing a counter-argument about the church’s theological identity is D. Ray Hostetter, *The Soul of the Brethren in Christ: Essays in Church History* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel, 2009). In addition to these major studies, since the late 1970s a variety of scholarly and popular articles have been published in *Brethren in Christ History and Life*, the journal of the Brethren in Christ Historical Society.

Virtually all of this literature has agreed that the earliest Brethren in Christ were influenced by two theological traditions, Anabaptism and Pietism. It has likewise agreed that, since the late nineteenth century, the church has reflected the influence of a third tradition: the American holiness movement. Several studies have examined the process by which the Brethren in Christ embraced and codified a distinctively Wesleyan-holiness understanding of sanctification, a doctrinal position in place since at least the 1930s.¹⁴ Yet beyond Keefer's 1995 analysis, little attention has been paid to the status of the doctrine since the middle decades of the twentieth century. This article builds on Keefer's analysis, which was primarily theological, by historicizing the shifts in holiness theology among the Brethren in Christ between the 1940s and the early twenty-first century. It moves beyond the aspirational realm of stated doctrine and into the lived reality of Brethren in Christ sanctuaries, homes, camp meetings, and administrative board rooms. In doing so, it shows that although the stated holiness doctrine of the church remained stable during the last seventy years of the twentieth century, individuals' experiences with sanctification changed significantly. In the ways they preached and practiced their theology, the Brethren in Christ transformed sanctification from a second work of grace to a matter of secondary status.

A variety of forces contributed to this transformation. Importantly, second-work sanctification was never universally embraced by all Brethren in Christ clergy and laypeople; as far back as the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, some resisted or rejected the doctrine in favor of a more progressive view. Moreover, as early as the 1920s and 1930s, the church experienced the pressures of acculturation into white, middle-class American society. By the middle decades of the century, this growing sense of social respectability, in tandem with creeping concerns about muted evangelistic success and a lack of new members in their con-

¹⁴See, among others, Climenhaga, 296-298; Carlton O. Wittlinger, "The Impact of Wesleyan Holiness on the Brethren in Christ to 1910," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 49, no. 4 (October 1975): 259-283; Wittlinger, *Quest for Piety and Obedience* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel, 1978), esp. chapters 11 and 14; Martin H. Schrag, "Benjamin Hardin Irwin and the Brethren in Christ," 4, no. 2 (December 1981): 89-126; Owen H. Alderfer, "Acceptance of the Holiness Doctrine by the Brethren in Christ Church, 1910-1937," *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 15, no. 3 (December 1992): 397-421; and Luke L. Keefer Jr., "Holiness: A Brethren in Christ Case Study," *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 22, no. 1 (April 1999): 63-89.

gregations, pushed the Brethren in Christ to abandon many of its external symbols of social separatism and to downplay the holiness theology that undergirded them. Meanwhile, the church's formal and informal affiliation with post-World War II American neo-evangelicalism provided a theological justification for this acculturation, enabling the church's leaders to couch the turn away from principled separatism in the rhetoric of mission, outreach, and church growth. Further eroding the church's commitment to sanctification as a distinctly achieved second work of grace was a growing lack of support for the doctrine among credentialed Brethren in Christ ministers, starting at least in the 1940s and 1950s. In the pew, meanwhile, church members questioned their sanctification experiences, chafed under legalistic teaching and preaching, and reacted against excessive emotionalism. And even though the Brethren in Christ devoted effort and resources to ecumenical holiness organizations and institutions, especially the National Holiness Association, such affiliation did little to bolster the church's commitment to a distinctive doctrine of sanctification. Although these forces did not alter the church's doctrinal statements, they had a significant impact on the practice and pursuit of a second work of grace within congregations, camp meetings, and members' homes. Paying attention to this transformation reveals dimensions of the Brethren in Christ story missing from the current historiography.

Yet the changing status of Brethren in Christ's holiness theology matters not just for denominational scholarship. Charting these developments also helps to locate the Brethren in Christ within the wider holiness movement. This study begs the question: Do the Brethren in Christ—with their “badly eroded” sense of identity and their declining adherence to holiness theology—really belong within this tradition?

The Not-So-Quiet in the Land

In order to understand the shifting role of holiness theology in the Brethren in Christ Church, some context is necessary. The Brethren in Christ trace their origin to late-eighteenth-century Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. There, German-speaking immigrants, mostly of Mennonite background, embraced the teachings of radical Pietism, especially the need for warm-hearted conversion.¹⁵ Like their Mennonite and Amish

¹⁵The origins of the Brethren in Christ are described in Wittlinger, chs. 1-2. The group used the informal name “River Brethren” until the mid-nineteenth century, but I use the more recognizable name throughout this section.

co-religionists, early Brethren in Christ developed a reputation as the “quiet in the land.” In part, this quietism developed from a literal yet selective interpretation of the biblical injunctions to “resist not evil” and to “come out from among them, and be ye separate.”¹⁶ Members refused to serve in the military, swear oaths, pursue litigation, hold political office, or exercise the franchise. These distinctly countercultural practices eventually became codified as the church’s doctrine of nonresistance. Along with nonresistance, the Brethren in Christ also embraced a doctrine of nonconformity, a theological and social-structural arrangement intended to distinguish members from their North American neighbors through alternative patterns of dress, speech, consumption, and recreation. In time, nonconformity came to demand separation from certain social activities and individual vices within modern American life: dancing, watching movies, drinking alcohol, using tobacco, and playing organized sports, among others. It also necessitated prescribed forms of “plain dress”: Women wore ankle-length dresses in muted colors, head coverings and bonnets, without jewelry or adornment, while men wore dark suits with upright collars and no neckties. These practices drew sharp and visible boundaries between the Brethren in Christ and their neighbors, including many Protestant and Catholic co-religionists.¹⁷

Yet at the same time, the Brethren in Christ were also engaged with the American Protestant mainstream. From the start of their movement, they embraced warm-hearted conversion, revivalism, and devotional prayer and Bible reading—all practices that marked them as distinctively Pietist. Later, during the late nineteenth century, they embraced a number of outward-looking Protestant innovations such as domestic and foreign missionary work, benevolent institutions, church-sponsored schools and colleges, and the use of mass media, as exemplified by the church’s newspaper, the *Evangelical Visitor*.¹⁸ These factors linked the Brethren in

¹⁶Respectively, these injunctions appear in Matt 5:39 and 2 Cor 6:17 (King James Version).

¹⁷On Brethren in Christ nonconformity and nonresistance before the mid-twentieth century, see Wittlinger, 102-124; Schrag, “The Brethren in Christ Attitude Toward the World,” 55-76, 154-192; and M. J. Heisey, *Peace and Persistence: Tracing the Brethren in Christ Peace Position Through Three Generations* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2003).

¹⁸Wittlinger, 162-200, 258-269, and 284-317. For this trend among Mennonites, see James C. Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War: Mennonite Identity and Organization in America, 1890-1930* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1989), 106-188.

Christ to the broader world, even as they remained ensconced within their particular ethnic subculture.

The Promise of Perfection

Such examples of selective borrowing from evangelical Protestantism help to explain why, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the Brethren in Christ gradually embraced an understanding of sanctification as a second work of grace subsequent to justification—an understanding that they gleaned from their increasingly frequent interactions with segments of the American holiness movement. Mid- to late nineteenth-century migration took the Brethren in Christ away from the eastern centers of church life—Pennsylvania, Ohio, and southern Ontario, Canada—to rural, Midwestern places: Kansas, Oklahoma, Iowa, and beyond.¹⁹ In these places, removed from the watchful eyes of conservative leadership, ministers and laypeople encountered new varieties of Christian faith and practice, including expressions of holiness fervor. These unfamiliar expressions challenged long-established beliefs about sanctification. Since their eighteenth-century origins, the Brethren in Christ had understood this move of grace as beginning with regeneration and initiating a life-long process of incremental maturation in righteousness—a “growth according to the Holy Scriptures” into perfection, according to the church’s earliest confession of faith.²⁰ But contacts with the Free Method-

¹⁹On the migrations of the Brethren in Christ in the nineteenth century, see Wittlinger, 145-161. On the Kansas Brethren in Christ specifically, see Wilma I. Musser, *Brethren in Christ Churches in Kansas* (Grantham, PA: Brethren in Christ Historical Society, 1991). These Midwestern states had already begun to feel the influence of the originally northern, urban holiness movement by the late nineteenth century. My characterization of the origins and subsequent spread of the holiness movement is shaped by Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), chs. 1-4. For the parallel spread of the northern holiness movement into the U.S. South, see Randall J. Stephens, *The Fire Spreads: Holiness and Pentecostalism in the American South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

²⁰On the early Brethren in Christ understanding of sanctification, see Wittlinger, 58-59; Luke L. Keefer Jr., “Holiness: A Brethren in Christ Historical Case Study,” *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 22, no. 1 (April 1999): 63-64. For the earliest (eighteenth-century) confession of faith, see “A Copy of the Confession of Faith of the Brethren,” trans. William M. Meikle, in Wittlinger, 551-554 (quotation, 552).

ists, the Salvation Army, the Hephzibah Faith Missionary Association, and other groups introduced some church members to a new understanding of sanctification as an instantaneous second work of grace subsequent to regeneration.²¹

Evidence of holiness teaching appeared in Brethren in Christ literature as early as the 1870s,²² but the most sharply defined expressions of second-work theology emerged among the Brethren in Christ in Kansas in the 1880s and 1890s.²³ In time, this holiness doctrine spread from the Midwest to other corners of the Brethren in Christ Church, largely through articles in the *Visitor* and through the charismatic preaching of a cabal of Brethren in Christ holiness evangelists such as John R. Zook, a minister from Iowa; Orville B. Ulery, a minister and bishop from southern Ohio; and Daniel Steckley, a Canadian minister who popularized holiness teachings north of the U.S. border.²⁴ Beyond the work of male evangelists, women also played a critical role in spreading the holiness message. As some of the most frequent and articulate writers on the holi-

²¹On the influence of "holiness societies" on the Brethren in Christ, see Wittlinger, 227, 236-240; Luke L. Keefer Jr., "The Hephzibah Faith Missionary Association and Its Influence Upon the Brethren in Christ Church," *Notes and Queries in Brethren in Christ History* 4, no. 1 (January-March 1963): 1-11; and Charles Edwin Jones, "Co-Incidence of Piety and Conviction: The Brethren in Christ and the Hephzibah Faith Missionary Society," *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 32, no. 3 (December 2009): 421-435. For similar forces acting on Mennonites, especially in the Midwest, see William C. Kostlevy, "Perfecting Mennonites: The Holiness Movement's Impact on Mennonites with Special Reference to Kansas," *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 34, no. 2 (August 2011): 213-236.

²²Wittlinger, 228-234.

²³*Ibid.*, 234-242; Musser, ch. 10. In the Kansas setting, some members attracted to the holiness message came under the more radical preaching of Benjamin Hardin Irwin, who extended the American holiness movement's notion of sanctification as a second work of grace to include a *third* work: the "baptism of the Holy Ghost and fire." The influence of Irwin's teachings created brief but significant tension, both locally and throughout the denomination, as well as some movement of Brethren in Christ out of their churches and into Irwin's movement. Eventually, however, the Kansas churches rejected Irwin's beliefs. On Irwin and his church, the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church, see Synan, 51-60. On the influence of Irwin on the Brethren in Christ, see Wittlinger, 238-240; Schrag, "Benjamin Hardin Irwin"; and Musser, 217-224.

²⁴Wittlinger, 240-242. For more on Zook and Ulery, see their biographies in E. Morris Sider, *Nine Portraits: Brethren in Christ Biographical Sketches* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel, 1978).

ness message in the *Visitor*, women shared their testimonies, reported on evangelistic services, and published or shared theological and biblical messages on the subject.²⁵ Through these means, converts to second-work perfectionism began to appear across the North American church by the early twentieth century.

Yet despite enthusiasm in some corners of the church, not all Brethren in Christ readily embraced the doctrine of the holiness movement. So-called traditionalists within the church balked at the intrusion of this new theological concept. Above all else, these members rejected in kind the very notion of theological change: as a conservative group, they did not warm to any such modifications to faith and practice. Others bristled at the emotionalism and extremism that tended to characterize segments of the holiness movement; still others feared that the movement

²⁵See, for instance, Mary K. Landis, "Entire Sanctification," *Evangelical Visitor*, August 1, 1896, 238-239; Eva Sawyer, "Holiness," *Evangelical Visitor*, February 15, 1897, 53-54; Mary Wismer, "Experience," *Evangelical Visitor*, March 1, 1897, 70-71; Mary K. Landis, "Obedience," *Evangelical Visitor*, August 1, 1897, 238; Fannie Burkholder, "A Letter," *Evangelical Visitor*, September 15, 1897, 301-302; Leah Eshelman, "Sanctified by Obedience," *Evangelical Visitor*, March 15, 1897, 86; Annie S. Lehman, "Whose Servants Are We?" *Evangelical Visitor*, June 1, 1899, 203-204; Mamie Hoffer, "Be Ye Holy; For I am Holy," *Evangelical Visitor*, November 1, 1899, 403-404; Amanda Snyder, "Deep," *Evangelical Visitor*, October 1, 1901, 370; Amanda Snyder, "Holy Brotherhood," *Evangelical Visitor*, December 1, 1901, 446; Mrs. C. D. Erb, "Tame Holiness," *Evangelical Visitor*, February 16, 1903, 7; Mrs. C. D. Erb, "The Additions of Sanctification," *Evangelical Visitor*, February 1, 1904, 7; Mary Macklem, "Be Filled with the Spirit," *Evangelical Visitor*, February 1, 1904, 9; Ada Wolgemuth, "Be Filled with the Spirit," *Evangelical Visitor*, March 1, 1905, 10; Annie E. Wenger, "Consecration," *Evangelical Visitor*, November 1, 1905, 6; Emma Long Dohner, "Not Self, But Thee," *Evangelical Visitor*, February 15, 1905, 16; Iva C. Herr, "Entire Sanctification ro the Blessing of Perfect Love," *Evangelical Visitor*, December 1, 1906, 4; Emma Dohner, "How the Lord Dealt with Me," *Evangelical Visitor*, January 1, 1908, 9; Mary McNeal, "An Experience," *Evangelical Visitor*, July 26, 1909, 8; Mary J. Long, "The Need of the Anointing," *Evangelical Visitor*, March 15, 1909, 8; Mazy Dohner, "A Work of Grace," *Evangelical Visitor*, April 29, 1912, 14; Martha Heisey, "A Warning Note," *Evangelical Visitor*, May 5, 1913, 16; Hettie Kready, "... Writes about Sanctification. . .," *Evangelical Visitor*, December 15, 1913, 5; Sarah Climenhaga, "The Fall and Restoration of Man," *Evangelical Visitor*, June 28, 1915, 27; Mazy Dohner, "He is Able," *Evangelical Visitor*, October 2, 1922, 5; Lela Pierce, "We Must Go the Death Route of Self Before God's Approval is on Us," *Evangelical Visitor*, September 29, 1924, 11; Ida W. Cassel, "Sanctification—What is It?" *Evangelical Visitor*, July 30, 1934, 244.

exalted private religious experience above the corporate notions of obedience that had long characterized the Brethren in Christ faith. Traditionalists especially rejected the concept of an instantaneous second work of grace, believing it to be basically unscriptural.²⁶ Such resistance demonstrates that, even from the first decades in which holiness teaching touched the Brethren in Christ, the doctrine was always contested and never fully embraced by all church members.

Amid this growing enthusiasm, in 1887 the church's governing body, the General Conference, passed a new doctrinal article on sanctification that, according to Wittlinger, "shift[ed the church] toward moderate accommodation to perfectionism" while still maintaining the original confession of faith's emphasis on sanctification as a process.²⁷ By 1910, however, the tide was turning. The perfectionist contingent pushed for a more radical stance, forcing the General Conference to develop yet another new statement. Wittlinger concludes that this statement "moved [Brethren in Christ] considerably closer to the position of sanctification as a second work of grace," but also "specifically reject[ed] the terminology 'second definite work of grace'" as a concession to the traditionalist contingent within the church.²⁸

But this compromise did not contain the ardor of the perfectionists for long.²⁹ Over a two-decade period, these progressives gained the upper hand within the internecine debates. For instance, in 1918 perfectionists ousted the moderate editor of the *Visitor* and installed a pro-holiness replacement, essentially transforming the publication into a vehicle for promoting the second-work doctrine.³⁰ At the same time, well-known proponents of the second-work position published treatises promulgating the doctrine.³¹ Within two decades, perfectionists pushed the church to

²⁶Wittlinger, 242-244.

²⁷Ibid., 231-234 (quotation, 233).

²⁸Ibid., 246-247.

²⁹On continued conflict over holiness among Brethren in Christ after 1910, see Ibid., 322-325.

³⁰Ibid., 325-328.

³¹See, for instance, John R. Zook, *Holiness and Empowerment Both Defined: How to Obtain Them, How to Retain Them* (Des Moines, IA: n.p., 1919). In this tract, Zook carefully avoided the exact language of "second work of grace," yet boldly declared that "[e]ntire sanctification . . . is INSTANTANEOUS. . . . [T]he moment we have met the condition, the blessings is ours." His claims directly challenged the process orientation of the traditionalists.

once again revise its doctrinal statement on holiness.³² The resultant document, ratified by General Conference in 1937, made a critical modification to church teaching: It redefined sanctification for the Brethren in Christ as an immediate, completed event—an experience “obtained instantaneously and subsequent to the new birth.” It still eschewed the controversial language of “second work of grace,” thus never linking the church to the mainstream of the holiness movement. Yet it implied the theological content of that language in its redefinition, making sanctification not a gradual process but a sudden, singular moment.³³ In this redefinition, the traditionalists lost and the perfectionists won. Wittlinger calls this moment in the church’s history “the triumph of second-work holiness.”³⁴

Why would the church make this pivotal shift at this particular moment? A variety of answers are possible. Of course, the power of the perfectionists within the General Conference made possible the passage of the new statement. But major social and cultural changes in American life might also have persuaded leaders within the conservative group to take a firm stance on sanctification. By the 1930s, the Brethren in Christ had begun to feel the impact of these changes: Urbanization, industrialization, advances in technology, a world war, the growth of cultural pluralism, the ever-enlarging rift between so-called modernist and funda-

³²Other forces also popularized holiness across the denomination during this period. For instance, the transformation of Brethren in Christ hymnody through two successive hymnals—1906’s *Spiritual Hymns* and 1935’s *Spiritual Songs and Hymns*, introduced holiness movement music into the church’s repertory and added numerous songs about sanctification, consecration, “heart purity,” and other holiness topics into the books’ indices. Many of these songs communicated the theological content of second-work sanctification, even if not always using that exact language. On these musical changes, see Wittlinger, 218-220; H. Royce Saltzman, “A Historical Study of the Function of Music Among the Brethren in Christ” (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1964), 165-171, 181-188; Dwight W. Thomas, “From Living Room to Sanctuary: Reflections on Brethren in Christ Worship,” in *Windows to the Church: Selections from Twenty-Five Years of “Brethren in Christ History and Life,”* ed. E. Morris Sider (Grantham, PA: Brethren in Christ Historical Society, 2003), 261-262; and Thomas, “Holiness Songs Then and Now,” *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 31, no. 1 (April 2008): 96-100.

³³“Art. IV: Sanctification,” *Constitution, Doctrine, By-Laws and Rituals of the Brethren in Christ Church* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel, 1937), 15-16 (quotation, 16).

³⁴See the title of his chapter on these developments: “Ch. 14: The Triumph of Second-Work Holiness.”

mentalist factions within Protestantism, and more challenged the church in many ways, putting to the test their doctrines of nonconformity and nonresistance. They responded to these challenges in part by fully embracing a doctrine that promised to help them live out their decidedly separatist posture toward the surrounding world. The experience of total sanctification—of dying to the “old man,” of consecrating one’s life to Christ, and of feeling the indwelling of the Holy Spirit—offered the spiritual power necessary to fulfill the high demands of the Brethren in Christ’s countercultural faith. In other words, for many Brethren in Christ the experience of total sanctification tended to strengthen their commitment to and practice of “the ways of the Brethren.” Reports published in the *Visitor* of Brethren in Christ revival services and holiness camp meetings suggest that new converts and members seeking entire sanctification could not “pray through” to the filling of the Spirit without first dying to their pride and committing to the “plain way” of the church.³⁵ Thus, the church’s sharp turn toward a full-throated perfectionist position in the early decades of the twentieth century had everything to do with resolving their sense of peril.³⁶

The “Triumph” of Second-Work Sanctification

This triumph of second-work sanctification—its codification at the General Conference of 1937 and its apparent reinforcement of the church’s

³⁵For examples, see “Florin, Pa.,” *Evangelical Visitor*, March 8 and 22, 1920, 14; A. L. Eisenhower, “Sanctification,” *Evangelical Visitor*, April 30, 1928, 10-11, 15; Adda G. Wolgemuth, “The Baptism of the Holy Ghost and Fire,” *Evangelical Visitor*, December 1, 1930, 22; M. E. W., “Gleanings from the Roxbury Revival,” *Evangelical Visitor*, November 11, 1935, 361. General Conference- and district-level statements published during this period also tended to link the experience of holiness to the doctrine of nonconformity; see, for instance, “Scriptural Standard of Dress,” tract published by the Brethren in Christ Church (Nappanee, IN: Evangel), 4-5, and *Minutes of the Pennsylvania State Council*, 1927, 14-16. Other scholars have also pointed to this linkage; see Alderfer, “The Mind of the Brethren in Christ,” 253-258, and Keefer Jr., “The Three Streams in Our Heritage,” 36.

³⁶On this period in Brethren in Christ history, see Devin C. Manzullo-Thomas, “‘Unity in Diversity’: Negotiating Communal Boundaries in the Brethren in Christ Church, 1930-1950,” unpublished paper presented at the Communal Studies Association annual meeting, Zoar, Ohio, October 5-7, 2017. For a parallel move within segments of the broader holiness movement concerned with the encroachment of “worldliness,” see Wallace Thornton, Jr., “Behavioral Standards, Embourgeoisement, and the Formation of the Conservative Holiness Movement,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 33, no. 2 (Fall 1998): 172-197.

longstanding doctrines of nonconformity and nonresistance—set off a flurry of holiness activity within the church. First and foremost, it inspired the founding of several holiness camps throughout the United States and Canada: Roxbury Holiness Camp in Pennsylvania (1935), Ontario Holiness Camp in Ontario, Canada (1941), and Memorial Holiness Camp in Ohio (1944).³⁷ It also inspired missionary activity. In the late 1930s and early 1940s a handful of recently sanctified Brethren in Christ carried the church's holiness message to new communities. Through a series of highly emotional, even proto-charismatic revival meetings, they established new Brethren in Christ congregations in the Allegheny Mountains of western Pennsylvania and in rural southern Kentucky.³⁸ Meanwhile, the church periodical, the *Evangelical Visitor*, continued to churn out articles on holiness, from doctrinal treatises to devotional texts, personal testimonies, and more.

From a certain perspective, these outcomes seem to reinforce Wittlinger's observation about the "triumph" of second-work holiness. Yet if considered from another vantage, these same developments might point to an entirely different reality—one in which the doctrine had far less universal stability. We cannot say with much certainty if the pitched battles between perfectionists and traditionalists in the early twentieth century were fair fights: What if the traditionalists grossly outnumbered the perfectionists, but the latter group simply had louder advocates? What if the codification of instantaneous sanctification at the 1937 General Conference reflected not a broad consensus about the experience, its timing, and its nature, but rather a narrow unanimity shared primarily by the architects of the statement? What if the influence of holiness preaching and teaching was isolated to a few geographical centers: western Pennsyl-

³⁷On Roxbury Holiness Camp, see E. Morris Sider, *Holiness Unto the Lord: The Story of Roxbury Holiness Camp* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel, 1985) and Sider, *A Living and Growing Ministry: The Story of Roxbury Holiness Camp* (Roxbury, PA: Roxbury Holiness Camp/Grantham, PA: Brethren in Christ Historical Society, 2010). On other camps, see Wittlinger, 336.

³⁸For the story of holiness-inspired missionary activity in western Pennsylvania, see E. Morris Sider, 2nd ed. (Grantham, PA: Brethren in Christ Historical Society, 2010). For the Kentucky story, see Wittlinger, 448; Albert E. Engle, *Saved to Serve in Kentucky . . . and More!* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel, 1977); and Dortha Dohner, "M. L. Dohner and the Beginning of the Brethren in Christ Work in Kentucky," *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 14, no. 3 (December 1991): 396-414.

vania, Kentucky, the Midwest, and in the vicinity of the holiness camps scattered throughout North America? And what if the writing on holiness that filled the pages of the *Visitor* reflected not confidence about the doctrine, but a sense that a skeptical church had to be indoctrinated into a set of beliefs about the necessity of a second work of grace?

Unfortunately, the archives of the Brethren in Christ Church lack the kinds of sources necessary to penetrate deeply into the lived experiences of church members in the 1920s and 1930s. So it is difficult to say with any sense of certainty how scholars should interpret the alleged “triumph” of holiness in these years. But developments within the church in the 1940s, 1950s, and beyond suggest that at least by these decades, Brethren in Christ holiness felt far less triumphant and far more contested and criticized.

Revisiting the Holiness “Triumph”

If the Brethren in Christ’s embrace of a new doctrine of sanctification in 1937 was intended, at least in part, to protect the church from the advent of cultural modernity, it failed to achieve its desired end. By the 1940s and 1950s, some church members and even some leaders experienced visible acculturation into the dominant cultures of North American society. Historically an agrarian society, many Brethren in Christ in these decades entered into new vocations: in business, education, and other professions. Many increasingly pursued higher education, primarily (but not exclusively) at church-related schools. During World War II, many Brethren in Christ men accepted alternative service rather than military conscription, while others enlisted as noncombatants and, more rarely, as combatants. In all of these new settings—vocational, educational, and otherwise—church members and leaders faced as never before questions about their plain dress, their nonviolent convictions, and their suspicion of “worldly” entertainment. In short, many felt pressure to abandon their nonconformist ways. Those who did so risked the censure of the church; those who did not, the skepticism of their neighbors and co-workers.³⁹

³⁹On challenges to nonconformity and nonresistance in the 1930s and 1940s, see Wittlinger, chs. 15-16; David L. Weaver-Zercher, “Open (to) Arms: The Status of the Peace Position in the Brethren in Christ Church,” in *Windows to the Church: Selections from Twenty-Five Years of “Brethren in Christ History and Life,”* ed. E. Morris Sider (Grantham, PA.: Brethren in Christ Historical Society, 2003), 209-226; David L. Weaver-Zercher, “Improvising Faithfulness: A Brief History of Brethren in Christ Nonconformity,” *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 40, no. 1 (April 2017): 124-129; and Manzullo-Thomas, “Unity in Diversity.”

Around the same time that they faced these acculturating pressures, the Brethren in Christ also encountered the neo-evangelical movement. Though rooted in the separatistic fundamentalism of the 1920s and 1930s, neo-evangelicalism represented a socially engaged form of conservative Protestantism, eager to “win America for Christ” by communicating their gospel message in the vernacular of white, middle-class popular culture.⁴⁰ Rubbing elbows with these evangelicals in ecumenical groups such as the National Association of Evangelicals made some Brethren in Christ leaders self-conscious about their group’s small size and relative lack of evangelistic success. Many began to see the church’s regulations of nonconformist and nonresistant practice as “legalism” and as barriers to effective outreach.⁴¹ In the 1950s and 1960s, the General Conference commissioned the Church Review and Study Committee to review and revise the structures and practices of the church, so that the church might minister more effectively. The result of their work was a wide-ranging reconsideration of the church’s separatist stance; by 1965, the church no longer required its members to wear a proscribed church uniform of plain dress and it no longer threatened those who enlisted in the military with disfellowship.⁴²

As it downplayed earlier standards of nonconformity and nonresistance, the church also tended to speak less and less about the doctrine of holiness. While the *Visitor* in the 1920s and 1930s had been practically a

⁴⁰Scholarship on post-World War II evangelicalism is vast, but for this narrative the most salient studies include Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); D. G. Hart, *That Old-Time Religion in Modern America: Evangelical Protestantism in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: Ivan D. Ree, 2002); Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); and Matthew Avery Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014). On fundamentalism, see George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism in American Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁴¹On these developments, see Wittlinger, 475-482; David L. Zercher, “Opting for the Mainstream: The Brethren Join the National Association of Evangelicals,” *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 10, no. 1 (April 1987): 48-70; Devin C. Manzullo-Thomas, “Beyond ‘Indianapolis ’50’: The Brethren in Christ Church in an Age of Evangelicalism,” *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 36, no. 3 (December 2013): 433-463; and Manzullo-Thomas, “Born-Again Brethren in Christ.”

⁴²On the Church Review and Study Committee, see Wittlinger, 483-492.

holiness journal, by the 1950s and 1960s the number of holiness-themed articles dropped off precipitously.⁴³ In the realm of official doctrine, a new statement published in 1961 essentially replicated the 1937 statement, but placed “slightly less emphasis upon the perfection reached at sanctification” and left “a little more room for progressive growth,” according to one analysis.⁴⁴ Though modest, even this change testifies to the ways in which the doctrine of holiness was downplayed by leaders in these decades. As bishops and ministers moderated the principled separatism of past generations and cloaked these changes in the evangelical-inspired rhetoric of mission and church growth, they also laid less stress on holiness.

While some older church leaders downplayed the doctrine, some newer leaders questioned it altogether. This lack of new ministerial support for second-work sanctification became evident to Luke Keefer, Sr., a bishop from rural central Pennsylvania, when he joined the Brethren in Christ’s Ministerial Examining Board in 1947. As he wrote in his memoir, Keefer quickly realized “that there were differences of enthusiasm in the endorsement and promotion of several doctrines which characterized our denomination . . . [including] sanctification.”⁴⁵ In the case of a few ministerial applicants, their articulation of holiness deviated so far from the church’s 1937 doctrinal position that Keefer “could not conscientiously sign my approval” to their applications.⁴⁶ Such ambivalence on second-work sanctification persisted into the latter decades of the twentieth century. In 1983, for instance, the Messiah College professor Owen Alderfer

⁴³An index for the *Visitor* housed in the Brethren in Christ Historical Library and Archives lists only six articles under the subject heading “holiness” between 1950-1969, and only four under the subject heading “sanctification” during those same years. While the index may not represent a comprehensive or fully accurate cataloguing of all articles written on these subjects during this period, it does indicate that fewer articles were written on these subjects in the denominational periodicals during this period. Moreover, a survey of *Visitor* issues published after 1947 indicate that the publication ceased printing testimonies around that time; such testimonies often promoted the Brethren in Christ understanding of sanctification in their narratives.

⁴⁴Roger C. Sider, “A Comparative Study of the 1937 and 1961 Doctrinal Statements of the Brethren in Christ Church,” *Notes and Queries in Brethren in Christ History* 7, no. 3 (July 1966): 17.

⁴⁵Luke L. Keefer Sr., *No Empty Dream: My Psalm of Life* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel, 1990), 149.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 151.

related a discussion with a student considering ministry in the Brethren in Christ Church. The student told Alderfer that he “just can’t go along with the Brethren in Christ view of a ‘second blessing.’”⁴⁷ Alderfer further revealed that even current ministers credentialed by the Brethren in Christ—including many who grew up in the denomination—likewise rejected the second-work stance in their public ministry:

[N]umbers of pastors with roots in the church have reacted against what they regard to be unrealistic, psychologically unsound, and unbiblical teachings on the subject. In some cases they are reacting against what they perceived as irregularities in the lives of some who proclaimed crucifixion of the self and eradication of the carnal nature. What they discerned as anger and power politics in the church brought disillusionment relative to the doctrine and modification of the teaching on their part.⁴⁸

Though perhaps not universally reflective of Brethren in Christ ministers in the mid-twentieth century, such incidents certainly suggest a diminished embrace of the doctrine by those in the church’s pulpits.

If the church’s holiness doctrine received lackluster support from some ministers and aspiring ministers, it received even less support from many laypeople. For instance, several Brethren in Christ members who came of age in these mid-century decades became repeat seekers at the altar: Under what they perceived as intense pressure, these young people “prayed through” for sanctification only to stumble spiritually days or weeks later, and thus question the sincerity of their experience. For many, these troubling experiences with sanctification were often linked to struggles with the practices associated with the doctrine of nonconformity.

Such was the case for Luke Keefer Jr. In his autobiography, Keefer described his own sanctification experience as a teenager in 1956. This experience promised—in a theological sense—freedom from the desire to sin and consecration to Christ and his service. Yet as Keefer later reflected, “Theological explanations and practical Christian life realities are not infrequently strangers to one another.”⁴⁹ Even after his experience,

⁴⁷Owen H. Alderfer, “Rationale for a Colloquy on the Holy Spirit and the Holy Life,” *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 6, no. 2 (December 1983): 143.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 146.

⁴⁹Luke L. Keefer Jr., “Autobiography” in E. Morris Sider, ed., *My Story, My Song: Life Stories by Brethren in Christ Missionaries* (Mt. Joy, PA: Brethren in Christ World Missions, 1989), 304.

Keefer continued to struggle not only with overt sin but also with a sense of rebelliousness against the strictures of the denomination, including the issue of plain dress. Only after numerous stumbles, repeated visits to the altar, periodic counseling sessions with his minister-father, and a long period of self-doubt did Keefer “mediat[e] . . . an acceptable truce” between the conflicting parties of theological expectation and personal experience.⁵⁰

In the end Keefer’s experience proved more positive than negative. But, Keefer noted, not everyone of his generation arrived at such an acceptable spiritual compromise. In her autobiography, the long-time Brethren in Christ missionary Grace Herr Holland made much the same point. Because she and her siblings had been taught “that sanctification was [both an instantaneous experience and] also an ongoing process,” they were “spared the struggle of those who questioned their ‘experience’ every time they stumbled.”⁵¹ Her comments convey the pervasiveness of spiritual struggle among some Brethren in Christ coming of age in the 1940s and 1950s.

For others, holiness represented an impossible ideal. Growing up among the Brethren in Christ in southern California in the 1950s and 1960s, Connie Engle Hoffman heard numerous sermons on holy living and the call to sanctification. Yet she found those teachings “vague and unattainable.” She therefore “had no personal sense of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit” in her life.⁵² In a 2008 memoir, Hoffman nevertheless observed that coming of age under such teachings had impacted her spiritual journey in adulthood, burdening her with a “desire for perfection” and giving her “difficulty accepting and owning grace.”⁵³ Hoff-

⁵⁰Ibid. For an analysis of Keefer’s spiritual journey in terms of the Brethren in Christ doctrines of sanctification and nonconformity, see Manzullo-Thomas, “Luke Jr. and Doris Bowman Keefer,” ch. 4.

⁵¹Grace Herr Holland, *Planting Seeds: A Missionary Story* (Grantham, PA: Brethren in Christ Historical Society, 2016), 6. This autobiography was published as the August 2016 issue of the journal *Brethren in Christ History and Life*.

⁵²Connie (Engle) Hoffman, “Where Christ May Dwell,” *In Part*, Summer 2013, 10.

⁵³Connie (Engle) Hoffman, “Growing Up Brethren in Christ: The Influence of Home and Congregation,” *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 31, no. 2 (August 2008): 302. In later years, Hoffman and her husband, Warren, came into contact with and embraced the influence of the charismatic movement. Connie Hoffman later noted that her charismatic experiences brought her into a more intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit than did any of the holiness teaching of her

man's reflections point to another occasional criticism of holiness teaching articulated by some Brethren in Christ: that the doctrine has a psychologically unsound impact on some of its hearers.⁵⁴

Other laypeople balked at the excessive emotionalism that seemed to accompany holiness preaching. One church member, who grew up near the church's Roxbury Holiness Camp in Pennsylvania, later recalled the humiliation he felt in bringing a non-Brethren in Christ woman to camp on a date:

Once I took a young Mennonite girl to Roxbury when the shouting and hollering started from the pulpit and from the audience. Poor girl, she was mortified, never having seen such in her church and I was embarrassed to explain what was happening—basically I could not understand it either. The relationship quickly dissolved.⁵⁵

His recollection demonstrates that as some Brethren in Christ experienced upward social mobility in the middle decades of the twentieth century, such "shouting and hollering" became less a symbol of spiritual enthusiasm and more a cause for shame and humiliation.

Still other laypeople perceived the holiness preaching and teaching of the church as a form of legalism. In an autobiographical account, Grace Holland recalled how some of her peers criticized the Brethren in Christ Church of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s for practicing a "works religion."⁵⁶ Similarly, laywoman Eleanor Poe observed that she grew up listening to harsh, severe sermons and feeling "prolonged pressure [during] altar calls" at her home congregation in Ohio.⁵⁷ In these ways and others, holi-

earliest years. On these experiences, see Hoffman, "Where Christ May Dwell," 10-11. Warren Hoffman served for many years as a Brethren in Christ minister and missionary, and later became a bishop in Pennsylvania and the moderator of the North American denomination.

⁵⁴The theologian Owen Alderfer indicated this criticism as one harbored by some Brethren in Christ. See Alderfer, "Rationale for a Colloquy," 145-146.

⁵⁵Unsigned questionnaire, Devin C. Manzullo-Thomas Papers, uncatalogued material, Brethren in Christ Historical Library and Archives (Mechanicsburg, PA). This questionnaire was collected as part of my master's thesis research at Temple University, 2011-2012.

⁵⁶Grace (Herr) Holland, "Growing Up Brethren in Christ: The Influence of Home and Congregation," *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 31, no. 2 (August 2008): 255.

⁵⁷Eleanor (Herr) Poe, "Growing Up Brethren in Christ: The Influence of Home and Congregation," *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 31, no. 2 (August 2008): 305.

ness came to be associated by some Brethren in Christ as a “legal ought” rather than a liberation from sin.⁵⁸

Thus in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, a variety of cultural trends, personal experiences, and institutional changes cumulatively impacted the Brethren in Christ’s holiness position. Stated doctrine shifted only modestly back toward a progressivist view. But in practice and in public prominence, the ideas associated with holiness as an instantaneous experience were contested and questioned, if not forthrightly criticized. Indeed, the doctrine seemed much less triumphant in these decades than it had in 1937.

Confidence or Crisis

Yet holiness was far from dead in the Brethren in Christ Church. Somewhat paradoxically, despite contest and criticism, holiness ideas and institutions thrived within the church during the century’s middle decades.

In at least one instance, enthusiasm for the church’s holiness position led to church growth. In 1955, a young Amish couple, Abe and Hannah Yoder, experienced entire sanctification during a revival service in rural Juniata County, Pennsylvania, conducted by the Brethren in Christ minister Luke Keefer Sr. For a number of years afterward, Keefer conducted a weekly Bible study and prayer meeting with the Yoders and a handful of other sanctified Amish and conservative Mennonites whose holiness experiences had been opposed by their home congregations. By 1959, the small group decided to form a new congregation—the Big Valley Brethren in Christ Church—comprised almost entirely of conservative Anabaptists who had encountered second-work sanctification through the Brethren in Christ.⁵⁹

Holiness institutions also thrived in these decades. For instance, Roxbury Holiness Camp—the first holiness camp founded by the Brethren in Christ in the 1930s—grew by leaps and bounds. Such growth could be assessed solely by the expansion of the physical plant: Between 1940 and 1965, the camp added a new tabernacle, cabins and dormitories,

⁵⁸On the Brethren in Christ and legalism, see Devin C. Manzullo-Thomas, “Between Legalism and Liberalism: The Brethren in Christ Construct a New (Evangelical) Identity, 1945-1965,” *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 34, no. 3 (December 2011): 347-386.

⁵⁹Abe S. Yoder, Jr., *My Walk with God* (Belleville, PA: [the author], 2000), 29-33, 77-78.

a kitchen, bathroom facilities, buildings for children's and youth programming, a bookstore, and even a motel to its grounds.⁶⁰ Attendance rates also demonstrate Roxbury's growth. In the 1970s, the camp experienced record turnout multiple years in a row. In 1978, for instance, over 2,100 people crammed into the camp's tabernacle for the final Sunday evening service of its two-week program.⁶¹ During these same decades, the Brethren in Christ associated with Roxbury even launched a new holiness camp meeting: Camp Freedom in St. Petersburg, Florida.⁶²

Yet even during these heady years, holiness institutions also worried about their longevity. Roxbury leadership began to express a growing concern about the passing on of holiness to the next generation as early as the mid-1960s. Camp director and minister Charlie Byers, writing in 1966, pleaded with the camp's Board of Directors: "We must get through to the younger generation. A few more frosts and the gray heads will be gone. Then what for Roxbury camp?" His comment seems to suggest that despite high attendance in these years, the vast majority of participants were elderly members of the church.⁶³ A similar sentiment led Byers to organize a series of sermons on sanctification delivered at the camp meeting of 1982. In his letter inviting a well-respected Brethren in Christ holiness teacher to deliver the lectures, Byers expressed his concern that camp attendees under thirty-five did not have a clear knowledge of sanctification. "They know the word holiness," he wrote, "[and] they hear talk about sanctification, they listen to the various sermons at Roxbury." But, he concluded, they lack a full understanding of the doctrine and its importance.⁶⁴ To some, the Brethren in Christ's camp meeting program seemed more imperiled than thriving.

The Brethren in Christ also sought to strengthen their holiness *bona fides* in the middle decades of the twentieth century by developing insti-

⁶⁰Sider, *Holiness Unto the Lord*, chs. 5-6. By its fiftieth anniversary in 1985, the camp occupied 65 acres at a value of approximately \$250,000.

⁶¹Simon A. Lehman, Jr., *Ever Green... Ever Fruitful, To God Be The Glory: My Life Story* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Unigraphics Communications, 2010), 214-215. Lehman also records that another Brethren in Christ camp meeting, Camp Freedom in Florida, also had its highest attendance a year later, in 1979.

⁶²On this camp, see Simon A. Lehman, Jr., *Free Indeed: The Story of Camp Freedom* (St. Petersburg, FL: n.p., n.d.), and Dennis L. Ritchey, *So Run!: Camp Freedom—Celebrating Fifty Years of Ministry, 1963-2012* (St. Petersburg, FL: n.p., 2012).

⁶³Quoted in Sider, *A Living and Growing Ministry*, 138.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 138-139.

tutional ties to the broader holiness movement. Historically resistant to ecumenical activity, the Brethren in Christ gradually embraced cooperative ventures in the post-World War II years. In 1949, as previously mentioned, they joined the National Association of Evangelicals.⁶⁵ A year later, they joined the National Holiness Association (NHA).⁶⁶ Church leaders hoped that joining the interdenominational body would not only “keep our people more aggressive and alive” regarding the holiness message, but might also stimulate the Brethren in Christ toward “a more gracious conception of the doctrine of holiness” and give them “a larger influence” within the holiness movement.⁶⁷ Such rationales suggest that in joining this and other ecumenical groups, the Brethren in Christ sought to enlarge their prominence within the Protestant marketplace and perhaps even develop a conception of holiness more in keeping with their upwardly mobile socio-economic status and their growing sense of participation in American culture.

After joining NHA, Brethren in Christ ministers and bishops began to hold key leadership roles and make many contributions to the agency. For instance, in 1968, at the height of domestic tensions over the Vietnam War and the rise of Black Power movements, the Brethren in Christ

⁶⁵On Brethren in Christ resistance to formal ecumenical efforts, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Schrag, “Brethren in Christ Attitude,” 156-162. The earliest ecumenical efforts by the Brethren in Christ was with the inter-Mennonite relief agency Mennonite Central Committee in the 1930s and 1940s; on their MCC involvement, see Nancy Heisey, “Brethren in Christ Participation in Mennonite Central Committee: Integral Part or Burden?” *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 18, no. 2 (August 1995): 177-227. See note 58 for scholarship on the Brethren in Christ involvement in the National Association of Evangelicals.

⁶⁶*General Conference Minutes*, 1950, 46-47. This organization changed its name to Christian Holiness Association (CHA) in 1971, and to Christian Holiness Partnership in 1998. In the remainder of this article, I will use the abbreviation that reflects the official name of the agency during the period being discussed.

At least a few church leaders resisted the idea of affiliation. One minister from rural Pennsylvania later recalled that he initially opposed joining the NHA because he feared that doing so might dilute the church’s distinctiveness. See Keefer Sr., 157. General Conference actually postponed voting on this affiliation for two years, in order to pursue further study and to pacify those, like Keefer Sr., who feared such ecumenical relationships. See *General Conference Minutes*, 1948, 31; *General Conference Minutes*, 1949, 30-32.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 1948, 30.

bishop Arthur Climenhaga helped to prepare a “widely acclaimed” report by the NHA’s Social Action Commission that laid out a holiness response to the issues of the day.⁶⁸ Five years later, in 1973, the Brethren in Christ’s Commission on Peace and Social Concerns co-sponsored with the CHA a seminar on “Christian Holiness and Issues of War and Peace.” Four Brethren in Christ gave papers at the gathering, alongside scholars and leaders from the Church of the Nazarene, the Church of God (Anderson), and the Free Methodist Church, among others. Proceedings from the conference were subsequently collected under the title *Perfect Love and War* and published by the Brethren in Christ’s Evangel Press.⁶⁹ Moreover, from 1972-1974, the Pennsylvania bishop Henry Ginder served as the organization’s president—the first Brethren in Christ to do so.⁷⁰ And in 1977, for his presidential contributions and more, the CHA named Ginder their “Holiness Exponent of the Year.”⁷¹

Yet beyond these elite investments, the Brethren in Christ Church as a whole generally demonstrated broad ambivalence toward the institutional holiness movement. Only a handful of Brethren in Christ ministers ever attended a national convention. Reports by the denomination’s representative frequently included calls for more Brethren in Christ ministers to attend and/or give greater financial support to the organization.⁷² Many of those same reports made repeated attempts to emphasize—and perhaps *over-emphasize*—Brethren in Christ contributions to the organi-

⁶⁸Ibid., 1968, 38.

⁶⁹The seminar was held in June 1973 in Winona Lake, Indiana. Brethren in Christ presenters included Owen H. Alderfer, C. O. Wittlinger, Daniel Chamberlain, and Lucille Sider Dayton. See Paul Hostetler, ed., *Perfect Love and War: A Dialogue on Christian Holiness and the Issues of War and Peace* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel, 1974). For a report on the event see John K. Stoner, “Foreward,” in *Perfect Love and War*, 3-4.

⁷⁰*General Conference Minutes*, 1972, 38; E. Morris Sider, *Leaders Among Brethren: Biographies of Henry A. Ginder and Charlie B. Byers* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel, 1987), 133-134.

⁷¹For more on Ginder’s award, see materials in the Henry A. Ginder Papers, MG 12—Box 2.3, Folder “Holiness Exponent of the Year Citation, 1977 CHA Convention, Denver, Colorado,” Brethren in Christ Historical Library and Archives (Mechanicsburg, PA).

⁷²*General Conference Minutes*, 1960, 48; Ibid., 1961, 47; Ibid., 1962, 45; Ibid., 1963, 53.

zation.⁷³ But even such reporting did little to bolster denomination-wide support for the church's involvement.

Thus, while membership in the National/Christian Holiness Association managed to galvanize a small section of the Brethren in Christ pastorate and bishopric, that influence seems not to have trickled down to the pew. In the final tally, the boosters who endorsed NHA membership in the late 1940s were wrong: participation in the interdenominational holiness movement did little to inspire greater interest in and enthusiasm for the holiness message. Instead, in the decades after the 1937 General Conference's new doctrinal statement on sanctification, second-work theology seemed far less triumphant, less stable, and less universally embraced. Despite the growth of Brethren in Christ holiness institutions and the increased visibility of Brethren in Christ leaders within the holiness movement, the church as a whole entered into the latter decades of the twentieth century with a weakening commitment to the doctrine of second-work sanctification.

From Second Work to Secondary Status

By the 1980s and 1990s, denominational leaders began to acknowledge that disagreement, confusion, and even disregard for the doctrine of sanctification had emerged in some corners of the church. In 1983, in an effort to remedy these divisions and to renew theological reflection on the topic, the church convened a "Colloquy on the Holy Spirit and the Holy Life." Leaders declared that the event was not designed "to defend and support Wesleyanism—or any other specific position," but rather "to discover where the Brethren [in Christ] are and to ascertain where we ought

⁷³For instance, in 1961, the Pennsylvania minister Charlie Byers highlighted the Brethren in Christ contributions to the NHA convention in language uncommon to the typically pride-averse church. He described a seminar led by the Pennsylvania minister Henry Ginder as "one of the better attended seminars" and "a most commendable piece of work," and likewise commended Ginder's talk to the delegate body as "one of the warmest sermon periods of the convention." He also depicted the exhibit hall display by Evangel Press, the Brethren in Christ publishing house, as "attractive," strategically located, and well trafficked. Such puffed-up language may have struck some Brethren in Christ readers as dangerously prideful. Yet repeated mentions of the church's "significant contribution" to the organization continued for multiple years. See Charlie Byers, "Article XXI: Report from the Representative to the National Holiness Convention," *General Conference Minutes*, 1961, 47; *Ibid.*, 1963, 53; and *Ibid.*, 1964, 51.

to be and want to be.”⁷⁴ At least some of the presenters took this rationale to heart, arguing for a revision of some elements of the church’s historic position.

Luke Keefer Jr.’s contribution to the conference is emblematic in this regard. By the 1980s, Keefer had earned a PhD in religious studies from Temple University in Philadelphia and taken a position at Messiah College, the denominational school in Pennsylvania. His dissertation, on ecclesiology in the writings of John Wesley, had earned him a reputation in both the wider academic community and in the Brethren in Christ Church as an expert on holiness. Church leaders acknowledged this expertise by making him a key presenter at their 1983 conference.⁷⁵ He began his presentation by affirming the biblical nature of holiness, God’s provision for it, and its necessity in the life of the believer. Yet he also departed from Brethren in Christ orthodoxy by questioning the timing of sanctification as a second work. “An experience of the Spirit does not itself make one a mature Christian,” Keefer told the colloquy delegates. “But as one matures in the faith, his understanding of and experience with the Spirit will enlarge. . . . I do not see the Scriptures absolutely defining the timing of these events nor the precise number of them.” In other words, Keefer urged the church not to promote “one-size-fits-all” sanctification experiences. Rather, he recommended a focus on the fruits of sanctification: achieving victory over sin, committing fully to God and the work of God’s kingdom, and knowing and feeling the presence of the Holy Spirit.⁷⁶

Keefer’s middle-way approach was crucial in several ways. But perhaps its most important contribution to the church was that it formed the basis for the sanctification article in a new doctrinal statement produced by the Brethren in Christ in the early 1990s. The revised article emphasized sanctification as both “a *full surrender* and commitment of the motives and will to Christ” and “an *ongoing journey* of yielding to God and growing in grace”—both a decisive crisis experience, and a continuing pursuit of obedience and righteousness.

⁷⁴Alderfer, “Rationale,” 143.

⁷⁵On Keefer’s scholarship on the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition, see Manzullo-Thomas, “Luke Jr. and Doris Bowman Keefer,” 302-305.

⁷⁶Luke L. Keefer, Jr., “Getting at Essential Issues in Sanctification,” *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 6, no. 2 (December 1983), 168-209 (quotation, 208).

This re-envisioning of sanctification as a “crisis within a process” moved away from the position of the 1937 statement and reinforced the modest moderation of the 1961 statement, but only slightly: Since the Brethren in Christ had never officially used the language “second work of grace,” the new language did not fundamentally represent a change in direction, at least on paper. Leaders suggested that the change epitomized an attempt not to change the church’s stance, but to update its framing for “the current generation.”⁷⁷ In the 1980s, one senior churchman applauded these efforts and expressed gratitude for a new batch of holiness exponents “who teach holiness, but not in extremes.”⁷⁸ Those who had downplayed the radical edges of the doctrine during the church’s mid-century acculturation warmly welcomed this effort to refashion sanctification.

But these intentional efforts to renew holiness theology among the Brethren in Christ largely floundered. Demographic data collected from church members over the next three decades indicated ambivalence about the doctrine. According to surveys conducted in 1989, 2006, and 2014, few Brethren in Christ saw or currently see “Wesleyan” as a meaningful marker of their religious identity; most respondents identified themselves as either evangelicals or Anabaptists.⁷⁹ Moreover, and perhaps most damningly, both the 2006 and 2014 surveys revealed that “maintaining the holy lifestyle” ranked very low on the list of “important issues facing Brethren in Christ congregations today.”⁸⁰

Although some Brethren in Christ seemed ambivalent about the doctrine, others lamented the church’s perceived disregard for it. In 1985, for instance, members of the Big Valley congregation—a church built on

⁷⁷See, for instance, Lynn Thrush, “The Brethren in Christ and Their Doctrinal Statements,” *Evangelical Visitor*, April 1987, 11-13.

⁷⁸“E. J. Swalm Comments on Changes in the Brethren in Christ Church,” *Evangelical Visitor*, June 1988, 12.

⁷⁹John R. Yeatts and Ronald J. Burwell, “The Brethren in Christ at A.D. 2000,” in *Reflections on a Heritage: Defining the Brethren in Christ*, ed. E. Morris Sider (Grantham, PA: Brethren in Christ Historical Society, 1999), 238; “Brethren in Christ Member Profile 2006,” Section B, question 21, Records of the Brethren in Christ Church, I—14: “Miscellaneous”—Box 1.2, Brethren in Christ Historical Library and Archives (Mechanicsburg, PA); Ronald Burwell, “Results of the 2014 Global Anabaptist Profile: Brethren in Christ Church in the U.S.,” *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 38, no. 3 (December 2015): 370.

⁸⁰Burwell, “2014 Global Anabaptist Profile,” 351-353. In 2006, it was ranked sixth on a list of ten issues; by 2014, it had fallen to spot number eight on the same ten-issue list.

its founders' sanctification experiences—mournfully wrote in the *Evangelical Visitor* that holiness “is not taught in the Brethren in Christ churches as it once was.”⁸¹ Four years later, an anonymous contributor to the church periodical bemoaned the infrequency of holiness preaching in Brethren in Christ churches. “Where is the word of cleansing from sin and victory over sin?” the author asked. “Are we forgetting the urgency of the Apostle Paul when he wrote to the Galatians saying, ‘I am crucified with Christ,’ or in his urging the Ephesians to ‘be filled with the Spirit?’”⁸² The boldest critique came from the leadership of Camp Freedom, the Brethren in Christ camp meeting in St. Petersburg, Florida. In 1995, the camp’s board of directors published a *Holiness Primer* intended, at least in part, to rekindle the doctrine within the Brethren in Christ Church. The *Primer*’s author complained, “There is a dearth of holiness preaching and teaching . . . not just in *other* churches but in *our* church. It is as if holiness were not in the Bible, as if it were of no importance, as if it were an unattainable state of grace.”⁸³

Written in the same year that Luke Keefer Jr. noted the erosion of the church’s commitment to a Wesleyan theology of sanctification, Camp Freedom’s critique showed that not all vestiges of holiness thinking had disappeared from the North American church. Yet at the same time, their manifesto pointed to holiness’ marginal status within the denomination. By the waning years of the twentieth century, the Camp Freedom participants still willing to remain within the Brethren in Christ Church were a voice calling out in the wilderness.

Conclusion

By the closing years of the twentieth century, a distinctively Wesleyan-holiness view on sanctification had moved to the margins of the Brethren in Christ Church. A seventy-year period of transition had reduced sanctification from a “second work of grace” to a matter of secondary status within much of the denomination. At present, the doctrinal statement of the Brethren in Christ Church affirms the necessity of sanctification, though not firmly as an instantaneous event subsequent to regeneration. Yet at the level of popular opinion and practice, evidence suggests that

⁸¹Mildred Yoder and Sara Bowel, “Considering Sanctification—1985,” *Evangelical Visitor*, August 1985, 24.

⁸²“Onesimus,” *Evangelical Visitor*, December 1989, 29.

⁸³Fred Holland, comp., *A Holiness Primer* (St. Petersburg, FL.: Camp Freedom, 1996), 63-64.

few Brethren in Christ claim the second-work experience or see it as an important issue in their congregations. As Luke L. Keefer Jr. pointed out over twenty years ago, the Brethren in Christ's "Wesleyan voice on sanctification" has been clearly diminished.

This story matters for the broader historiography of the American holiness movement. The Brethren in Christ often appear in studies of the holiness movement.⁸⁴ But as this article has shown, future historians seeking to include the Brethren in Christ under this rubric will have to grapple with the fluctuating embrace of holiness theology within the denomination. While certainly more robust in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the church's adoption of holiness theology has always been contested and contingent. And particularly in recent decades, evidence of a distinct second-work mentality has been minimal; others have questioned or downplayed holiness altogether.

At the same time, however, scholarship has demonstrated that the Brethren in Christ are not the only segment of the holiness movement to struggle with or lose their zeal for the doctrine since midcentury.⁸⁵ Drury

⁸⁴Reference works typically include the Brethren in Christ under the holiness rubric. See, for example, Donald W. Dayton, *The American Holiness Movement: A Bibliographic Introduction* (Wilmore, KY: Asbury Theological Seminary, 1971), 13-14; William Kostlevy, *Holiness Manuscripts: A Guide to Sources Documenting the Wesleyan Holiness Movement in the United States and Canada* (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1994), 274-277; William C. Kostlevy, ed., *Historical Dictionary of the Holiness Movement* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2001), 29-31; and Charles Edwin Jones, *The Wesleyan-Holiness Movement: A Comprehensive Guide—Volume 1* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2005), 228, 569, 586-592; Jones, *The Wesleyan-Holiness Movement: A Comprehensive Guide—Volume 2* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2005), 846, 852, 857, 875, 1477, 1603. They have also appeared in surveys of the Wesleyan-holiness movement; for recent examples, note the Brethren in Christ's inclusion Brian Black, *Holiness Heritage: The Rise of the Conservative Holiness Movement* (Salem, OH: Allegheny, 2003), 153-157, and in Barry L. Callen, ed., *The Holy River of God: Currents and Contributions of the Wesleyan Holiness Stream of Christianity* (Spring Valley, CA: Aldersgate, 2016), 53-58.

⁸⁵See, for instance, John W. V. Smith, *The Quest for Holiness and Unity: A Centennial History of the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana)* (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1980), chs. 14-18; Diane Winston, *Red-Hot and Righteous: The Urban Religion of the Salvation Army* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), especially ch. 5; Floyd T. Cunningham, Stan Ingersol, Harold E. Raser, and David P. Whitelaw, *Our Watchword and Song: A Centennial History of the Church of the Nazarene* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 2009), esp. ch. 28; Worthen, *Apostles*

and others have even declared the death of the holiness movement. In this sense, then, the Brethren in Christ's story confirms much of recent holiness historiography. Because of—not in spite of—their declining adherence to holiness theology, the Brethren in Christ continue to share much in common with their Nazarene, Free Methodist, and Salvation Army co-religionists.

of Reason, 90-96; as well as all the essays in Drury, *Counterpoint*. David McKenna's study of the history of the Free Methodist Church from 1960 to 1995 argued that the leadership of the church reaffirmed the church's emphasis on entire sanctification during this thirty-five-year period, but also notes that it did so concerned about the answer to a key question: "Will the position of the Free Methodist Church on the doctrine of holiness be specifically Wesleyan or generically evangelical?" Such a question suggests some worry about a perceived decline in adherence to the doctrine. See McKenna, *A Future with a History: The Wesleyan Witness of the Free Methodist Church—Vol. 2* (Wilmore, KY: First Fruits, 2016), 76-78 (quotation, 90), <http://place.asburyseminary.edu/freemethodistbooks/2>.

PERFECTION AND SALVATION: ADVENTIST VARIATIONS ON A WESLEYAN THEME

by

Richard Rice

Rex D. Mathews' careful analysis of John Wesley's idea of Christian perfection in the Fall 2015 issue of the *Wesleyan Theological Journal* noted the important place it occupied in Wesley's thought and the complexities of Wesley's attempts to describe it adequately, along with the challenge of appropriating Wesley's concept today.¹ According to Mathews, "holiness of heart and life" and its cognate goal, Christian perfection, formed the "single most consistent theme in Wesley's thought over the entire span of his life and ministry."² Yet, while Wesley published *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (1766) in an attempt to demonstrate the consistency of his teaching on the topic over the years, there were subtle but significant shifts in his thinking about the *nature* of Christian perfection.³ For example, his negative characterizations of perfection in the 1730s and 1740s—freedom from or the absence of sin, fear, doubt, guilt, etc.—gave way in the 1750s and 1760s to a more positive description of perfection as the presence of love in one's heart and life.⁴

Mathews also notes the controversy among Methodists as to just what perfection involved, including the differences between John and Charles Wesley themselves. Was perfection something that could be experienced instantaneously, or only if ever after a long period of time—say, at or near the end of one's life? Were perfect Christians freed from all human infirmities? Could only fully sanctified Christians be assured of final salvation? (Wesley denied both.)⁵

Reading Mathews' informative account, I was impressed with the similarities between Wesleyan and Seventh-day Adventist concerns when

¹Rex D. Mathews, "John Wesley's Idea of Christian Perfection Reconsidered," *WTJ*, (Fall 2015), 25-67.

²*Ibid.*, 30.

³*Ibid.*, 31.

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵*Ibid.*, 33.

it comes to the experience of salvation—in particular, their concerns about the nature and goal of sanctification—as well as some of the distinctive perspectives that Adventists⁶ bring to the topic.

In the decades following the Great Disappointment of 1844, the Millerites who organized the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the 1860s and those who joined them eventually embraced what amounts to a Wesleyan view of the Christian life. They came to appreciate the importance of conversion, or the “new birth,” and invoke the distinction between justification and sanctification to identify, respectively, the beginning of the Christian life, with its instantaneous transformation of the sinner’s relationship to God, and the ongoing process of growing in grace toward the goal of perfection.

The turning point in this development occurred at the General Conference session of 1888, where two younger members of the Church, A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner, made a series of presentations on the topic of righteousness by faith. There are no extensive records of what Jones and Waggoner said, but it is generally accepted that they argued that we are saved, not by our own righteousness—not by our efforts to keep the law of God—but by the righteousness of Christ. This posed a challenge to many traditional Adventists, for whom the remnant of the biblical book of Revelation, viewed as a prophetic precedent for the Advent Movement, is identified by two important characteristics: they keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.⁷ This deeply held conviction, along with differences in temperament and age—Jones and Waggoner were in their thirties—contributed to a spirit of confrontation.

Following the crisis of 1888, a number of Adventists, including some prominent leaders, wrestled with the tension between the notion of salvation by grace and the historic Adventist emphasis on the importance of keeping the Law of God, specifically, the importance of keeping *all* of the Ten Commandments. Ever since, Adventists have been discussing and

⁶Subsequent uses of the word “Adventist” variously refer to members and beliefs of Seventh-day Adventist Church.

⁷“And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 12:17 KJV).

debating just what the message of 1888 was and—with equal fervor—whether or not the church has ever really accepted it.⁸

Ellen White—Adventism's most influential figure—was among those who welcomed the message of Jones and Waggoner and in the years following she devoted increasing attention to the experience of salvation.⁹ Her writings from the 1890s in particular are noteworthy for their extensive discussion of the life and ministry of Jesus and the dynamics of a personal relationship with God. What many regard as her most appealing books appeared during this decade: *Steps to Christ* in 1890—her most widely read book; *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing* in 1896—her comments on the Sermon on the Mount; *The Desire of Ages* in 1898—her book on the life of Christ; and *Christ's Object Lessons* in 1900—a devotional commentary on the parables of Jesus. And her most succinct statement regarding justification and sanctification comes from 1895: "The righteousness by which we are justified is imputed; the righteousness by

⁸In 1988, various SDA periodicals devoted commemorative issues to 1888, including the *Adventist Review* and *Ministry: International Journal for Clergy*. For a book-length treatment of the conference and its significance, see L. E. Froom, *Movement of Destiny* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Association, 1971). For the views of two Adventists who are critical of the SDA Church's interpretation of the message of 1888, see Donald K. Short and Robert J. Wieland, *1888 Re-examined: One Hundred Years in Retrospect* (Paris, OH: The 1888 Message Study Committee, 1989).

⁹It is well known that Ellen White grew up as a Methodist, though her family left their church when they became involved in the Millerite movement. As for John Wesley, Ellen White speaks of him in glowing terms in her most influential book, *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan* (1888, 1911). After his conversion, she writes, "Wesley's life was devoted to the preaching of the great truths which he had received—justification through faith in the atoning blood of Christ, and the renewing power of the Holy Spirit upon the heart, bringing forth fruit in a life conformed to the example of Christ" (256). And she concludes her chapter on "Later English Reformers" with this tribute: "[W]hile preaching the gospel of the grace of God, Wesley, like his Master, sought to 'magnify the law, and make it honorable.' Faithfully did he accomplish the work given him of God, and glorious were the results which he was permitted to behold. At the close of his long life . . .—above half a century spent in itinerant ministry—his avowed adherents numbered more than half a million souls. But the multitude that through his labors had been lifted from the ruin and degradation of sin to a higher and a purer life, and the number who by his teaching had attained to a deeper and richer experience, will never be known till the whole family of the redeemed shall be gathered into the kingdom of God. His life presents a lesson of priceless worth to every Christian" (264).

which we are sanctified is imparted. The first is our title to heaven, the second is our fitness for heaven.”¹⁰

When it comes to sanctification, and the related topic of perfection, we find some interesting points of comparison between the views of Wesley and Ellen White.¹¹ One is a common emphasis on the progressive nature of sanctification. While justification involves an immediate change in a person’s status before God,¹² sanctification is ongoing. As Ellen White says, “Sanctification is not the work of a moment, an hour, a day, but of a lifetime.”¹³ She emphasized this characteristic in response to the view of some in her day that sanctification can be fully realized here and now. Besides noting that instantaneous sanctification does not harmonize with the biblical description of sanctification, she also criticized this concept because it easily becomes a pretext for spiritual pride and for disregarding the commandments of God.¹⁴ Those who believe they are already sanctified often show little interest in the fruits of a godly life.

There are also similarities in the sort of attention that Wesley and Ellen White both give to the practical side of godly living. Several years ago Dean Blevins, of Nazarene Theological Seminary, acquainted me with Wesley’s rules for the Methodist Band Societies, gatherings of people who dedicated themselves to mutual spiritual improvement. At their weekly meetings, members of the Societies were not only expected to confess their faults to one another, but also—and this startled me—to confront other people with *their* faults, and to do so, in Wesley’s precise words “plain and home.”

The practice of calling on people to frankly confront their personal faults, failures, and persistent shortcomings, illuminates the character of some of Ellen White’s writings, in particular her “testimonies for the church.” Running to nine volumes, this series represents the most exten-

¹⁰White, *Review and Herald*, June 4, 1895 (quoted in *Messages to Young People*, 35).

¹¹For a previous discussion of Ellen G. White’s views on sanctification, see Richard Rice, “Sanctification and Perfection: Another Look,” *Ministry* (June, 1984), 7-8, 11.

¹²“Justification is a full, complete pardon of sin. The moment a sinner accepts Christ by faith, that moment he is pardoned.” (*SDA Bible Commentary, Ellen White Comments*, on Rom, 5:1, 1071).

¹³White, *The Faith I Live By*, 116; cf. White, *The Great Controversy*, 470; White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 560.

¹⁴White, *The Great Controversy*, 471ff.

sive collection in her writings. And in the various “testimonies” they contain, Ellen White weighs in on institutional and personal failings, “plain and home,” we might say. So direct are many of these letters that they make for uncomfortable reading today. But viewing them as an application of the Wesleyan concern for holiness puts them in a new light. Individual spiritual needs are given pointed attention, specific diagnosis, and detailed prescription, because what applies to certain individuals, Ellen White apparently believed, applies to others as well, and ultimately to the church as a whole. For both Wesley and Ellen White, evidently, the pursuit of holiness, the never ending work of sanctification, calls for continual attention to the faults and failures that afflict us.¹⁵

When it comes to the specific theme of perfection, we find that Ellen White, like Wesley, applies the term to Christian growth in two different ways—with reference both to Christian life as a whole and to the ultimate goal of the process. At times she speaks of growth *in* perfection, as when she writes, “At every stage of development of our life may be perfect.”¹⁶ At other times she speaks of growth *towards* perfection. “Glorious is the hope before the believer as he advances by faith toward the heights of Christian perfection!”¹⁷

The idea that Christians should direct their lives toward the goal of perfection raises the further questions of whether they can attain this goal; and if so, when they can or will reach it—matters that also concerned both John Wesley and Ellen White. To cite Mathews again, there was a shift in Wesley’s thinking about perfection from the 1730s and 1740s to the 1750s and 1760s. The negative language of the former period—freedom from sin, fear, doubt, guilt, etc.—gave way to more positive language, as when he described Christian perfection as the presence of love filling the heart.¹⁸

In this connection, it is helpful to note that the idea of “goal” can function in two different ways. It may refer either to an ideal objective, or on the other hand, to a practical or realistic one. To illustrate, a sailor off the coast of Southern California may direct his boat toward a star on the horizon, not because he hopes to reach it but because travelling toward it

¹⁵The more Adventists become acquainted with Wesleyan history, this may suggest, the more we may understand our own.

¹⁶White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, 65.

¹⁷White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 533.

¹⁸Mathews, “John Wesley’s Idea,” 31.

keeps him on the right course. In contrast, he may sail toward a certain landmark, such as Catalina Island, because it is his actual destination. In different ways, both the star and his landmark serve as goals to the navigator, although he expects to reach the goal eventually in the one case, but not in the other. If we think of Christian life as a journey toward the goal of perfection of character, the question is whether perfection represents a destination that believers could actually reach at the some point in time or instead an ideal, which, like the navigator's star, keeps them on the right course throughout their journey.

We can find evidence for both views in Ellen White's writings. She variously describes perfection as an obligation *and* a possibility, or a promise. On the one hand, she states, "The Lord requires perfection from his redeemed family. He expects from us the perfection Christ revealed in his humanity."¹⁹ On the other hand, she applies words like *may* and *can* to perfection. "God calls upon us to reach the standard of perfection and places before us the example of Christ's character. In his humanity, perfected by a life of constant resistance to evil, the Savior showed that through cooperation with divinity, human beings *may* in this life attain a perfection of character. This is God's assurance to us that we, too, *may* obtain complete victory."²⁰

Statements like this appear to describe perfection as a practical possibility, an objective we can actually reach in this life. And if this were all Ellen White said, we could naturally conclude that some will do so. Another sort of statement she makes, however, warns us against drawing this conclusion. For when she describes the actual results of Christian growth, she indicates that God's people always come short of perfection. Thus she writes, "so long as Satan reigns, we shall have self to subdue, besetting sins to overcome; so long as life shall last, there will be no stopping place, no point which we can reach and say, I have fully attained."²¹

This brings us to yet another point of comparison between Wesley and Ellen White—namely, the role of what we might call "self-assess-

¹⁹White, *Child Guidance*, 477. Also: "God requires perfection of his children. His law is a transcript of his own character, and it is the standard of all character" (White, *Christs Object Lessons*, 315).

²⁰White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 531. Cf.: "Jesus revealed no qualities, and expected and exercised no powers, that men may not have thought faith in him. His perfect humanity is that which all his followers may possess" (White, *The Desire of Ages*, 664). Emphasis added.

²¹White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 560, 561.

ment” in the Christian life—to use an irritatingly current academic term. To quote Mathews once again, “Wesley’s ‘perfect’ Christians in fact become increasingly aware of their physical, moral, psychological, emotional, intellectual and spiritual weaknesses and imperfections, and thus increasingly conscious of their total dependence upon God’s grace and mercy.”²² Similarly, according to Ellen White, no true Christian will ever claim to be perfect: “We are never to rest in a satisfied condition, and cease to make advancement, saying, ‘I am saved.’ . . . No sanctified tongue will be found uttering these words till Christ shall come.”²³ Indeed far from claiming perfection, Christians will discover more and more ways in which they need to change: “The closer you come to Jesus, the more faulty you will appear in your own eyes.”²⁴ The closer we come to perfection, it seems, we will perceive ourselves as farther and farther away from it.²⁵

Does Ellen White contradict herself? If we will never reach a point where we can accurately claim perfection, why say that we can become perfect? Conversely, if we *can* become perfect, why say we will always have besetting sins to overcome? In response, it may be helpful to note that in none of her statements on the topic is Ellen White directly addressing the question, will we or won’t we become perfect in this life? Instead, she apparently intends these contrasting statements to serve distinctly different purposes.

One possibility is that these two types of statements were intended for people who had different personal problems. One group, for example, may speak to those who underestimated God’s expectations, satisfying themselves with a low level of spiritual achievement, or assuming that once they had accepted the offer of salvation, there was nothing more to be concerned about. Another group of statements may have been directed

²²Mathews, “John Wesley’s Idea,” 51.

²³White, *Selected Messages*, 1:314. “Sanctification is not the work of a moment, an hour, a day, but of a lifetime. It is not gained by a happy flight of feeling, but is the result of constantly dying to sin, and constantly living for Christ. Wrongs cannot be righted nor reformations wrought in the character by feeble, intermittent efforts. It is only by long, persevering effort, sore discipline, and stern conflict that we shall overcome” (White, *The Faith I live By*, 116).

²⁴White, *Steps to Christ*, 64.

²⁵See also this statement: “The more our sense of need drives us to Him and to the word of God, the more exalted views we shall have of His character, and the more fully we shall reflect His image” (*Ibid.*, 65).

to those who were discouraged by the height of God's expectations, or disillusioned by previous failures. To such individuals Ellen White was saying, "Take heart. There is no limit to what the power of God can do in your lives." Then there may be a third group—those who were overly impressed with their spiritual accomplishments, assuming that they had reached all that God expected of them and no longer needed to be concerned with their spiritual growth.

There's another way to construe these varying statements as well. Instead of, or in addition to, applying them to the spiritual misconceptions of different people, suppose we construe these statements as referring to factors that belong within the outlook of every individual Christian. In this vein, they suggest that a Christian's experience ideally includes the simultaneous cultivation of several different attitudes: (a) an increasing appreciation for the height of God's standard, (b) a growing confidence in God's sanctifying power, and (c) a deepening distrust of one's own abilities. On the one hand, we need the confidence that by God's grace we can reach the high standards that God has set for us. Consequently, to the question, *can* we become perfect? The Christian answers, Yes, expressing trust in God. However, to the question, *have* you become perfect? The Christian answers, No, expressing distrust in herself. If one or the other of these elements is missing—trust in God or distrust of self—an important balance within one's spiritual life will be lost, and faith could easily give way to either discouragement or presumption.

From this perspective, Ellen White's statements affirming the possibility of perfection serve the purpose of encouragement, rather than prediction. They refer to an ideal that gives direction and motivation to the Christian's experience rather than to a specific level of achievement that will actually be reached at some point during this life.

There is a final point of comparison between Ellen White and Wesley when it comes to perfection, and it may be the most important one of all. When we think about perfection as the goal of sanctification, we need to remember that perfection can be conceived in different ways. As people often think of it, perfection is primarily negative. It consists of avoiding certain forms of behavior, or successfully resisting temptation. And it is in this vein that people equate perfection with sinlessness and speak of sinless perfection. (As a devout thirteen year old, I recall, I kept a daily inventory of my mistakes and made a determined effort to confess each one specifically before going to sleep. My goal was to avoid committing sins and, when I failed, to clear the record of my mistakes in the books of heaven.)

But this is not the only way to think of perfection, and the transition Mathews notes in Wesley's accounts of perfection provide a helpful alternative. "For Wesley, in the end," says Mathews, quoting from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, perfection "is nothing higher and nothing lower than this: the pure love of God and man. . . . It is the love governing the heart and life, running through all our tempers, words, and actions." Indeed, "pure love . . . is the whole of scriptural perfection."²⁶

The life of Christ itself, the ultimate manifestation of a holy character, clearly evinces this. Although he remained free from sin, never yielding to temptation, such a statement by itself fails to express the essence of our Lord's spiritual accomplishments. For what equally, and perhaps more remarkably, distinguished his life from all others was the fact that love was the constant motive of his actions. He devoted his entire life to self-forgetful service to others. Not once did he ignore another's needs in order to meet his own, not once did he sacrifice another's welfare to his own advantage, and the crowning act of his entire ministry was to give his life for the salvation of humanity.²⁷ From this perspective, the essence of our Lord's spiritual accomplishments consisted, not in what he avoided doing, but in what he never failed to do. It was in the depth and constancy of his love.²⁸

This transition in Wesley's thought suggests a helpful way to navigate between interpretations of what may be the most controversial—and influential—statement Ellen White makes regarding perfection. "When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in his people," she wrote in 1900, "then he will come to claim them as his own."²⁹

Seventh-day Adventists trace their denominational origins to the Millerite movement of the mid-nineteenth century, and throughout their history Adventists have never lost a strong sense that Christ's return is near. For example, "Arise! Shine! Jesus is Coming!" was the theme of the General Conference in July, 2015 which brought together thousands of Adventists from around the world in San Antonio. Throughout their history as well, Adventists have wondered why the blessed hope has not yet

²⁶Mathews, "John Wesley's Idea," 51-52.

²⁷Mark 10:45.

²⁸One could argue that the claim that Jesus never yielded to temptation is comprehended in the affirmation of his constant love, on the ground that his fiercest temptations were to leave the path of unselfish service with all that this meant he would undergo.

²⁹White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, 69.

been realized. What accounts for the delay of the Advent? The conjunction of this concern with an appreciation for the importance of spiritual growth (=sanctification) characteristic of Wesleyan soteriology generates a pressing question. Is there a relation between the time of Christ's return and the moral and spiritual condition of the church?

A number of Adventists have concluded that there is. As they see it, the major factor accounting for the delay of the Advent is the failure of God's people to eliminate sin from their lives and reach a state of moral perfection. Christ has not returned because his people are not ready to meet him. They have not made sufficient spiritual and moral progress. The statement cited above is central to their thinking. Christ has not yet come, they conclude, because his character has not been perfectly reproduced in his people. That's what he's waiting for.

An influential proponent of this notion puts it this way. "Personally and institutionally, Adventism's highest priority is to reveal to the world, dark with misapprehension, the glory of God's character, and thus to vindicate His government."³⁰ By demonstrating the full effectiveness of God's saving work in their lives, these followers of Jesus will demonstrate God's true character before the universe and effectively refute the devil's charges against God. The central issue of the great controversy—whether or not God truly deserves the adoration and loyalty of the creatures—will finally be resolved.³¹

Other Adventists are leery of this "last generation theology," as it is sometimes called. They fear that it can lead to an unhealthy preoccupation with personal behavior, and detract from the necessity of depending on divine grace and forgiveness throughout our lives. Moreover, they believe that Wesley's concept of perfection as the "loving of God with all the heart," rather than the absence of sin, along with Wesley's acknowledgment that God's people will make mistakes as long as they live in a sinful world, can provide a helpful corrective to this behavior-centered

³⁰Herbert E. Douglass, *The End: Unique Voice of Adventists about the Return of Jesus* (Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1979), 145. Douglass served as associate editor of the *Adventist Review*, editor at Pacific Press and president of Atlantic Union College.

³¹To quote Douglass again, "Satan fears that this winsome, appealing character of such commandment keepers will hasten the Advent and his final destruction . . ." (*Why Jesus Waits: How the Sanctuary Message Explains The Mission of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church* [rev. ed.; Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1987], 45).

view of sanctification. Among other benefits, it suggests that reflecting God's character does not mean duplicating Christ's sinlessness, but providing a clear portrayal of God's love to the world. It has more to do with relationship than with private spiritual accomplishment.

Taking love, then, as the ideal of sanctification provides another interpretation of the influential statement quoted above. "When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in his people, then he will come to claim them as his own." What the consummation of the plan of salvation awaits, according to this construction, is a manifestation of Christ's love for others in the lives of his people. Only this will attract the world to what they have to say and enable them to complete their mission.

Whether or not Wesley himself connects sanctification, perfection, and second coming in a way that is anything like this I don't know. But the variations Mathews identifies in Wesley's views provide a valuable resource for those concerned with the growth in grace that, for Seventh-day Adventists and Wesleyans alike, plays a major role in the Christian life.

A WILD NIGHT AT THE RODEO: AN ENGAGEMENT WITH WILLIAM J. ABRAHAM ON HISTORIC WESLEYAN THEOLOGIES OF SCRIPTURE

by

Thomas H. McCall

I. Introduction

In his recent response to my essay on historic Wesleyan understandings of Scripture, William J. Abraham takes issue with my work on three points: he objects to my “odd conception of the ‘classical’ account of Scripture,” he criticizes my “awkward way of handling historical debates about pietism and Methodism,” and he really does not like my “misplaced reading of [Abraham’s] contrast between a soteriological conception of scripture and an epistemic conception of scripture.”¹ Along the way, he also thinks that I say things “designed to mask radical differences and to create intellectual guilt” (12), offer a “myth” (12) that is “bogus” (11), am “insensitive” (13), go “cherry-picking” (14), miss the point (18), and even am guilty of “cooking the books” (13, 23)!

William J. Abraham is rightly known not only as a rigorous and erudite philosophical theologian but also as a remarkably passionate, bold, and winsome evangelist. He has done probing and excellent work in many important areas of theology, and he is always concerned with the life and health of the church. Moreover, he is a theologian who works hard to edify and encourage others. In all these ways—and more beside—he is an example and inspiration to us all. Those who know him as friend are blessed indeed, and I am truly grateful to Professor Abraham for his encouragement, generosity, and support on various projects and initiatives over the years. I look to the future in hopes of further collaboration. But in his response to my essay, he not only fixates on a passing reference I made to the great steed Smoky the Cow Horse but also criticizes my work with the

¹William J. Abraham, “*Smoky the Cow Horse* and Wesleyan Understanding of Scripture,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* (2016), 8. Subsequent citations of this essay will be noted parenthetically within the text.

impressive verve and fervor that endears him to those of us privileged to know him. In this essay, I go beyond mere rejoinder to each of his main criticisms and allegations to engagement with the broader issues at stake (and, given his fascination with Smoky, I shall try to do so in such a way that encourages his interest in the theological resources of the Old West).² I conclude that while there indeed are substantive differences, I do not think that the distance between us is as great as he seems to think it is.

II. Soteriology at the Ok Corral: Abraham's Ambiguities Again

Abraham does not like the assumption with which I began my essay; as we shall soon see, he denies that there ever was a "classical" view of scripture (as we shall also see, his denial does not rise very far above the level of mere assertion). He does not like my interpretation of the Wesleyan tradition. And he *really* does not like my engagement with his earlier work on the topic. He refers to it as my "misplaced reading" of his account of these issues (15).

He says that I find what I take to be a "fatal ambiguity" in his work (16). Abraham is partly correct here; I do find ambiguity in important areas, but I do not think that it is in any way "fatal." If I thought that it were fatal, I would not bother with efforts at disambiguation. But disambiguation is exactly what I try to do in my essay. Alas, Abraham takes issue with my efforts. Reflecting on Abraham's claims that we need a doctrine that is "soteriological rather than epistemological in outlook," I originally noted that what he means by "epistemology" is not as clear as it might be. He does, however, say that epistemic criteria are "means of demarcating truth from falsehood, reality and illusion, rationality from irrationality, knowledge from opinion" (16).³

²I leave to the side several issues that are irrelevant to my arguments. Concerns about the overall volume in which my essay appears, the view of B. B. Warfield, and the convictions and (perceived) tone of the volume's editor (who need not be interpreted as saying that all who disagree with him are idolaters but who could be understood to be describing a general state of affairs culturally) have nothing to do with the claims that I make or the arguments offered in support of them. Moreover, speculation about the psychological states and motivations of people who may buy and read the book is an unfortunate distraction—and one that is not well-supported (serious work in sociology or social psychology would be interesting and might support Abraham's speculative claims, but, alas, he offers nothing along these lines).

³He grants that he talks this way "in oral presentation." I note that he also does so in *Canon and Criterion*—on the first page.

In my essay, I offer several ways of disambiguating his “soteriology-rather-than-epistemology” claim. One such way is this: scripture is all about salvation but is not making truth claims at all. Abraham says that this is “simply ludicrous” (17). Good; I think so too (and, to be clear, I never claimed that this was the proper interpretation of his proposal; indeed, it is so bad that I say that “surely this is not the proper interpretation”).⁴

I further offer as a possible interpretation, the notion that scripture be received as a kind of roughly-edited textbook in epistemology. Here is what I had to say about this possibility:

On another reading, Abraham means only to inveigh against reception of Scripture as epistemology per se. If so, then what he is primarily concerned about is the temptation to read the Bible as if it were a treatise on epistemology. If this is Abraham’s target, then it surely is – or would be – a worthy one. For to do so would be to set ourselves up for failure in epistemological endeavors, because the Bible as such simply is not concerned with the familiar problems of perception, warrant, justification, and the like. Much worse, we would easily miss the importance of the content of Scripture if we were to read it this way.⁵ To trawl through the Gospels looking for arguments for the right view of epistemic justification, or to read the Prophets to find the right account of perception, would not only be a dead end—it could also easily cause us to miss the *Sache* of Scripture. Again, if this is Abraham’s target, then it surely is—or *would be*—a worthy one.

Would be? Unfortunately, however, there is a bit less here than meets the eye. This is not how Christians traditionally have read Scripture. More modestly, at least, Abraham’s long and fascinating narrative fails to demonstrate that any of the major traditions under his microscope have done this. He does not, so far as I can see, show that Christians were unsuccessful in attempting such an appropriation of Scripture. I would agree that such attempts would have been doomed to failure, and I would agree further that they would have been doubly harmful. But I don’t see that he has shown that we have evidence of such

⁴McCall, “Wesleyan Theology and the Authority of Scripture,” 190.

⁵This point is brought home forcefully by Nicholas Wolterstorff, “True Words,” in *But Is It True? The Bible and the Question of Truth*, eds. Alan G. Padgett and Patrick R. Keifert (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 34-43.

failure. Why not? Because he does not present us with evidence that any (or at least not all) of these major movements actually *tried* to do so. The various movements that feature in his narrative (at least many of them) surely are concerned with claims to the *truth* of the Christian faith, and Abraham is right to point out both that the strategies for ascertaining and defending this truth vary widely and in many cases must be judged finally to have failed. But he has not shown that any of them in fact *were* concerned with understanding the Bible as a handbook of epistemology. This would not be beating a dead horse—it would be flailing away at one that shares ontological status with *The Black Stallion*, *Smoky the Cow Horse*, and other fictive creatures of equine lore.⁶

Finally, we have rounded up the reference to Smoky the Cow Horse. We have also clarified another possible interpretation of Abraham's soteriology-rather-than-epistemology claim. Interestingly, Abraham says that it is "close to the quarry [he] is pursuing" (18), but he rejects it and says that I "simply miss the point" (18). I take this to be encouraging overall (well, at least as encouraging as missing the point can be), for in my essay I hoped that this was not Abraham's meaning: as I said, "surely there is a better way to understand Abraham."⁷

In my original essay, I offer another interpretation as this "better way." This is the possibility that Abraham means only that we should take the Bible to be primarily formational rather than informational (or, perhaps better, primarily soteriological rather than criteriological). But, alas, his response informs me that I have not yet lassoed the elusive mustang. He wants to claim less than the problematic options that I outlined, but he wants to claim something a good bit more than my unexciting suggestion. So he affirms that Scripture gives us information, but he denies that "giving information" means that "we should construe the text involved as an epistemic norm" (17). Unfortunately, however, this concept still seems skittish, for the precise meaning of "epistemic norm" (or "criterion") remains a bit ambiguous. Here is why: Abraham has said that epistemic criteria are "means of demarcating truth from falsehood" (16).⁸

⁶McCall, "Wesleyan Theology and the Authority of Scripture," 191.

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸Also in Abraham, *Canon and Criterion*, 1-2.

He also affirms that scripture makes truth claims. But he then denies that scripture should be understood as epistemic criteria (18-19).⁹ Trying to put this together, matters are still just vague enough that it is not readily apparent to me exactly how this is supposed to cohere. Without further explanation, it seems that Abraham is affirming the following:

(α) Scripture makes truth claims (which, presumably, serve to demarcate truth from falsehood);

(β) something that demarcates truth from falsehood is an epistemic criterion; and

(γ) Scripture is not, and does not contain, epistemic criteria.

While it is too much to claim that this is an inconsistent triad (I am serious about the “without further explanation” qualifier), this is confusing.

Abraham might admit that while epistemic criteria in fact do serve to demarcate truth from falsehood, there may be other ways to do this too; maybe all epistemic criteria do this work, but other things can, too. But it is not clear that this sort of move will offer enough help. To see this, consider the case of Orrin the reflective wrangler. Suppose that Orrin takes Genesis 1:1 to be making truth claims: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” Suppose further that Orrin takes this text to be asserting or entailing the following propositions (among others):

(G1) God exists.

(G2) God is the Creator of everything that is not God.

Suppose further that Orrin takes (G1)-(G2) to be true (and that such beliefs enjoy epistemic warrant or justification). If Orrin takes (G1) to be true, then Orrin has a defeater for some candidate-belief (\sim G1) that is inconsistent with (G1). Is it not then the case that Orrin has reason to reject as false a great many beliefs (e.g., atheism and pantheism)? Does not scripture then give Orrin a “means of demarcating truth from falsehood?” Is scripture not then “the relevant norm of truth in theology” (21)? And then is this not, by Abraham’s own account, what counts as “epistemic criteria?”

Or consider the case of Tyrel the mystical buckaroo. Sometimes while riding Smoky on night watch under the big sky when the Milky Way is ablaze, and sometimes when the luminous evening alpenglow casts its soft light over the sage and rimrock, the magnitude and wonder and beauty of it

⁹Abraham adds “in the sense allowed by general discourse in epistemology” (18-19)—but he never (at least so far as I can see) specifies just what this means. Thus my request for more clarity.

all fill Tyrel with a numinous awe. He wonders if it is an experience of the divine; he wonders if he might be experiencing a revelatory encounter with the Creator. But the charming schoolmarm Nellie keeps reading impressive books by the high-falutin' Professor Ditchkens to him and telling him that there is no Creator, and he also then wonders if his experiences are only illusory (or perhaps even delusional). And then one day, while reading Genesis 1:1, the "internal instigation of the Holy Spirit" leads him to believe that the conjunction of (G1)-(G2) is true (and, assuming "Reformed epistemology" for the moment, this testimony or instigation gives warrant).¹⁰ He now has a defeater for the notions that such experiences must be illusory, and he need not be worried by the schoolmarm's claims. Is this not an instance of the Bible providing "means of demarcating truth from falsehood" and "reality from illusion?" Is this not—on Abraham's own account of what these are—an "epistemic criterion?"

Abraham must have something else in mind. But what, more precisely, is it? I understand that Abraham affirms that "scripture conveys information that is true rather than false" (18). I get this, and I concur. I also understand that he does not want us to read the Bible as if it were a textbook on epistemology. I get this too, and I concur (and, I take it, so does pretty much everyone else). It is also clear to me that he does not want it to be construed as "an epistemic criterion in the sense allowed by general discourse in epistemology" (18-19). But exactly what *this* "sense" is remains less clear. Given what he has said elsewhere (about epistemic criteria as a means of demarcating truth from falsehood, etc.), more explanation would be helpful. To summarize my call for more clarity, consider

(δ) what the Bible affirms as true of *x* is true;

(ε) we can know that what the Bible affirms as true of *x* is true;

(ζ) we can use what the Bible affirms as true of *x* as a criterion of truth about *x* when considering other (and rival) claims to truth about *x*.

(δ) is a matter of ontology. If what the Bible affirms as true about *x* indeed is true of *x*, then it is true whether or not we know that it is true.¹¹ Orrin and Tyrel do not need to know that the conjunction of (G1)-(G2) is

¹⁰E.g., Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford University Press, 2000); idem, *Knowledge and Christian Belief* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2015).

¹¹Note that this formulation does not presuppose any doctrines of inspiration, infallibility, or inerrancy with respect to the Bible.

true for it to be true, nor do they need to know that the Bible teaches this for it to be true. (ϵ) is an epistemological claim; it is a claim about what we can know.¹² I take as safe the assumption that Abraham would not deny (ϵ); surely he would not deny that we can have knowledge of some proposition that the Bible affirms as true. But now it seems that (ζ) follows from (δ) and (ϵ)—and thus that the Bible functions criteriologically. For, given some x , if the Bible affirms as true something about x and we can know that what the Bible affirms as true of x is true of x , then it serves to demarcate truth from falsehood about x .¹³

III. Sons (And Daughters) of the Pioneers: The “Classical” Account Revisited¹⁴

Abraham forcefully denounces my summary of the “classical” account. He refers to it as an “odd conception” (10), says that any claims to serious or substantive continuity within the Christian tradition are “simply bogus” (11), and concludes that “the whole idea of a classical account of scripture is a myth” (12). Moreover, he thinks that my “aim here is to fault the critic on the grounds of being innovative, reformist, revisionist, or even heretical” (10). Indeed, I am trying to “create intellectual guilt” (12). I have no idea why he would make such claims about my “aim,” or how he would draw such conclusions. I do not *say* that this is my “aim,” nor do I say anything that actually *implies* this. Perhaps in his case that was the perlocutionary effect of what I said, but, in point of fact, my aim was something much more modest and much less sinister: it was simply to offer a concise but accurate summary of the historic teaching of the Christian tradition on the issue at hand. To do so, I took a formal statement from the largest Christian body, one that both claims continuity with earliest Christianity and works hard to substantiate such claims. At any rate, here is the offensive thing that I said:

¹²Note that this formulation does not presuppose any particular epistemological account of how it is that we come to know this.

¹³On the other hand, if he means “epistemic criteria” in a more formal sense (something closer to the textbook interpretation), then it is not obvious that they serve to “demarcate truth from falsehood” and “reality from illusion” at all. For taken more formally, such epistemic criteria would seem only to show us *how* to make such demarcations.

¹⁴By “classical” I mean simply that it is deeply traditional or mainstream in the Christian tradition. If this is too offensive, simply substitute “traditional.”

the books of both the Old and New Testaments in their entirety, with all their parts, are sacred and canonical because written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author and have been handed on as such to the Church herself . . . [and] since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching solidly, faithfully, and without error that truth which God wanted put into sacred writings.¹⁵

Abraham first complains that this is “seriously vague” (11), for it contains “significant qualifications and ambiguities” (11). But note that this is a complaint about the contents of the statement itself; it is not a historical judgment of how well this statement represents the tradition (whether or not Abraham is right that it is “seriously vague,” and whether or not some room for various proposals with respect to higher-resolution details might be a good thing). He also complains that it is not “mere repetition of what has been said in the past” (11). Well, yes, Abraham is right, it is not “mere repetition.” But while Abraham is correct, what he says is rather beside the point: most summaries are not mere repetitions, and at any rate one need not merely repeat to retain continuity.¹⁶

Abraham says that any claims to “robust continuity here [are] simply bogus” (11). Why would he say such a thing? Because, he avers, the common historical view has been nothing short of *dictation* as the means of inspiration, but my summary (drawn as it is from *Dei Verbum*) does not demand dictation. If I understand his point, it is something like: (T) any doctrine of Scripture that does not affirm dictation does not (or, alternatively and more strongly, *cannot*) enjoy “robust continuity” with the deeply traditional view.

But now I am confused: on one hand, Abraham is denying that there is any such thing as a doctrine of scripture held in common in the Christian tradition: “the whole idea of a classical account of scripture is a myth”

¹⁵*Dei Verbum: Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Solemnly Promulgated by His Holiness, Pope Paul VI on November 18, 1965* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1965), 9.

¹⁶I think that a good case could be made that mere repetition is neither necessary nor sufficient for continuity. But such a discussion would take us too far afield.

(12). But on the other hand, he is assuming just such a thing to deny that my summary is in continuity with it; because my summary does not satisfy (T) as a criterion, my claim that the summary represents the classical view is “totally bogus.” It is hard to see how Abraham can have it both ways. But at any rate, Abraham has given us no reason to accept (T) in the first place. Nor do I think that the prospects are bright that he will provide support for (T), for it seems highly unlikely that he will be able to produce any good arguments that one cannot have any robust continuity without also affirming dictation. Furthermore, it simply is not safe to assume (T). For, as Richard A. Muller has shown, Thomas Aquinas (hardly a marginal or obscure figure in the Christian tradition) takes a different approach. Aquinas is convinced that *Deus est auctor principalis Scripturae, homo autem instrumentum*—but he (following Albert Magnus) moved “away from a theory of simple verbal dictation.”¹⁷

Note that Abraham claims that “any claim to robust continuity here is simply bogus” (11, emphasis mine). Really? This a very strong claim indeed: any such claim is bogus. On an eminently plausible interpretation, the summary I drew from the Catholic tradition includes the following propositions (among others):

(A) the Bible is written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and has God as its author;

(B) the entirety of the Bible is inspired by the Spirit and has God as its author;

(C) the Bible teaches that truth which God wanted to communicate in the Bible;

(D) the claims that the Bible makes as true are utterly reliable and absolutely trustworthy (thus “faithfully” and “without error”).

I take it that each of these propositions is significant, and that any such continuity on these points would qualify as “robust.” But it is not hard to find commitments to each of (A)-(D) in the Roman Catholic and major Protestant theological traditions. This is not the place for extended arguments (which have, in any case, been made), but even a few examples

¹⁷Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725, Volume Two: Holy Scripture, the Cognitive Foundation of Theology*, second edition (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 41.

will serve to show this. Consider the following exhibits from earlier Roman Catholic theology:¹⁸

From the First Vatican Council: These books the church holds to be sacred and canonical not because she subsequently approved them by her authority after they had been composed by unaided human skill, nor simply because they contain revelation without error, but because, being written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author, and were as such committed to the church.¹⁹

Note that this text explicitly affirms (A) and (D) (and, in context, (B) and (C) too). Surely this should count as continuity.

From Pope Leo XIII's *Providentissimus Deus*: Because the Holy Spirit employed men as his instruments, we cannot therefore say that it was these inspired instruments who, perchance, have fallen into error, and not the primary author. For, by supernatural power, he so moved and impelled them to write – he was so present to them—that the things which he ordered, and those only, they, first, rightly understood, then willed faithfully to write down, and finally expressed in apt words and with infallible truth. Otherwise, it could not be said that he was the Author of the entire Scripture.²⁰

To be sure, Leo's encyclical also employs the language of “dictation”; clearly, Abraham is correct in his observation that dictation views have a place in the tradition (although, as we have seen, he is incorrect to conclude that this is *the* view). But while this would mean that Leo says more with respect to the details of *how* inspiration takes place, he certainly does not say *less than* the points I draw from the summary. Even a casual reader can see that this statement clearly endorses (A), (B), (C), and (D).

¹⁸By “earlier” I mean earlier in the modern era. I take as obvious enough to need no further substantiation the summary statement of Anthony N. S. Lane that in “the sixteenth century, Roman Catholic and Protestant alike accepted the inspiration, infallibility, and authority of Scripture; it was the interpretation of Scripture and the authority of the church that was the point of controversy,” “Roman Catholic Views of Biblical Authority from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present,” in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2016), 295. See further Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics Volume Two: Holy Scripture*, 28-29.

¹⁹Cited in Lane, “Roman Catholic Views,” 295.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 297.

Very significant points are being affirmed. This is continuity, and it is continuity that is robust.

Pushing the discussion back further, it is not at all hard to find theologians (both Protestant and Catholic, and before them in patristic and medieval theology) who affirm all of (A)-(D) as well as many points besides. Important work here has been done by serious historians such as Muller (whose massive work details the complex and variegated relations between medieval theology and the theology of the Reformers, on one hand, and between the major theologians of the Protestant Reformation and their scholastic descendants, on the other hand). As for the patristic background, Muller observes that while “the fathers do not provide us with a formal account of Scripture,” there nonetheless is “a consistent appeal to the inspiration and authority of Scripture throughout their writings . . .”²¹ He documents the views of medieval theologians such as Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure, Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Giles of Rome, Hervaeus Natalis, Henry of Ghent, Peter Aureole, Alphonsus Vargas, and John Duns Scotus on the inspiration, authorship, truthfulness, and authority of scripture, and he shows the widespread nature of the conviction that God is the “principal author” of scripture. Sadly, Abraham’s work (which makes sweeping historical judgments) does not learn from such historical scholarship.²² It is weakened by this neglect.²³ It would be tedious to engage in “mere repetition” of such work, but anyone who compares Abraham’s assertions with it will quickly see that while there is need for care and caution on these matters (e.g., we should not assume that the “Chicago Statement” is “merely repeating” the doctrines of the Reformers), it is obvious that commitment to (A)-(D) is both

²¹Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, Volume Two: Holy Scripture*, 25.

²²The first two volumes of Muller’s *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* cover prolegomena and revelation, and these amount to nearly one thousand pages of detailed work in primary (and often untranslated) sources (and while the second edition was not yet available, the first edition had been in print for six years at the publication of *Canon and Criterion*).

²³The index to Abraham’s *Canon and Criterion* (505) lists only one reference to Muller’s work—which is equivalent to the references to Smoky the Cow Horse in my essay. However, the index is incomplete: e.g., not only 125 n29 but also 129 n41, 135 n58, 148 n7, and 149 n8. Abraham shows appreciation for Muller’s work—which makes more baffling the fact that he did not learn these obvious lessons from it.

widespread and deep. In other words, such work also provides support for claims to “robust continuity.”

Of course many confessional traditions and individual theologians will also affirm *more* than (A)-(D). Fair enough, but that does not mean that there is no continuity—or that “any claim” to such is “totally bogus.” Nor does it mean that such continuity is not “robust.” The fact that they may not agree on all points of higher-resolution detail does not mean that they do not agree at all. Nor does it mean that they do not agree on matters of importance—it does not negate the possibility of “robust” agreement.

Abraham says that “the whole idea of a classical account of scripture is a myth” (12). I have no desire to paper over real and significant differences in doctrinal formulations about Scripture (or other matters) within the Christian tradition.²⁴ At the same time, however, it is a mistake to see this as a zero-sum game: either “mere repetition” without any developmental variety or “*any* claim to robust continuity [is] totally bogus.” Along with internal disagreements and elements of discontinuity, there is also real and substantial continuity. It is not hard to find this continuity. Considering the serious and rigorous nature of the work that has been done on such issues of continuity and discontinuity (again, such as that of Muller), we need more than the assertions made by Abraham. While there is much more that could be said (and, indeed, that *has* been said) on these matters, it should be obvious that Abraham’s charge—that *any* claim to robust continuity is “totally bogus”—simply is not defensible.

IV. Meanwhile, Back at the Ranch: Wesleyan Views Revisited

In my original essay, I looked at important Wesleyan theologians (especially from the oft-forgotten nineteenth century). Surveying a range of theologians (including John Wesley, Richard Watson, Thomas Ralston, Samuel Wakefield, Miner Raymond, William Burt Pope, Thomas O. Summers, and Randolph Sinks Foster), I concluded that “what is reasonably clear are these facts: first, that the early Wesleyans held to a high view of the inspiration and authority of the Bible and only much later began to distance themselves from it, and second, that it is deeply mistaken to claim that either ‘fundamentalism’ or ‘Calvinism’ was in any way respon-

²⁴For frank discussion of some of those differences *within* Roman Catholicism, see Anthony N. S. Lane, “Roman Catholic Views of Biblical Authority,” 292-317.

sible for basic Wesleyan commitments to the traditional doctrine of Scripture.”²⁵

Abraham does not like what I do here either. He refers to this as my “misplaced reading” (12) and “awkward way of handling” the sources (10). Whatever exactly this means is short of pellucid, but it seems safe to conclude that he does not think of it as a good thing. What is abundantly clear, however, is his charge that I am “simply cherry-picking the material to fit [my] case to provide a quick kill to the story [I find] unsatisfactory” (14). It really is disappointing that Abraham does not work to provide evidence for such a serious charge. So I ask: am I misreading my sources? Am I suppressing or twisting evidence from, say, Watson or Wakefield or Foster or Pope? If not, then I am not misrepresenting their views—and, accordingly, I am at least correct that many important Methodist theologians held to the classical view. If I am withholding such evidence, on the other hand, then I need correction. But I do not need unsubstantiated charges. Unfortunately, at this point this is all we have from Abraham.

Or am I withholding evidence from *other* sources—evidence that might be inconsistent with my thesis? Here Abraham at least gestures toward argument. First, he notes that I do not examine the statement on the Bible in the Articles of Religion of the Methodist Episcopal Church (13). He is correct; *mea culpa*, I do not do this in my essay. But the relevance of this escapes me, for an analysis of this article turns up nothing that is inconsistent with the classical view. So it is hard to see how this provides any support for Abraham’s charge of “cherry-picking.”

Abraham also mentions the important Methodist theologian Henry C. Sheldon. Although Abraham’s purpose in referencing Sheldon is not entirely obvious, this is interesting, for in my essay I also discuss Sheldon. I know that Sheldon does not hold to the classical view, and I make no effort to hide that fact. Instead, I reference his work to show that I am not the only one who interprets the broad sweep of nineteenth century Methodism as not only consistent with but also as committed to the deeply traditional or classical view. I cite Sheldon as one who exemplifies the changes—and indeed as one who celebrates those changes. But note that Sheldon himself recognizes that the doctrine of scripture underwent major revision within Wesleyan theology at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. He notes that

²⁵Thomas H. McCall, “Wesleyan Theology and the Authority of Scripture,” in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2016), 180.

For several decades Methodists, in common with other American Christians, have been aware of a conflict between two contrasted theories of the Bible. On the one hand is the high technical theory, which at the acme insists upon complete verbal inspiration of every part of Scripture, and in any case maintains the inerrancy or detailed infallibility of the Bible as originally written. On the other hand is the broader theory, which indeed cordially grants that the Bible contains the materials of a complete ethical and religious system, but renounces the notion of a detailed infallibility or inerrancy of every part, and places the stress upon the trend and outcome of the biblical teaching.²⁶

Sheldon makes his interpretation of the evidence plain: it “indicates that American Methodism began substantially upon the basis of the high technical theory, so far as that theory affirms inerrancy,” and he documents how the view remained influential into the latter part of the nineteenth century.²⁷ So in fact I *do* admit that Methodist theology eventually moved away from the traditional view; I do not ignore voices such as those of Sheldon. Ironically, in this case Sheldon confirms *my* historical argument: major theologians of Methodism in the nineteenth century affirmed (and in many cases stoutly defended) the classical view. But Abraham never even mentions my engagement with Sheldon, and the reader who only encounters Abraham’s article without also reading my essay might easily be led to think that I ignore Sheldon and neglect to notice those Methodist theologians who reject the classical view.²⁸

²⁶Sheldon, “Changes in Theology Among American Methodists,” *American Journal of Theology* (1906), 32.

²⁷*Ibid.*

²⁸As the scholarly reception of Abraham’s own work shows, his work has not been immune to similar criticisms. In a rather scathing review of *Canon and Criterion*, John Webster (Abraham’s “favorite” Reformed theologian) observes that “all too often, his narrative is insufficiently close to the ground,” and he concludes that Abraham is “clearly more anxious to present a coherent overall portrait than he is to register detail,” “Canon and Criterion: Some Reflections on a Recent Proposal,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* (2001), 231. He goes on to say that Abraham’s “narrative is largely silent about those aspects or agencies in Christian history which do not conform to the epistemic norm” (232), and he says of Abraham’s treatment of Calvin that it “leaves a good deal to be desired” (232), offers a “quite drastic misconstrual” that exhibits a “serious misunderstanding” (233), and at any rate is “alarmingly under-illustrated” (233). He expresses similar concerns about Abraham’s treatment of Aquinas, Luther, the Anglican tradition, and Barth.

Unfortunately, not only does Abraham charge me with “cherry-picking,” he goes even further: he accuses me of nothing short of “cooking the books” (13). Following common usage, I take “cooking the books” to be calculated misrepresentation; it is something that is both unethical and fraudulent.²⁹ It goes beyond mere misinterpretation or clumsiness to something that is intentionally dishonest—something for which one is culpable. Book-cooking is a violation of intellectual honesty and scholarly integrity. Unfortunately, however, Abraham makes this charge without showing that this is what I am doing—he simply asserts that I am “cooking the books.” Such an assertion is easy, but it is also—*sans* evidence—irresponsible and unfortunate.

Abraham has done nothing whatsoever either to overturn or undercut them, so I stand by my original claims about the history of Wesleyan theology. Throughout the eighteenth and most of the nineteenth centuries, major theologians of Methodism affirmed what I have called the classical view. Nor is this commitment limited to the work of the “ivory tower” theologians. Even a cursory glance at, say, the influential works of Phoebe Palmer will show that she really did think that “God said, and I believe it” (12). Like it or not, for better or worse, this simply is part of our history.

V. Conclusion: Legends of the Fall

To call Abraham’s rhetoric in his response “over-heated” is to denigrate and insult its truly impressive thermal capacities. He clearly does not share or appreciate my sympathies with the tradition, and he does not seem remotely favorable to the possibilities of retrieval (with respect to the doctrine of scripture). Given his previous work (in which he rides herd on a particular narrative about the place of biblical authority in the Christian tradition), this is not at all surprising. What is rather surprising is his vehement criticism of my historical work; I would have assumed that while we might disagree about the prescriptive or normative way forward, there is no need to tangle over the history of (primarily nineteenth century) Wesleyan theology. What is more surprising yet is the bellicosity with which Abraham makes his charges—a bellicosity that seems about inversely proportional to the level of support for those charges. Even so, I do not think that Abraham and I are nearly so far apart as he seems to

²⁹E.g., “Cooking the Books Law and Legal Definition,” *USLegal*, <https://definitions.uslegal.com/c/cooking-the-books%20/>.

believe. Concord between us should not be surprising; after all, we ride for the same brand. He quotes with approval—and, to my bewilderment, some astonishment—my conclusion that we should think of these matters as “*the Holy triune God giving Holy Scripture as a means of grace whereby the Holy Spirit transforms sinners into truly holy persons by uniting them to the incarnate Son*” (15). He even refers to it “as good a soteriological account of scripture as may be captured in under thirty words” (15). He says that he “nearly fell off his chair” when he read this. While grateful that he lasted more than eight seconds and was spared serious injury from being bucked off his chair, I do not understand why he would be so surprised. I do not accept the notion that there is any incompatibility between believing that scripture serves “to demarcate truth from falsehood and reality from illusion,” on one hand, and to form us spiritually, on the other hand. So I see no reason *not* to make such claims. In my essay I say that Abraham is “exactly right” to insist that “Scripture is given for soteriological purposes rather than to give us a storehouse of facts about God and the world.”³⁰ I stand by this conclusion. I also say that while Abraham’s work “raises some legitimate and important concerns,” such concerns give us no “compelling reason to abandon the classical view.”³¹ I stand by this conclusion too, and will do so until good arguments move me.

³⁰McCall, “Wesleyan Theology and the Authority of Scripture,” 192.

³¹Ibid., 193.

WAS JESUS EVER HAPPY? HOW JOHN WESLEY COULD HAVE ANSWERED

by

Rem B. Edwards

Over the centuries, much attention has been given to Jesus as a “suffering servant,” but the positive features of his inward constitution and the inherent value of his life for himself have been neglected, especially the question of his happiness. After I began to wonder about this, I found a few discussions of “Was Jesus happy?” on the internet, but none of these are particularly illuminating. The question, though, is interesting and important. This article will show how Wesleyans can answer this question affirmatively and intelligently—with the help of John Wesley.

In some sense, the suffering of Jesus cannot be overemphasized, but this may be done and has been done at the expense of, or to the neglect of, the positive values that were internal to and inherent within the life, experience, and constitution of Jesus. Without getting into or affirming any of the most disputed “facts” about the “historical Jesus,” this discussion will assume, with some New Testament scholars,¹ that a relatively non-controversial and historically reliable understanding of what Jesus was like, of his general personality and character, may be abstracted from the four Gospels. What Jesus was actually like within himself does have a significant bearing on the question of whether or not he was ever happy. Even if the real Jesus turns out to be too elusive to pin down, we can at least profit from an examination of Wesley’s understanding of “happiness” and how this might apply to ourselves. Before addressing the positive side of the life and inwardness of the Jesus of the Gospels, and how Wesley might assess his happiness, we must first ask: What is happiness?

At least two different concepts of the nature of “happiness” are present in Western thinking. First, the *hedonistic* understanding affirms that happiness consists of *nothing more than* as much pleasure as possible, and ideally no pain or suffering at all, over an extended period of time. Of

¹For example, Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospel* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990).

course, pleasures themselves differ in quality, some “higher” or “nobler” than others, as John Stuart Mill maintained,² and as Wesley earlier anticipated. Correspondingly, hedonistic unhappiness consists *only* of pains and sufferings, whether “physical,” that is, bodily localized, or “mental,” that is, psychological.

Second, the *eudaimonistic* understanding of happiness, dating back to Aristotle, is pluralistic. It includes pleasure along with a number of other happiness-making properties. Happiness consisting in actualizing our general human and uniquely personal potentials for *many* desirable “good for us” qualities, capacities, and relations. (Wesley would want to be sure that we are talking about actualizing our redeemed moral natures, not our sinful natures.) To avoid confusion with the hedonic view, this kind of happiness is often spoken of as “well-being,” “excellence,” “fulfillment,” “essence-actualization,” “self-realization,” etc. Actualizing pleasure is indeed one of our many desirable potentials. Pleasure is a very good thing, a very fulfilling thing, but pleasure *alone* does not constitute our complete well-being or happiness. Many additional “good for us” human capacities and properties are indispensable components of happiness, things like knowing, thinking, responsible choosing, diverse feelings and emotions, conscience and faithfulness to it, physical activities, adventure, sensory stimulation, desire satisfaction, and virtuous or moral motives, dispositions, and actions. Such things do not *produce* our happiness or well-being; their actualization *is* our happiness or well-being. All of these are typically accompanied by pleasures of some quality, but their positive happiness-value is far more than that of being mere sources of pleasure.

Correspondingly, eudaimonistic unhappiness includes but does not consist solely in pain and suffering. It also involves the loss, lack, absence, and the actualized contraries of eudaimonistic “good for us” properties, for example, the presence of ignorance, confusion, falsehood, evildoing, and miserable immoral dispositions, feelings, and “tempers” as Wesley called them.

Wesley himself identified our well-being or happiness with the redeemed, restored, and actualized potentials of the image of God within us. He wrote of “attaining all the image of God” and “advancing the image of God in us.”³ This usually begins, he thought, with a drastic and sudden

²See Rem B. Edwards, *Pleasures and Pains: A Theory of Qualitative Hedonism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979).

³Wesley, “Satan’s Devices,” *Works*, 2: 143.

inner transformation (a new birth), but he reluctantly recognized that significant inner spiritual changes may be only gradual and almost imperceptible. Actualizing the image of God within us definitely involves ongoing and lifelong growth in spiritual and moral beliefs, experiences, motives, sensitivities, dispositions, and behaviors, all of which are indispensable components of human happiness or well-being. Each of us can only do this in our own unique and distinctive ways. This moral and spiritual growth constitutes the sanctification process. Sanctification, *becoming* holy, requires God's grace, enablement, and cooperation with us, and our own individual efforts, choices, and collaboration with God.

Wesley subscribed to a pluralistic or eudaimonistic understanding of human "happiness" or "well-being."⁴ Happiness consists of actualizing an abundance of non-sensory pleasures, joys, and delights, along with many *additional* image of God internal capacities, likenesses, and relations. Here is his one of his definitions of "happiness": "And, first, without love nothing can so profit us as to make our lives happy. By happiness I mean, not a slight, trilling pleasure, that perhaps begins and ends in the same hour; but such a state of well-being as contents the soul, and gives it a steady, lasting satisfaction."⁵ Happiness included what Wesley identified as the "nobler" pleasures, but much more as well. Hereafter, "happiness" will connote eudaimonistic well-being, and "Was Jesus ever happy?" will be about this kind of abundant living.

A Wesleyan Argument for the Happiness of Jesus

Wesley *did not in fact* ask or answer, "Was Jesus ever happy?" What follows will show how Wesley *could have* made a strong case for regarding Jesus as a "happy servant" for much of his life—in addition to being a "suffering servant," a "man of sorrows, acquainted with grief." The main argument runs as follows:

1. The principle ingredients in eudaimonistic human happiness or well-being, as John Wesley correctly identified them, are: a. love and obedience to the love commandments; b. spiritual beliefs, knowledge, experiences, dispositions, virtues, sensitivities, and activities; c. moral beliefs, knowledge, experiences, dispositions, virtues, sensitivities, and activities,

⁴An expanded case for Wesley's eudaimonistic understanding of "happiness" is found in Rem B. Edwards, *John Wesley's Values—And Ours* (Lexington, KY: Emeth, 2013), 244-246.

⁵Wesley, "On Love," III, 4, *Works*, 4:386.

d. pleasures; enjoyments, joy, and e. freedom from as much pain, suffering, unhappiness, and loss as humanly possible. This may not be the whole story, but it will suffice for now.

2. Anyone who exemplifies these definitional components of happiness or well-being is indeed truly happy, at least to the extent and duration that these are present.

3. Jesus momentarily exemplified all of these components of happiness or well-being for most of his life, even if not during his passion and crucifixion.

4. Conclusion: Jesus was truly happy for most of his life.

The third point here makes no direct appeal to historical specifics about Jesus. Rather, it assumes that the four Gospels give us an accurate general knowledge of the overall *character* of Jesus during his life, ministry, and death. A common-sense understanding of human nature itself also supports some of the following characterizations of Jesus.

The first point above is the key to the argument and requires further explanation. Each theme below could be supported by many additional quotes from Wesley, but those given will suffice for present purposes.

According to Wesley, genuine human happiness or well-being consists in the following (and perhaps more).

a. Love and Obedience to the Love Commandments

Wesley thought that loving, in lived obedience to Jesus' two love commandments, is the most basic component of human happiness. Without love, no one can be happy. Christians are happy and joyful people because they are loving people,⁶ Wesley affirmed. (We might want to add that non-Christians who are loving people are also happy and joyful.) Their happiness consists largely in loving God and their neighbors, but not in loving the mindless things of the world, as do worldly people. People can love the wrong things. Most do, he thought. True happiness depends as much on *who and what* we love as on *that* we love, but all who love God, other people, and animals⁷ are happy people. As Wesley explained, "Does anyone imagine the love of our neighbor is misery, even the loving every man as our own soul? So far from it that next to the love of God this

⁶Wesley, "The Way to the Kingdom," *Works*, 1:223-224.

⁷Wesley scholars seem to neglect the great moral and religious significance that Wesley attached to animals. For an examination of Wesley's own radical Christian perspective on animals, see Edwards, *John Wesley's Values—And Ours*, 73-82.

affords the greatest happiness of which we are capable.”⁸ Loving not only fulfills our God-given essence or image, it also is downright enjoyable. Quoting another author, Wesley affirmed “The joy of loving, or of being loved.”⁹ He recognized “the pleasure of loving” (in those words) as not springing from self-love or “advantage to” oneself.¹⁰ No “reciprocal altruism” for Wesley! *Agape* isn’t long range self-interestedness.

In addition to being joyful or pleasant, unselfish love, *agape*, also renews and *fulfills* the most important, meaningful, and essential potentials of our God-given nature, of the image of God within us. Wesley had a very rich understanding of essential properties that make up the image of God within us. They consist in our being (1) *spirits* (immaterial souls) with (2) *self-motion*, (3) *understanding*, (4) *will* (desires, feelings, affections), and (5) *liberty* (free choice).¹¹ Under “will” he made a place for love as one of our essential image of God qualities. What theologian of consequence prior to Wesley, if any, ever affirmed that love is the image of God within us? (Almost all said, “reason.”) Wesley wrote, “But love is the very image of God: it is the brightness of his glory. By love man is not only made like God, but in some sense one with him.”¹² “Above all,” he wrote, “remembering that God is love, he [the Christian] is conformed to the same likeness. He is full of love to his neighbor: of universal love. . . .”¹³

As for the Jesus of the Gospels, would it really be too presumptuous to think that he was an intensely, constantly, and consistently loving person? He actually exemplified all the above image of God qualities. He was an embodied spirit capable of initiating his own movements and behaviors. He was capable of understanding and of increasing in knowledge and wisdom. He had a will, that is, all the normal desires, emotions, dispositions, and feelings that human beings usually have. He exercised

⁸Wesley, “The Important Question,” *Works*, 3:189.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰John Wesley, “A Plain Account of Genuine Christianity” in Albert C. Outler, ed., *John Wesley*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 185.

¹¹Wesley, “The General Deliverance,” *Works*, 2:438-439. These features of the image of God are also discussed elsewhere, for example, Wesley, “The End of Christ’s Coming,” *Works*, 2:474-475; Wesley, “The Good Steward,” *Works*, 2:284-285; Wesley, “On the Fall of Man,” *Works*, 2:409-410; Wesley, “The New Birth,” *Works*, 2:188.

¹²Wesley, “The One Thing Needful,” *Works*, 4:355. See also “The Righteousness of Faith,” *Works*, 1:205.

¹³Wesley, “A Plain Account of Genuine Christianity,” 184.

responsible liberty or freedom of choice. Most especially, Jesus was a loving and caring person. Wesley's view was that love and service to others fulfill human nature, God's moral image, as well as the law, including the two love commandments, which proclaim "Thou O man of God, stand fast in love, in the image of God wherein thou art made."¹⁴ The two love commandments are rock-bottom Christianity, Methodism, and "true religion."¹⁵ The Jesus of the four Gospels actually obeyed the love commandments. He loved God most of all, himself as he loved others, and others as he loved himself. We have no good "historical" reasons for thinking otherwise. If so, as an intensely, constantly, and consistently loving person, Jesus was indeed an intensely, constantly, and consistently happy person. Given his understanding of the very nature of happiness, Wesley could have easily affirmed that Jesus was indeed a happily loving person, but there is more.

b. Spiritual Beliefs, Knowledge, Experiences, Dispositions, Virtues, and Activities

Without being naïve about the evils that befall us, Wesley was convinced that properly religious people are happy, and unreligious people are unhappy. Toward the end of his sermon on "The Important Question," Wesley concluded, "It has been proved . . . that religion is happiness, that wickedness is misery. . . ."¹⁶ He rejected the idea that Christians must be miserable in this world so they can be happy in the next. The real options, he argued, are between unhappiness both here and hereafter, and happiness both here and hereafter. The important question is: "Will you be happy here and hereafter—in the world that now is, and in that which is to come? Or will you be miserable here and hereafter in time and in eternity?"¹⁷

Wesley advised, "Singly aim at God. . . . Pursue one thing: happiness in knowing, in loving, in serving God."¹⁸ Further, "But true religion, or a heart right toward God and man, implies happiness as well as holiness."¹⁹

¹⁴Wesley, "The Righteousness of Faith," *Works*, 1:205.

¹⁵Wesley, "A Plain Account of Genuine Christianity," 184-185; Wesley, "The Character of a Methodist," *Works*, 9:35, 37-38; Wesley, "The Way to the Kingdom," *Works*, 1:221-224.

¹⁶Wesley, "The Important Question," *Works*, 3:197.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 3:197.

¹⁸Wesley, "On Dissipation," *Works*, 3:123.

¹⁹Wesley, "The Way to the Kingdom," *Works*, 1:223.

Real Methodists are “happy in God, yea always happy. . . .”²⁰ Christians are more likely to live a happy life than non-Christians because spirituality is an essential happiness-making and pleasure-giving property, and over time truly religious people successfully actualize its potentials, with God’s help. They find both image of God fulfillment *and* pleasure in loving God plus every creature God has made. They take “pleasure in God.”²¹ They heed Wesley’s advice: “One design ye are to pursue to the end of time—the enjoyment of God in time and eternity.”²²

Enduring happiness, Wesley argued, partly involves “the pleasures of religion,” specifically, pleasures derived from “the love of God, and of all mankind,” and from the more enduring joy, delight, comfort, peace, gratitude, and rejoicing that such love brings.²³ He regarded such pleasures as much more lasting and deeply satisfying than the fleeting pleasures of imagination and sensations. He called them “nobler enjoyments,” which are nobler than “low” sensory pleasures.²⁴

The Jesus of the Gospels was unquestionably a profoundly spiritual or religious person. He was intensely open and attuned to God and obedient to God’s loving will. He completely identified himself with God, was truly “God-intoxicated,” and found both essence fulfillment and enjoyment in his own spiritual beliefs, knowledge, experiences, dispositions, sensitivities, virtues, and activities. According to Wesley,

Now, to love God, in the manner the Scripture describes, in the manner God himself requires of us, and by requiring engages to work in us, to love him as the one God; that is, “with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind, and with all our strength.” It is to desire God alone for his own sake, and nothing else, but with reference to him; to rejoice in God; to delight in the Lord; not only to seek, but find happiness in him; to enjoy God as the chiefest among ten thousand; to rest in him as our God and our all—in a word, to have such a possession of God as makes us always happy.²⁵

²⁰Wesley, “The Character of a Methodist,” *Works*, 9:35.

²¹Wesley, “The More Excellent Way,” *Works*, 3:265.

²²Wesley, “The Circumcision of the Heart,” *Works*, 1:408.

²³Wesley, “The Important Question,” *Works*, 3:185.

²⁴Wesley, “A Plain Account of Genuine Christianity,” 186; Wesley, “Spiritual Idolatry,” *Works*, 3:106; Wesley, “Original Sin,” *Works*, 2:180.

²⁵Wesley, “Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, IX,” 5, *Works*, 1:635.

Though not written about him, wouldn't this be a good description, an accurate description, of Jesus himself, of his character, as portrayed in the Gospels? If so, Wesley could have concluded that Jesus was a profoundly happy person because he was profoundly spiritual in all such ways.

c. Moral Beliefs, Knowledge, Experiences, Dispositions, Virtues, Sensitivities, and Activities

Love is not the only moral/spiritual virtue that involves beliefs, knowledge, experiences, dispositions, sensitivities, and activities, but it is worthy of the special attention already given to it. Morality was not totally separated from spirituality in Wesley's mind, but there is more to morality than love alone. Love to God and all mankind is the "one, single ground" of all moral virtues,²⁶ their source or fount. But there are additional moral virtues, and actualizing and acting upon them is an essential part of both image of God fulfillment-happiness and pleasure-happiness. The *moral* imitation of God (and Jesus) looms large in Wesley's Christian ethics. Wesley's affirmed that the Christian "knows the most acceptable worship of God is to imitate him he worships, so he is continually laboring to transcribe into himself all his imitable perfections: in particular, his justice, mercy and truth, so eminently displayed in all his creatures."²⁷ God works, and we "labour" together with God toward actualizing all possible moral and spiritual virtues. We *strive* for all Christian perfections, for sanctification, for holiness, even if we succeed only by degrees, and only with God's help. In many writings, Wesley offered extended lists of moral virtues, but consider this one.

And this universal, disinterested love is productive of all right affections. It is fruitful of gentleness, tenderness, sweetness; of humanity, courtesy and affability. It makes a Christian rejoice in the virtues of all, and bear a part in their happiness at the same time that he sympathizes with their pains and compassionates their infirmities. It creates modesty, condescension, prudence—together with calmness and evenness of temper. It is the parent of generosity, openness and frankness, void of jealousy and suspicion. It begets candor and willingness to believe and hope whatever is kind and friendly of every man, and invincible

²⁶Wesley, "To the Inhabitants of Ireland," *Works*, 9:284.

²⁷Wesley, "A Plain Account of Genuine Christianity," 184.

patience, never overcome of evil, but overcoming evil with good. . . . The same love is productive of all right actions. . . . It constrains him to do all possible good, of every possible kind, to all men; and makes him invariably resolved in every circumstance of life to do that, and that only, to others, which supposing he were himself in the same situation, he would desire they should do to him.²⁸

As for the relevance of “doing good” and “being good” to happiness, Methodists teach “that there is an inseparable connection between virtue and happiness; that none but a virtuous (or, as they usually express it, a religious) man can be happy.”²⁹ Virtuous living is very enjoyable, as well as image of God fulfilling. “Now if the doing good [gives] so much pleasure to one who acted merely from natural generosity, how much more must it give to one who does it on a nobler principle, the joint love of God and his neighbor? It remains, that the doing all which religion requires will not lessen, but immensely increase our happiness.”³⁰ Once again, it “affords the greatest happiness of which we are capable.”³¹

Applied to the Jesus of the Gospels, Wesley’s account of the many moral virtues that flow from love seems to be accurately descriptive of his general character. Jesus highly, perhaps perfectly, exemplified all the moral virtues, and this is further evidence that he was a profoundly happy person. Wesley could have said that because of his exemplary ethical beliefs, virtues, motives, dispositions, sensitivities, and deeds, Jesus had “all the happiness of which [he was] capable.”

d. Pleasures, Enjoyments, Joy

Wesley thought that Christians have a much better chance than non-Christians at both essence fulfillment and hedonic enjoyment. He was definitely not against “the pursuit of happiness.” He did not use this exact phrase, but he did write of “they that pursue happiness,”³² and of “Pursuing happiness, but never overtaking it.”³³ Wesley was all for happiness, understood as composed in part of pleasures, but not pleasures alone. He repeatedly affirmed and never denied the goodness of pleasure as such.

²⁸Ibid., 185.

²⁹Wesley, “To the Inhabitants of Ireland,” *Works*, 9:283.

³⁰Wesley, “The Important Question,” 3, *Works*, 3:191.

³¹Ibid., 189.

³²Wesley, “On Mourning for the Dead,” *Works*, 4:239.

³³Wesley, “Spiritual Idolatry,” *Works*, 3:100.

He wrote, "We no more affirm pleasure in general to be unlawful than eating and drinking."³⁴ But, he thought, most people go about pursuing pleasure in the wrong way; worldly people live mainly to experience nothing more than the world and its sensory pleasures, or imaginary and social manifestations of them. He divided the pursuit of worldly pleasures into three groups, *pleasures of sense* ("the desires of the flesh"), *pleasures of the imagination* ("the desire of the eye"), and *pleasures of high social honor, class, or status* ("the pride of life").³⁵ Obviously, much more could be said about each of these. Worldly persons live only for worldly pleasures, many intellectuals only for mental pleasures, but they do not live to enjoy or be enriched by grace, faith, spirituality, love, moral virtue, and "works of mercy." To this theme he gave much attention.³⁶

Wesley vigorously defended the importance of pleasure, but not exclusively or primarily the sensory pleasures of the world. One of his objections to the pursuit of "low," worldly, sensual pleasures was that they are fleeting, transient, disappointing, and ultimately unsatisfying and unfulfilling. Said Wesley, "You cannot find your long-sought happiness in all the pleasures of the world . . . which may amuse, but cannot satisfy."³⁷ Wesley did not say so, but one very serious problem with loving "mere things" is that they cannot love us back.

At times, Wesley may have underestimated the positive contributions of sensory enjoyments to a Christian's, or anyone else's, genuine happiness. After all, our senses and their objects were also created for us by God, as was sensory pleasure itself. Wesley's most serious objection was actually to futile efforts to enjoy the world without God, or in the absence of God, i.e., without an awareness of God's presence in sensory objects and processes, and of God's expectations for us regarding them. He did not object to enjoying the world under or within God. Any Christian, he wrote, "may smell a flower, or eat a bunch of grapes, or take any other pleasure which does not lessen but increase his delight in God."³⁸ Again, "The man who loves God feels that 'God hath given him all things

³⁴Wesley, "Letter to Mr. Fleury," *Works*, 9:393.

³⁵Wesley discussed these in many writings. See, for example, Wesley, "Spiritual Idolatry," *Works*, 3:105-111; Wesley, "An Israelite Indeed," *Works*, 3:282-283; Wesley, "The Important Question," *Works*, 3:183-185, 192-194; Wesley, "The Circumcision of the Heart," *Works*, 1:409, and elsewhere.

³⁶See Edwards, *John Wesley's Values—And Ours*, 90-104.

³⁷Wesley, "Spiritual Worship," *Works*, 3:101.

³⁸Wesley, "The Reformation of Manners," *Works*, 2:318.

richly to enjoy.' He delights in his works, and surveys with joy all the creatures which God hath made. Love increases both the number of his delights, and the weight of them, a thousandfold. For in every creature he sees as in a glass the glory of the great Creator."³⁹ Not viewing and experiencing all things in God, and God in all things, was what he called "practical atheism." God's omnipresence means that God pervades everything, is present everywhere, though most of us are insensitive to that.⁴⁰

God is in all things, and that we are to see the Creator in the glass of every creature; that we should use and look upon nothing as separate from God, which indeed is a kind of practical Atheism; but, with a true magnificence of thought, survey heaven and earth, and all that is therein, as contained by God in the hollow of His hand, who by His intimate presence holds them all in being, who pervades and actuates the whole created frame, and is, in a true sense, the soul of the universe.⁴¹

Few people have seriously considered pleasure within the life and experience of Jesus. We have many words for experiencing pleasure—enjoyment, joy, having fun, etc. The Gospels may have neglected this, but we can ask: Did Jesus ever have any fun? Did he ever enjoy anything? Human nature itself may provide us with a good answer. If Jesus was as "fully human" as orthodoxy insists, surely he did. Since most children with loving parents are playful, inquisitive, venturesome, joyful, and affectionate, we can safely assume that Jesus had a happy childhood. The Gospels give us no reasons for thinking that he was not physically and mentally healthy, so we can safely assume that he regularly experienced all the ordinary human joys and exuberance of vibrant living. He enjoyed eating, drinking, and dining with outcasts and sinners. Perhaps he enjoyed defying the strict religious purity conventions of his day. As fully human, he had both mundane and sublime goals, achieved many of them, and gained countless satisfactions thereby.

Most of us take great joy (pleasure) and find great personal fulfillment in helping others, no matter how, and surely Jesus did as well. Most of us take great pleasure in actually loving both God and others intensely, and in acting accordingly. If he was fully human, Jesus must have done so as well. Most of us find much hedonic delight in humor and laughter.

³⁹Wesley, "The Love of God," *Works*, 9:343.

⁴⁰Wesley, "On the Omnipresence of God," *Works*, 4:39-47.

⁴¹Wesley, "The Righteousness of Faith," *Works*, 1:205.

Others have asked whether Jesus ever laughed or had a sense of humor, with some positive results. Wesley's view was that the key elements that *define* human happiness—love, spirituality, and morality—are both pleasant and image of God fulfilling. Jesus identified with God within himself and in others, and he had innumerable enjoyable and fulfilling identification experiences over the course of his lifetime. As fully human, Jesus experienced all of the interests, desires, emotions, and feelings that we all experience, and he knew both their satisfactions and their frustrations. As Wesley indicated, "Our blessed Lord himself had a will as a man; otherwise he had not been a man."⁴² Thus, it would not be sacrilegious or wrong-headed to affirm, on Wesleyan grounds, that Jesus himself found abundant image of God fulfillment and much delight or pleasure in doing what Jesus would do, thinking what Jesus would think, choosing what Jesus would choose, willing what Jesus would will, feeling what Jesus would feel, and loving who, what, and how Jesus would love.

**e. Freedom from as Much Pain, Suffering, Loss,
and Unhappiness as Humanly Possible**

Wesley was convinced that a moral and spiritual life is, on the whole, a happy life, but that does not mean that it contains no pain, suffering, or unhappiness. Christian happiness is never pure or unmitigated bliss; it is always mixed with pain and suffering. Wesley acknowledged at least two ways in which good, moral, spiritual, loving people are likely to suffer, no matter what.

First, suffering, accidents, diseases, poverty, losses, and malicious deeds by wicked persons do afflict good people.⁴³ Wesley was not naïve enough to think that being a Christian, a Methodist, or a loving person guarantees protection from all losses, temptations, harms, accidents, diseases, poverty, pain, suffering, and unhappiness. His was not a prosperity gospel. As he recognized, the Christian "may accidentally suffer loss, poverty, pain; but in all these things he is more than conqueror."⁴⁴

Second, even the life of love involves some inherent suffering. He acknowledged that loving people may suffer precisely because they are loving people. Christians do deny themselves and carry crosses.⁴⁵ He

⁴²Wesley, "The Repentance of Believers," *Works*, 1:337.

⁴³Wesley, "Death and Deliverance," *Works*, 4: 208-209; Wesley, "Heaviness through Manifold Temptations," *Works*, 2:222-235.

⁴⁴Wesley, "The Important Question," *Works*, 3:191.

⁴⁵Wesley, "Self-Denial," *Works*, 2:238-252.

defined a “cross,” as “anything contrary to our will, anything displeasing to our nature.”⁴⁶ Overcoming worldliness (sacrificing or dethroning worldly desires and pleasures, delaying gratification, controlling our passions) is contrary to our unredeemed natural will; actually doing so may be very distressing, thus displeasing to some aspects of our basic human nature, at least temporarily.

More importantly, Wesley recognized with St. Paul that loving people are compassionate, which means that they bear one another’s burdens and suffer with those who suffer, while also rejoicing with those who rejoice. Suffering is an integral part of the very definition of “compassion.” A Christian will “rejoice in the virtues of all, and bear a part in their happiness at the same time that he sympathizes with their pains and compassionates their infirmities.”⁴⁷ He knew that “sympathizing sorrow,” includes pains of soul. “These are ‘tears that delight and sighs that waft to heaven.’”⁴⁸ Through the best and worst of times, the Christian “has learned to be content, to be easy, thankful, joyful, happy.”⁴⁹ Christians do carry crosses, bear one another’s burdens, console one another, and suffer with those who suffer. Like Christ, Christians (and all loving people who live up to the best light they have, we might add) are also suffering servants; yet, even in that, they find great and enduring happiness—both fulfillment and joy. The pleasures associated with compassion, love, gratitude, just dealings, and other virtues are not always pure. They are often mixed with pains of soul, but even these are an integral part of genuine happiness, genuine fulfillment of the image of God within us, for God suffers with those who suffer. Writing of “the Lord Jehovah,” Wesley proclaimed, “Trust in him who suffered a thousand times more than ever you can suffer. Hath he not all power in heaven and earth?”⁵⁰

Wesley argued that loving people do avoid some varieties of suffering and pains of soul; they are spared the inherent misery that is normally a part of immoral vices, dispositions, and deeds. All moral vices or “vile affections” are inherently miserable, he insisted. “All unholy tempers are unhappy tempers. Ambition, covetousness, vanity, inordinate affection, malice, revengefulness, carry their own punishment with them, and

⁴⁶Ibid., 2:243.

⁴⁷Wesley, “A Plain Account of Genuine Christianity,” 185.

⁴⁸Wesley, “The Important Question,” III, *Works*, 3:191-192.

⁴⁹Wesley, “A Plain Account of Genuine Christianity,” I, 11, 186.

⁵⁰Wesley, “Heavenly Treasure in Earthen Vessels,” *Works*, 4:167.

avenge themselves on the soul wherein they dwell.”⁵¹ In this sense, vice is its own punishment. Wesley developed this theme in many ways and in many writings. He identified all of the following as miserable vices: anger, fretfulness, revenge, ill-will, malice, hatred, jealousy, revenge, envy, and “any other temper opposite to kindness.”⁵² He may have underestimated the perverse, but mixed, pleasures that may also attend them.

Many of Wesley’s writings explain how true religion brings peace of soul that passes all understanding, assurance of God’s love and acceptance, an inner experience of God’s constant presence, a good conscience toward and before God, forgiveness and relief from guilt, and exemption from a great host of fears and spiritual and existential anxieties. Further exploring all of that here would take us far beyond the scope of this article.⁵³

Yes, the Jesus of the Gospels suffered compassionately with those who suffered, wept for and with those who wept, and bore the weight of our burdens and sins. He internalized and responded with deep sensitivity and compassion to every sinner and sufferer, and to every harm, loss, and tragedy. He endured the agonies of his own passion and crucifixion and felt abandoned by God at the end. Yet, for most of his life, in his innocence he was free from the miseries and “tempers” of all the moral vices, he had his own peace of soul that passed all understanding, he lived with assurance of God’s presence, love, and acceptance, he had a good and clear conscience before God, he was guilt-free, and he was spared a great multitude of spiritual fears and existential disquietudes.

Conclusion

In sum, with John Wesley’s help, we can now understand that and how the Jesus of the Gospels was indeed a very happy person for much if not most of his life. Within himself, he was as profoundly loving, spiritual, moral, and joyful, filled with delight in all of creation, and free from all the miseries of sinful dispositions and deeds. Anyone who is like him, who lives in imitation of him, would be fulfilled in both their humanity and their personal uniqueness. And they would be filled with joy unspeakable. Anyone like him, anyone who is Christlike, would have an abundant life, a happy life, on Wesley’s own grounds.

⁵¹Wesley, “The Important Question,” *Works*, 3:194.

⁵²Wesley, “On Love,” *Works*, 4:386; Wesley, “The New Birth,” *Works*, 2:195-196.

⁵³All of these themes are much further developed in Edwards, *John Wesley’s Values—And Ours*.

BAPTISM AND MEMBERSHIP IN THE CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE: AN HONEST CONSIDERATION

by

Joseph Wood

John Wesley described baptism in the following way: “It is the initiatory sacrament, which enters us into covenant with God. It was instituted by Christ, who alone has power to institute a proper sacrament, a sign, seal, pledge, and means of grace, perpetually obligatory on all Christians.”¹ And later, he continued, “By baptism we are admitted into the Church, and consequently made members of Christ, its Head.”²

The Church of the Nazarene, a self-proclaimed Wesleyan-holiness denomination does not require baptism for membership. To others in the Wesleyan tradition, this fact is startling. For those who follow the teachings and traditions of the Wesleyan/Methodist movement, it would seem that baptism as a requisite for membership is a given. The Wesley brothers practiced baptism, and emphasized its importance. The Methodist denominations, which emerged after the death of John Wesley, emphasized its importance, and (nearly) all of these denominations require baptism for membership. The question of the relationship of baptism and membership in the Church of the Nazarene developed out of my research on John Wesley’s ecclesiology, which revealed to me that the Church of the Nazarene, as inheritors of the Christian faith “through the Wesleyan revival of the eighteenth century,” often found ourselves not being very Wesleyan in practice.³ This is particularly true of the Nazarene understanding and practice of the sacrament of baptism.

Having investigated Wesley’s theology of baptism, I began to explore how that theology has been transmitted through the Wesleyan tradition to the Church of the Nazarene. In short, Wesley’s theology emphasized the importance of baptism in the life of the Christian, and it was assumed

¹John Wesley, *A Treatise on Baptism* in the *Works of John Wesley* (Jackson edition), 10:188.

²Wesley, *A Treatise on Baptism* (Jackson), 10:191.

³*Manual of the Church of the Nazarene* (2013-2017), Historical Statement, 14.

that members of the Methodist societies in the eighteenth century were baptized.⁴ The Church of the Nazarene, it seems evident, does not emphasize baptism and does not require baptism for membership. In light of this contradiction, the following paper seeks to address this question: Why is baptism not required for membership in the Church of the Nazarene? Two articles have been helpful in providing a framework for this task, and recent developments have highlighted particular issues pertinent to this study. The following paper offers an understanding of the development of baptism in the Church of the Nazarene, the roots of Nazarene theology and practice of baptism, and why certain contradictions in theology and practice exist today. It will conclude by suggesting a way forward.

Jeffrey Knapp's Article (2002)

In 2002, Jeffrey Knapp published an article titled, "Throwing the Baby Out with the Font Water: The Development of Baptismal Practice in the Church of the Nazarene." He began by saying,

I am an adopted child of the Church of the Nazarene. I was not born in the church, but came as a fifteen-year old in response to the invitation of a friend. The repeated emphasis from pulpit and lectern was that the milestone event in one's spiritual journey was a trip to the altar to pray and personally accept Christ. This I did one Sunday evening. In subsequent days, there was no discernible difference in the way I was treated, no change in expectations, no unusual demands. There was simply the glad awareness that I was now a true part of the church since I had volitionally accepted Christ.⁵

Having narrated his own experience of responding to an "altar call," Knapp explained that he was later asked if he would like to be baptized, "as a way of testifying to my new faith in Christ."⁶ Not particularly understanding why, Knapp agreed and was baptized and given a certificate offering proof that his testimony was true. Upon reflection later in life, Knapp had a few unanswered questions: "Did anything really happen that

⁴With the exception of those from the Quaker tradition.

⁵Jeffrey Knapp, "Throwing the Baby Out with the Font Water: The Development of Baptismal Practice in the Church of the Nazarene," *Worship* (Volume 76, Number 3, 2002), 225.

⁶*Ibid.*

night in the water? Was it simply a testimony about something I had done or believed? [If] this was an important ritual, why was there no baptism in the church where we worshipped week by week? Why was I not told about this when I first received Christ? Why did the whole thing feel very casual and ordinary?”⁷ As a result, Knapp concluded that, “the silence spoke loudly and said that baptism was not really that important.”⁸

Having articulated his own experience of baptism in the Church of the Nazarene, Knapp dedicated the bulk of his essay to answering the following question: “Is our commitment to entire sanctification as our *raison d’être* actually responsible in some way for our minimalist view of baptism in particular and the sacraments in general?”⁹ In an effort to answer the question, Knapp explored the development of baptismal practices in the Church of the Nazarene as revealed in the *Manual* over nearly 100 years. He concluded with four responses to the question:

1. The Nazarene emphasis on the doctrine of entire sanctification has led to a minimization of the sacraments.
2. The altar call has become our sacrament of initiation.
3. Pragmatism has characterized Nazarene history.
4. The affirmation of individuality is in opposition to the Wesleyan doctrine of holiness.

Knapp followed his critique with an exploration of John Wesley’s doctrine and practice, which culminated in a list of four ways in which the Church of the Nazarene can recover her Wesleyan roots regarding baptism.

1. The recovery of a biblical catechism that would include a clear sacramental emphasis.
2. The development of rites accurately reflecting our Wesleyan theological tradition.
3. A return to the historic roots of sacramental worship.
4. An ownership of our history.

Knapp’s article is both instructive, it outlines the issues and possible reasons for why the Church of the Nazarene seems to emphasize a profession of faith, over a sacrament of initiation, and it is constructive, it outlines ways in which the Church of the Nazarene could remedy this issue. Knapp’s article is in no way exhaustive. He highlights significant events,

⁷Ibid., 226.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., 227.

persons, and changes to the Manual, but there are a number of further issues that must be understood if one is to address the question of the present paper, “Why is baptism not required for membership in the Church of the Nazarene?” For deeper insight, an exploration of a second article, used by Knapp, is required.

Stan Ingersol’s Article (1992)

Stan Ingersol, Archivist for the Church of the Nazarene since 1985, published an article in the *Wesleyan Theological Journal* in 1992 (ten years before Knapp’s article appeared in *Worship*), titled, “Christian Baptism and the Early Nazarenes: The Sources That Shaped a Pluralistic Baptismal Tradition.” In this article, Ingersol examined the baptismal traditions of the various denominations who joined to create the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene. He then outlined how new traditions emerged in light of the union of these churches. The article is shaped by the claim that the Church of the Nazarene, and the various church traditions out of which it emerged, all share the same identifying mark: each was a “believers’ church,” exhibiting the following traits: voluntary fellowship of converted believers based on the idea of separation from the world, an emphasis on the necessity of all members being active in Christian work, the practice of church discipline, care for the poor, simple patterns of worship, and common life centred on the Word, prayer and love.¹⁰

Three significant groups made up the initial Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene when they united in 1908. The groups included the following: The Holiness Church of Christ, the Association of Pentecostal Churches of America, and the Church of the Nazarene. Ingersol analyzed the baptismal traditions of each of these groups and highlighted the differences. The Holiness Church of Christ (a result of a merger itself) concluded that “baptism would be required for church membership, but mode would be left to the individual conscience.”¹¹ The Association of Pentecostal Churches of America accommodated a variety of practices, including: the liberty of each congregation to write its own statement on baptism, permission to practice infant as well as “believers” baptism, and an emphasis on local congregational covenant. The Church of the Naza-

¹⁰Stanley Ingersol, “Christian Baptism and the Early Nazarenes: The Sources That Shaped a Pluralistic Baptismal Tradition” in *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, volume 27 (1992), 161-162.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 167.

rene, established under the leadership of Phineas Brisee, who was known for emphasizing, “Unity in essentials; liberty in nonessentials,” affirmed that baptism was indeed a nonessential, in that he advocated the widest possible practice of baptism.

Note the language used in the description of baptism in the *Manual* of 1898:

Christian baptism is a sacrament, or ordinance, signifying one’s acceptance of the benefits of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. It is to be administered by ordained ministers of the Gospel to believers as declarative of their faith in Him as their Saviour, and full purpose of obedience in holiness and righteousness. Baptism, being the seal of the New Testament, young children may be baptized upon request of parents or guardians who shall give assurance for them of necessary Christian teaching. Baptism may be administered by sprinkling, pouring or immersion, according to the choice of the applicant. In case a preacher, when requested to administer baptism in a mode which he deems unscriptural, has conscientious scruples against so administering the ordinance, he shall not be required to do so, but shall see to it that the candidate for baptism shall be baptized in the mode desired by the applicant.

Here, we see the allowance for variations in practice, particularly regarding the mode of baptism and whether or not infants may be baptized. Ingersol concluded, “At first independently, and later as a unified body, the founding groups of the present day Church of the Nazarene placed their baptismal theologies within the context of the believer’s church tradition, with its emphasis on commitment and love.”¹² Although the unified Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene held a pluralist view of baptism, the question of baptism as a requirement for membership was not one of the views that was included in the union. Those who advocated for baptism as a requirement for membership conceded to those who did not.

Ingersol was quick to highlight that this issue did not go away after the union. J. B. Chapman, editor of the *Herald of Holiness* (the denominational periodical) during the 1920s, having received numerous questions to the editor regarding baptism, responded to many of them. When responding specifically to the question of baptism and membership, he

¹²Ibid., 173.

said, "It is expected that people who unite with the Church of the Nazarene shall have *some* water by *some* mode."¹³ Chapman, who later became a General Superintendent, seemed to advocate that the mode of baptism was the nonessential, but that baptism itself was essential. Ingersol's article concluded that the Church of the Nazarene would do well to return to her baptismal roots, but with a recognition that the church is a "believers' church in the Wesleyan tradition."¹⁴

Resolution from East Ohio JUD-810: Rejected in Committee (0-15)

Having examined the articles written by Knapp and Ingersol, one may conclude that Nazarene baptismal practice is varied (different modes, infants and adults, pastoral conscience), developing over the decades, but one feature remains: baptism is not required for membership. One may say, "Well, maybe Ingersol is right, our pluralist views will not allow this mandate, as it would be a restriction," or, "Knapp is right, the issue is not membership, it is too much emphasis on sanctification, and not enough emphasis on the sacraments." Although these conclusions may be appropriate in their own right, it must be recognized that the question has not gone away. In the previous three general assemblies (held every four years), the issue of baptism and membership has been raised. Most recently, a resolution was submitted to the 2013 General Assembly (GA) for consideration.¹⁵

Resolution JUD-810, "Membership and Baptism," was accepted for discussion at the 2013 GA. It recommended changes to the Manual paragraphs which refer to local church membership (29, 107, 801). The paragraphs describe the necessary requirements of becoming a member of the Church of the Nazarene, which includes: being publicly received by the pastor, DS or GS, declaring their experience of salvation, and their willingness to submit to the church's polity.¹⁶ Into these paragraphs would be introduced the following line, "*having experienced Christian baptism*," as part of the requirements for membership. The resolution was passed to a

¹³Ibid., 175.

¹⁴Ibid., 174.

¹⁵Author's Note: A more recent General Assembly was held in June 2017. A resolution very similar to JUD-810 was submitted and adopted, however, it was amended to delete the line requiring baptism for membership. See the submitted resolution here: http://nazarene.org/sites/default/files/docs/bgs/2016/2016_en_BGS_GeneralBoardReport.pdf.

¹⁶JUD-810.

committee and the vote was unanimous (0-15); the resolution was rejected. Because there is no requirement to take minutes in these committees, nor is there a requirement to record who participates in these committees, researchers have no way of knowing the reasons for rejecting this resolution (if there were any raised), or if this was simply an acknowledgement, vote, and move on. The only thing recorded is the fact that the resolution was unanimously rejected.

What Is the Difference in Membership and Baptism?

In light of this, one may ask, "What is the difference in baptism and membership?" A brief look at the current liturgies for the reception of members and the sacrament of adult baptism are enlightening.

The Baptism of Believers

Dearly Beloved: Baptism is the sign and seal of the new covenant of grace, the significance of which is attested by the apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans as follows:

"Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death: in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection" (Romans 6:3-5).

The earliest and simplest statement of Christian belief, into which you now come to be baptized, is the Apostles' Creed, which reads as follows: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth;

"And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord;

who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary,

The Reception of Church Members

Dearly Beloved: The privileges and blessings that we have in association together in the Church of Jesus Christ are very sacred and precious. There is in it such hallowed fellowship as cannot otherwise be known.

There is such helpfulness with brotherly watch care and counsel as can be found only in the Church. There is the godly care of pastors, with the teachings of the Word; and the helpful inspiration of corporate worship. And there is cooperation in service, accomplishing that which cannot otherwise be done. The doctrines upon which the church rests as essential to Christian experience are brief.

We believe in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We especially emphasize the deity of Jesus Christ and the personality of the Holy Spirit. We believe that human beings are born in sin; that they need the work of forgiveness through Christ and the new birth

suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

"I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy Church of Jesus Christ, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting."

Will you be baptized into this faith? If so, answer, "I will."

Response: I will.

Do you acknowledge Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, and do you realize that He saves you now?

Response: I do.

Will you obey God's holy will and keep His commandments, walking in them all the days of your life?

Response: I will.

by the Holy Spirit; that subsequent to this there is the deeper work of heart cleansing or entire sanctification through the infilling of the Holy Spirit, and that to each of these works of grace the Holy Spirit gives witness. We believe that our Lord will return, the dead shall be raised, and that all shall come to final judgment with its rewards and punishments.

Do you heartily believe these truths? If so, answer, "I do."

Do you acknowledge Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, and do you realize that He saves you now?

Response: I do.

Desiring to unite with the Church of the Nazarene, do you covenant to give yourself to the fellowship and work of God in connection with it, as set forth in the Covenant of Christian Character and the Covenant of Christian Conduct of the Church of the Nazarene? Will you endeavor in every way to glorify God, by a humble walk, godly conversation, and holy service; by devotedly giving of your means; by faithful attendance upon the means of grace; and, abstaining from all evil, will you seek earnestly to perfect holiness of heart and life in the fear of the Lord?

Response: I will.

The minister, giving the full name of the person and using the preferred form of baptism—sprinkling, pouring, or immersion—shall say:

_____,
I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The minister shall then say to the person or persons:

I welcome you into this church, to its sacred fellowship, responsibilities, and privileges. May the great Head of the Church bless and keep you, and enable you to be faithful in all good works, that your life and witness may be effective in leading others to Christ.

The minister shall then take each one by the hand, and with appropriate words of personal greeting welcome each into the church.

Taking each by the hand, or speaking to the group, the minister shall say:

It gives me pleasure on behalf of this church to welcome you into our membership. We trust that we will be a source of encouragement and strength to you and that you, in turn, will be a source of blessing and help to us. May the Lord richly bless you in the salvation of souls and in the advancement of His kingdom.

What is the difference in baptism and membership? According to the rituals above, not much. One may read this and see virtually no difference. This is not the only place where confusion may come as a result of practice. In February 2016, the General Board of the Church of the Nazarene met in Ede, Netherlands, and the annual report of the General Superintendents was read. Part 2 of the report focuses on evangelism and church growth over the past year. It reports that in 2015, just over 209,000 people “converted” to Christianity through the witness of the Church of the Nazarene. The report includes the following statements:

These new Christ-followers are *embraced by the church in the sacrament of baptism*. Likewise, Jesus was baptized by his cousin John: “Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be

baptized by John” (Matthew 3.13, NIV). In the Great Commission, *we are commanded to baptize* these new disciples: Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you . . . (Matthew 28:19-20, NIV). *John Wesley* had this to say about baptism: By baptism, we enter into a covenant with God, an everlasting covenant, *are admitted into the church, and made members of Christ, made children of God.*¹⁷

Having explained that new converts join the Church through baptism, and having reminded the reader of what the Bible and John Wesley have to say about baptism, the next item in the report is a chart which illustrates the numbers of “conversions” and baptisms reported in the years 2011-2015. The chart clearly indicates that what was said about conversion and baptism is simply not true, and has been consistently not true for the past five years. Of the 209,000 conversions reported in 2015, less than 100,000 (about 90,000) baptisms were reported. It must be understood that this figure includes all baptisms recorded for the denomination for these years, not just those of the recently converted. The reader may be compelled to ask, “Is baptism really the way one is embraced into the church? Or is the Church of the Nazarene evidencing inconsistent practice in both word and deed?” It has been shown above that the rituals for membership and baptism can cause confusion, and it is apparent that reports of statistics can also cause confusion. Could it be that it is confusion which has led the Church of the Nazarene to reject the idea that baptism should be required for membership? Is there a way forward?

Assumptions as to Why This Is the Case

Knapp and Ingersol have been helpful in presenting some reasons why baptism has developed in the way it has in the Church of the Nazarene, but regarding the question at hand, there seems to be three primary reasons for why the Church of the Nazarene has not required baptism for membership.

Misinterpreting and Misappropriating Wesley

As inheritors of the Wesleyan Tradition the Church of the Nazarene claims John Wesley and Methodism as its most significant theological

¹⁷*Annual Report of the Board of General Superintendents to the 93rd General Board: Church of the Nazarene*, accessed September 13, 2016, February 28, 2016, http://nazarene.org/sites/default/files/docs/bgs/2016/2016_en_BGS_General-BoardReport.pdf, 9.

authority. On the issue of membership, it seems that Nazarenes have adapted the early Methodist society model. To be a member in the church of the Nazarene, there are specific requirements, as there were in the early Methodist society. These requirements were noted above: testimony of faith, willingness to commit to the church, adherence to certain doctrines, and faithfulness to a code of Christian conduct and character. The difference, often overlooked by churches in the Wesleyan tradition, is the fact that Wesley presupposed the Methodist members were baptized Christians and members of their own churches.¹⁸

Because Methodism was not, nor did it intend to be, a church, the issue of baptism was a non-issue. After Wesley's death, Methodism became a church, but instead of assimilating baptism with membership, the two continued alongside one another as two separate issues. In the Methodist church tradition, however, membership quickly evolved into confirmation, as a response to baptism. The Church of the Nazarene, as inheritors of this tradition, accepted baptism and membership as a part of its ecclesiology, but, as Wes Tracy and Stan Ingersol noted, the way in which one became a Christian in the Church of the Nazarene was divergent from the normal way in which one became a Christian in twentieth century Methodism:

Another difference lies in the basic understanding of how a person typically becomes a Christian. Nazarenes emphasize Christian conversion, both among their own youth and in their outreach to unchurched people. United Methodists, on the other hand, largely emphasize Christian nurture (baptism and catechism) as the primary way of coming to Christ. Altar calls are largely unknown in the UMC around large urban areas, whereas Nazarene pastors periodically sense a need to preach in a fashion that calls people to a decision.¹⁹

In this understanding, one finds that baptism is de-emphasized, and conversion is emphasized (as the chart referenced above suggests—nothing has changed). Please note, the 1908 *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene defined baptism in the following way: “Christian Baptism is a sacrament, or ordinance, signifying one's acceptance of the benefits of the

¹⁸See *General Rules of the United Societies* in Rupert Davies, editor, *The Works of John Wesley*, Bicentennial Edition, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), 9:67-79.

¹⁹Wes Tracy and Stan Ingersol, *What is a Nazarene? Understanding Our Place in the Religious Community* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 2013), 58.

Atonement of Jesus Christ.”²⁰ There is no mention of church membership in this description of baptism, only an acknowledgement of the link between baptism and salvation. This leads to a second reason.

Inconsistency in Practice

It has been noted above that there is an inconsistency in practice within the Church of the Nazarene regarding membership and baptism. When a report of the General Superintendents says that the way in which the “converted” are made members in the Church is through baptism, but the chart which follows outlines a striking difference in the number of baptisms and conversions that have taken place (consistently) over the past five years, a clear inconsistency is revealed. Not only this, but the report quotes the Bible and John Wesley’s thoughts on baptism in which the claim is made that baptism is the normal entry point into the Church. It may be concluded that, “Making Christlike disciples in the Nations,” as the Nazarene slogan claims, should, therefore, include baptising the converted, in order to be consistent with both scripture and tradition. Unfortunately, this is not the practice of the Church of the Nazarene.

Conflation of Ritual

The chart above has outlined the similarities of the baptism and membership rituals in the Manual. When two very different practices are being described in very similar ways (in some parts verbatim), it is inevitable that confusion will be the result. Why would one want to be baptized, if becoming a member is the way in which one shows their commitment to the life of the church? Not only that, but if one wants to become a member, they make the same covenant/testimony as they do in baptism. If a clear distinction between the two rituals is not made, or better, not emphasized, then these two practices of the church will continue to be conflated and misunderstood.²¹

Is There a Solution?

This paper has outlined a number of reasons why the Church of the Nazarene does not require baptism for membership. It offers further clar-

²⁰*Manual of the Church of the Nazarene* (1908), 30.

²¹It has come to my attention that another possible reason has to do with people who become Christians in areas of the world where Christianity is illegal, and being baptized would put new Christians at risk of imprisonment or death. Delicate situations like this are challenging, but these should be considered exceptions, and not the rule.

ity on the issue, previously discussed by Jeffrey Knapp and Stan Ingersol. In light of this, it may be helpful to suggest a way forward. Bearing in mind that the last time a resolution requiring baptism for membership was put forward, it was killed in committee with a 0-15 vote, what follows is the concept for a different resolution proposal, which may be more palatable to the Assembly.

Resolution JUD-810 simply added a line in the description of a church member that requires baptism for membership. Brief note: as baptism is not currently required for membership, and as membership is required to become and ordained minister, it stands to reason that ordained ministers, district superintendents, or even general superintendents are not required to be baptized. This means those who are authorized to perform the sacramental office of baptism, do not have to be baptized themselves, and those who hold the episcopal office (authorized ordain) do not have to be baptized themselves. It may be legitimate to hear an argument for baptism not being required for membership (believers' church, Quakers, Ingersol), but not requiring ordained ministers to be baptized seems irrational in a church that does affirm baptism.

What follows is a possible way forward. A resolution has been written, and will be submitted, which adds a single line to the requirements for a licensed minister.²² Currently, the criteria for one to be eligible to receive a district license reads as follows:

530.1 When members of the Church of the Nazarene acknowledge a call to a lifetime of ministry, they may be licensed as ministers by the district assembly provided they:

1. have held a local minister's license for one full year;
2. have completed one-fourth of a validated course of study for ministers, or have passed the Nazarene history and polity courses and five additional courses in a validated course of study for ministers;

²²In the Church of the Nazarene, licensed ministers are those who have been called of God to the ordained ministry. Licensed ministers are like curates or probationary ministers in other traditions. They are in a process of training to be ordained. See *Manual* (2013-2017), 186-214.

3. have been recommended for such work by the church board of the local church of which they are members, to which recommendation shall be attached the Application for Minister's License carefully filled in;

4. have given evidence of grace, gifts, and usefulness;

5. have been carefully examined, under the direction of the district assembly of the district within the bounds of which they hold their church membership, regarding their spiritual, intellectual, and other fitness for such work, including appropriate background checks as determined by the District Advisory Board;

6. have promised to pursue immediately a validated course of study prescribed for licensed ministers and candidates for ordination;

7. have had any disqualification, which may have been imposed by a district assembly, removed by an explanation in writing by the district superintendent and the District Advisory Board of the district where the disqualification was imposed; and provided further that their marriage relationship does not render them ineligible for a district licence; and

8. in case of previous divorce, the recommendation of the District Ministerial Credentials Board along with supporting documents will be given to the Board of General Superintendents, which may remove this as a barrier to pursuing a licence. (30.1-30.3, 129.14, 205.6, 529.5)

Baptism does not appear in these criteria. One may infer that church membership, which is a requirement, assumes baptism, but as it has been shown above, baptism is not required for membership. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that persons applying for a district minister's license have been baptized.

In order to ensure that licensed ministers (and thus, ordained ministers, district superintendents, and general superintendents) are baptized Christians, the following addition to the above criteria is proposed:

530.1. When members of the Church of the Nazarene acknowledge a call to a lifetime of ministry, they may be licensed as ministers by the district assembly provided they:

(New 1.) 1. have been baptized into the Christian faith (See Article 12: Baptism);

2. have completed one-fourth of a validated course of study for ministers, or have passed the Nazarene history and polity courses and five additional courses in a validated course of study for ministers;

The rest of the criteria will remain the same. This additional requirement will ensure that all ordained ministers are baptized Christians. This requirement may offer a way forward towards ultimately requiring baptism for all membership. If all ordained ministers are baptized, the significance of the practice may be emphasized by those in pastoral ministry. Shepherds lead their flocks by example.²³ Not only would it encourage the practice of baptism, but it would also place the Church of the Nazarene more in line with historic Christianity and the Wesleyan Tradition and it would encourage a more consistent practice. In future General Assemblies, resolutions on Baptism and membership will be considered. It is the hope of this paper that resolutions which emphasize the purpose and importance of baptism will not again be “killed in committee,” but will be embraced and promoted in an effort to fulfil the mission of the Church of the Nazarene, to make “Christlike disciples in the nations,” and the commission of Christ, “baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

²³I realize that this raises the issue of promoting a lay/clergy divide. That is not the intention of this resolution. More on this issue will be addressed in a future paper.

EVOLUTION, EMERGENCE, AND FINAL CAUSALITY: A PROPOSED PNEUMATICO-THEOLOGICAL SYNTHESIS

by

Bradford McCall

I. Introduction

There is an unprecedented challenge and opportunity for philosophy today: to mediate the ever-emerging dialogue between science and religion. Indeed, the times are ripe for genuine science-religion dialogue that seeks possible complementarity between the findings of science with philosophical insights and religious experience, without succumbing to reductionist methodologies that compromise distinct realms of inquiry. Douglas Futuyma suggests that “creation and evolution, between them, exhaust the possible explanations for the origin of living things. Organisms either appeared on the earth fully developed or they did not. If they did not, they must have developed from pre-existing species by some process of modification. If they did appear in a fully developed state, they must have been created by some omnipotent intelligence” (Futuyma 1983, 197). However, this essay will suggest that a pneumatological (re-)interpretation of emergence, one that “reads” the philosophical concept of emergence through theological lens, is *at least* plausible, and *possibly* fruitful for further research. Herein one will find a pneumatiko-theological hypothesis that “reads” the evolutionary epic—and the long periods of stasis that it exhibits—in such a manner that is consistent with contemporary understandings of the philosophical construct of emergence theory.

This essay offers a new theological interpretation of the evolutionary advance, accepting and incorporating elements of a Neo-Darwinian understanding of macroevolution, while supplementing those with insights from the budding studies of emergence. Sudden “jumps” in complexity—everywhere present, yet rarely explained—may be the result of emergence working within God’s *telos*, inasmuch as emergence may be the means through which the Godhead actualizes the evolutionary advancement. Despite the insistence on gradualistic evolution by many contemporary biologists, I argue in this essay—in part—that whereas the

empirical evidence might not support a gradualistic view of (macro-)evolution, it may very well support a view of (macro-)evolution informed by a pneumatological “reading” of emergence.

This essay contends, pointedly, that the Godhead creates and refines his “creation” in and through the process(es) of evolution; however, it also affirms that the evolutionary process is marked by long periods of stasis, followed by sudden increases in complexity—with these sudden appearances of complexity being attained in and through instances of emergence. Intimations of this essay’s position were alluded to over three decades ago; indeed, noted biologist Niles Eldredge agrees—in principle—with this concept, in saying, “Expectation colored perception to such an extent that the most obvious single fact about biological evolution—non-change—has seldom, if ever, been incorporated into anyone’s scientific notions of how life actually evolves. If ever there was a myth, it is that evolution is a process of constant change” (Eldredge 1984, 8).

Again drawing on sources from the last thirty years, it can be surmised that many evolutionists agree that the empirical evidence for evolution includes two features particularly *inconsistent* with the gradualism promoted by orthodox Darwinism: stasis and sudden appearance. Species appear in the physical world looking much the same as when they disappear, and a particular species appears at once and nearly fully formed (Eldredge and Gould 1972, 13-14). This ubiquitous absence of intermediate forms is true not only for major morphologic transitions, but even for most species-level variations. Jacques Monod, a supporter of gradualistic, Neo-Darwinian evolution, posits that chance suddenly gave rise to the first organism—perhaps a bacterium, alga, or protozoan—which later evolved into complex invertebrates and plants, followed by fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds and, finally, mammals (Monod 1972, 110). However, the proof of such a gradualistic sequence requires at least one of two kinds of evidence: either an unbroken chain of transitional forms or surviving intermediates, neither of which has been produced heretofore.

One would think that in the more than 140 years following Darwin, with thousands of trained biologists studying the problem while using complex lab equipment, someone would have filled these gaps within the gradualistic Darwinian paradigm. However, each phyletic group, generally speaking, suddenly appears within the geological strata as a unique individual, relatively unlinked by intermediates (Denton 1986, 290). In *Creation and Reality*, Michael Welker offers “initial steps toward correcting both the classic theistic caricature of God the Creator and a corre-

sponding religious understanding of reality” (Welker 1999, 2). Welker remarks that new approaches to creation are a “burning theological interest” because modern depictions are “boring, vapid, and banal” (Welker 1999, 4).

In order to arrive at the intended goal—which is to argue for the coherency of a triangulation between evolution, emergence, and final causality—this essay will dialog extensively with current proponents of emergence theory in the following sections, attempting to garner what such a position entails, and will then conclude by suggesting what may be the uniting factor between evolution and emergence: kenosis, understood theologically as a pouring of the Divine Spirit *into* primal matter, which provides emergence theory with explanatory power and thus expands its fecundity, particularly by opening up the *possibility* of final causality. Note that this essay is intended to contribute, at least minimally, to the constructive interface between evolutionary theory and emergence. In the long-run, we need a robust theory of divine providence,¹ because we need a theological and metaphysical account regarding how divine agency is more effective than that of nature alone, and the place to reconcile providence and evolution is theology, not science. Moreover, it is up to theologians, not scientists, to show how this robust theological account is consistent with biological explanation.

II. A Review Clayton’s Understanding of Emergence

Modern advances in scientific study reveal a vastly more complicated world than the strict reductionist program of the late nineteenth and twentieth century’s ever envisioned. Therefore, as Philip Clayton notes, “It is unfortunate that in recent years the explosion of knowledge in molecular biology has caused all of biology to be painted with a reductionist stroke” (Clayton 2004, 94). Clayton contends that emergence is a viable option in contrast to the waning explanatory power of reductionistic physicalism and substance dualism, its competitors. Both reductionistic physicalism and substance dualism, to varying degrees, are based on an Enlightenment model of science; emergence, in contrast, moves beyond

¹Note that Giberson and Yerxa acknowledge that God’s action in the world poses a challenge for the Christian scholar, because invocations of divine *providence* as an explanatory category are usually considered unacceptable (Karl W. Giberson and Donald A. Yerxa, “Providence and the Christian Scholar,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 1, no. 1 [1999]: 123). Thus it would be wise to explore models of congruence in reference to divine action and naturalistic evolution.

the Enlightenment model of science, responding to developments in science that are not reconcilable with the Enlightenment framework, within which twentieth-century science operated. It appears indefensible to continue to seek explanation of all things as merely reducible to their physical entities or microphysical causes (i.e., physicalism), as reductionistic physicalism is inconsistent with standard research theories and practices within biology (Clayton 2004, 66). Reductionistic physicalism is also incompatible with emergence because it “rules out forms of natural causality that are more than merely a sum of physical forces” (Clayton 2004, 174).

Emergence is the view that novel and unpredictable occurrences are naturally produced in nature, and that those novel structures, organs and organisms are not reducible to their component parts (O'Connor 1994, 91-104; Kim 1999, 3-36). Ursula Goodenough and Terrence W. Deacon agree, noting that emergence is “something more from nothing but” (Goodenough and Deacon 2003, 802). Clayton proffers that emergence is a fruitful paradigm in explaining evolutionary progress in the physical world, which represents explanatory power beyond that of physics alone (Clayton 2006, 682). Moreover, emergence provides a way for theists to speak of the response of agents to the divine while remaining consistent with the scientific study of natural history. Clayton argues that emergence is the philosophical position that best accounts for the data derived from the study of evolution, as the strict reductionary tendencies often displayed in the natural sciences are not tenable. In fact, “actualizing the dream of a final reduction ‘downwards,’ it now appears, has proven fundamentally impossible” (Clayton 2004, 70). Peacocke seems to agree with Clayton, noting that “there are, therefore, good grounds for re-introducing the concept of ‘emergence’ into our interpretation of naturally occurring, hierarchical, complex systems constituted of parts which themselves are, at the lowest level, made up of the basic units of the physical world” (Peacocke 2006, 261). Process Theology has a particular affinity toward strong emergence, as seen in some of the works by Ian Barbour, Arthur Peacocke, John Polkinghorne, Keith Ward, and Robert John Russell, among others.

Before offering his own definition of emergence, Clayton first depicts the two main classifications of twentieth-century emergence theories: strong and weak. The strong emergentist position could be labeled *ontological* emergence, whereas the weak position could be aptly labeled as *epistemological* emergence. Clayton himself is an advocate of strong emer-

gence. In fact, Peterson classifies Clayton as a “radical emergentist,” one who emphasizes both epistemological and ontological openness (Peterson 2006, 705). Radical emergence is productive for both theology and science; however, radical emergence also has its dangers, possibly leading to what might be referred to as an emergence-of-the-gaps (Peterson 2006, 709). For Dawkins and Dennett, who are ardent reductionists in contrast, there is a strong sense that the whole of a thing is nothing more than the sum of its parts and that emergent level entities and explanations are farcical. It may be no accident that there is a link between reductionist accounts of emergence and avowed atheism, as the work of both Dawkins and Dennett exemplifies.

After reviewing and critiquing twentieth-century views of emergence, Clayton offers his own view regarding emergence theory, which radicalizes the immanence of God within the natural world. Clayton’s radicalization of immanence comports well with this essay’s advocacy of kenosis of the Spirit into the natural environ, for in said notion, the Spirit is intimately interior to nature, as its source, sustenance, and end (a point which will be argued for later in part IV). Recognize that if theism is to be more than mere deism, it must allow for some sort of divine involvement in the natural world, which leads to the plausibility of some degree of immanence regarding the Godhead.

In a recent attempt to picture God as immanent within nature, Stuart Kauffman avers that the concept of God could be the “shared name for the true creativity in the natural universe” (Kauffman 2007, 903). Kauffman believes that thinking of God as the natural, awesome creativity in the universe could help not only the dialogue between science and religion, but also work toward the construction of a global ethic that would shape global civilization. Kauffman, it should be noted, does not believe in a transcendent God; rather, he thinks of God as the immanent principle of creativity within the cosmos. Kauffman discusses, rudimentarily, a new scientific worldview—beyond reductionism to emergence and radical creativity in the biosphere and human world. As Kauffman notes, this view pictures God not as transcendent, not as an agent, but as the very creativity in the universe itself (Kauffman 2007, 905). Support for this conception of God’s immanence in nature can also be found in Arthur Peacocke, who argues that God—being immanent within nature—could affect holistically the state of the world system because the ontological gap between the world and God is located everywhere in space and time (Peacocke 2001, 110). Thus, God’s activity cannot, in principle, be detected

and labeled as such, for God is active within and *through* nature's natural operations.

In *Mind & Emergence*, Clayton also seeks to develop the role of emergence—as he understands it—in the natural sciences and in evolution, which is Clayton's most enduring contribution to the dialogue between theology and science. He notes that particularly within biology, one can see multiple instances of emergence. Clayton argues that whereas “biological processes in general are the result of systems that create and maintain order (stasis) through massive energy input from their environment,” there comes a point of sufficient complexity after which a phase transition suddenly becomes almost inevitable (Clayton 2004, 78). Emergence in evolution therefore “consists of a collection of highly convoluted processes that produce a remarkably complex kind of combinatorial novelty” (Clayton 2004, 85). Based on this reasoning, he concludes that there “is increasing evidence that emergence represents a fruitful . . . meta-scientific . . . framework for comparing the relations between the diverse realms of the natural world” (Clayton 2004, 93).

In agreement, in his popular introductory college biology textbook, Neil A. Campbell writes, “with each upward step in the hierarchy of biological order, novel properties emerge that were not present at the simpler levels of organization. These emergent properties arise from interactions between the components . . . Unique properties of organized matter arise from how the parts are arranged and interact . . . [inasmuch as] we cannot fully explain a higher level of organization by breaking it down to its parts” (Campbell 1991, 2-3). That is, emergent phenomena are dependent upon, but irreducible to, lower levels. In the next section, I seek to compliment Clayton's view of emergence, adding relevant biblical data that could be “read” as supporting the notion of the Spirit's kenosis into natural world.

III. The Kenosis of the Spirit into the Natural World

Many parts of the bible give good grounds for illustrating the Spirit as being the active agent of God in the world, particularly picturing the Spirit as the life-giver and animator of all nature. This essay contends that just as the Spirit kenotically entered into the chaotic seas through which the Jews passed in their Exodus and parted them (Exod 14:21), so too was the Spirit parting the chaos of the primordial waters, thereby preparing the resultant complexity (Gen 1:2). Correctly, then, Goergen asserts that without and apart from the Spirit, there would be absolute chaos in the material world (Goergen 2006, 108).

In an important insight, Davis and Hays posit that reading scripture in today's environment requires one to move beyond the Enlightenment's ideal of a detached objectivity, and view reading scripture as an art, one that requires both discipline and imagination (Davis and Hays 2003, xv). Applying Davis and Hays' thoughts, one may envision that the Spirit of life hovered over the primordial waters and transformed the chaos into the *cosmos*. One could perceive this creative activity of the Spirit as being either inside the chaos (picturing God as immanent within nature), or as the Spirit reaching down to create order according to the laws of nature, picturing God as transcendent above the natural world (Crain 2006, 666), with this essay being near(er) to the previous category. Much recent theology, like that of Jürgen Moltmann (1993), John Haught (2003), and Denis Edwards (2004), also speaks eloquently of God's immanence in nature.

This recent trend toward picturing God as immanent will now be supplemented by resurrecting a view of God's action given by Aquinas in his *Summa theologiae* (Ia q.45 a.8), wherein he writes:

Some have understood God to work in every agent in such a way that no created power has any effect in things, but that God alone is the ultimate cause of everything wrought; for instance, that it is not fire that gives heat, but God in the fire, and so forth. But this is impossible. First, because the order of cause and effect would be taken away from created things: and this would imply lack of power in the Creator: for it is due to the power of the cause, that it bestows active power on its effect. Secondly, because the active powers which are seen to exist in things, would be bestowed on things to no purpose, if these wrought nothing through them. . . . In order to make this clear, we must observe that as there are few kinds of causes; matter is not a principle of action, but is the subject that receives the effect of action. On the other hand, the end, the agent, and the form are principles of action, but in a certain order. For the first principle of action is the end which moves the agent; the second is the agent; the third is the form of that which the agent applies to action (although the agent also acts through its own form). . . . Thus then does God work in every worker, according to these three things. First as an end. . . . Again it is to be observed that where there are several agents in order, the second always acts in virtue of the first; for the first agent moves the second to act. And thus all agents act in virtue of God Him-

self: and therefore He is the cause of action in every agent. Thirdly, we must observe that God not only moves things to operated, as it were applying their forms and powers to operation, just as the workman applies the axe to cut, who nevertheless at times does not give the axe its form; but He also gives created agents their forms and preserves them in being . . . and because in all things God Himself is properly the cause of universal being which is innermost in all things . . . [it follows that] in all things God works intimately.”

Ian Barbour elucidates four different typologies by which one may view God’s activity with and within the natural world (Barbour 1990, 243-270). The classical Monarchial model views God to be a ruler within his kingdom in terms of the relation between himself and nature. Barbour notes that the Deist model depicts God as a sort of clockmaker who allows nature (i.e. the clock) to work itself out according to the design by the maker. The Neo-Thomist model pictures God as the worker and the world as a tool used by the worker. Barbour stipulates that the Kenotic model can be characterized as the world being like a child, and God being like a parent. Using Barbour’s typologies, a pneumatological interpretation of emergence, as advocated by this essay, would be best categorized as a variant of the Neo-Thomist model in that the Spirit creates both the world (i.e., the “tool”), as well as the processes by which the tool is used (cf. Peacocke 1993).

By focusing on the Spirit as both the originator and operator of the natural world, one can see the Spirit as both directly and indirectly involved in the world from beginning to end. So then, whereas the Spirit is the primary cause of all things, he also works through secondary causes. This implies, therefore, that what may commonly be referred to as the natural processes, or even what may be termed random processes, are in reality the indirect acts of the Spirit through secondary causes. It is the postulate of this essay that distinctive, seemingly nondependent, actions are in fact Spirit-caused, though they may appear to be secondarily caused.² The apparent secondary Spirit-derived causation is due in large part to the fact that the Spirit is the agent of discovery within the various possibilities of God (cf. Dabney 2001, 58). In this secondary capacity, the

²Compare this postulation with a Neo-Thomist conception of Divine “double agency,” as cited in Christopher Southgate, *God, Humanity, and the Cosmos* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2005), 281.

Spirit is the remote cause, while natural forces are proximate causes of events. Because the Spirit created all of the natural processes and laws, it is not demeaning that he sometimes uses wind, fire, earthquakes and floods (along with other processes) to create and recreate the earth; the Spirit is God's creative agent within *all* of the forces of nature.

In support of my conceptioning, Kathryn Tanner contends that the Spirit has historically been seen to either work immediately (i.e., proximately) or gradually (Tanner 2006, 87). So then, the Spirit could be seen just as much at work in the ordinary events of history as in its unusual happenings. Just as God usually works within,³ rather than overriding the normal course of human affairs, so too does God work within the natural processes of nature; the Spirit works modestly, in a continuous fashion, in and through natural processes.⁴ The notion of emergence is compatible with this impersonal kenotic working of the Spirit in empowering nature from within in an almost hidden manner.⁵ By the Spirit's kenosis into the natural world, it itself is then enabled, using Clayton's language, to participate in the processes of production and reproduction.

A pneumatological rereading of Gen 1 and 2 shows the predominant conceptions of "creation" to be false abstractions. In fact, many contemporary conceptions of creation are "very vague, mostly even obscure" (Welker 1999, 6-7). I contend that the "creation" in Genesis is not a creation out of nothing (*ex nihilo*), as a onetime event, but is instead a continuous creation, a transformative process of producing higher aggregate conditions out of an absence of structure and order. *Creatio continua* operates as an enabling condition for all that occurs thereafter. According to Welker, neither Gen 1 or 2 "describes God as a highest being who in pure self-sufficiency does nothing other than produce and cause creaturely being" (Welker 1999, 9). Thus, the creating Spirit is not merely an actor within nature, but also a reactor within the natural world. Indeed,

³Goergen contends, which I also affirm, that as the source of creative evolution, the Spirit works from *within* creation to generate ever increasing complexity, as opposed to externally compelling and manipulating creation (Goergen, *Fire of Love*, 106).

⁴Michael Welker, "Spirit in Philosophical, Theological, and Interdisciplinary Perspectives." In *The Work of the Spirit*, ed. Michael Welker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 227.

⁵Hiddenness is at the heart of kenosis, notes Simmons (Ernest Simmons, "Towards kenotic Pneumatology: Quantum Field Theory and the Theology of the Cross." *CTNS Bulletin* 19, no. 2 (1999):11-16).

the Spirit's action is an action that reacts, and is an action that also lets itself be determined. Gen 1 and 2 depict a "creation" that has its own activity, is itself productive, and is itself causative.

In the Genesis narrative, then, one is not able to derive a clear demarcation between the Spirit's creativity and the creature's activity. On the one hand, the Spirit's activity is clearly active in production and causation. On the other hand, the Spirit is equally reactive to that which is created. An abstract, minimal definition of "creation" as related within the Genesis narrative could be stated as follows: "creation is the construction and maintenance of associations of different, interdependent creaturely realms" (Welker 1999, 13). A full study of "creation" must, therefore, focus upon the interdependencies of natural and providential processes. Creation as a whole, both the nature and reality of it, continually flow into each other.

As John C. Polkinghorne writes, "Part of a notion of *creatio continua* must surely be that an evolving universe is one which is theologically understood as being allowed, within divine providence, 'to make itself'" (Polkinghorne 1995, 84). Rather than bringing into being a ready-made world of unalterable character, the Godhead allows the natural world, kenotically empowered by the Spirit, to develop according to its own pace. Moreover, W. H. Vanstone notes that the activity of the Spirit within "creation" proceeds by no assured program, but is precarious instead (Vanstone 1977, 62). This evolving fertility is not a linear progression, but is staggered, as the Spirit is not the manipulator of the natural world, but its director instead. In support of this assertion, the Spirit is seen at various junctures within the Bible to operate via proximate causation. For example, Ps 104:30 (NKJV) states, "When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth." Here the term create (*bara*) is used, not of the initial generation of life, but of its continual regeneration, as the context speaks of the Spirit causing "the grass [to] grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate" (v. 14). It is "He [the Spirit, i.e., who] makes springs pour water into the ravines; [and flow] between the mountains" (v. 10) . . . and who "bring[s] darkness, [and] it becomes night" (v. 20). Further, it is the Spirit that continually provides food for all living things (v. 28). The repeated emphasis within Ps 104 is the notion that God works *with* and *within* the world, which presupposes that God creates through the power of the Spirit, as well as the notion that the presence of the Spirit is the condition for both potentialities and realities of nature (cf. Moltmann 1993, 10). So then, the psalmist knows nothing of

outright spontaneous generation, for God sends forth his Spirit, and they (i.e., all things) are created. Interestingly, Moltmann gives the Spirit a near monopoly in “creation.” From Ps 104:30, which speaks of the life-giving action of the Spirit, Moltmann concludes: “This presupposes that God always creates through and in the power of his Spirit” (Moltmann 1993, 9). The Spirit is repeatedly depicted in this psalm as the presence and power of God, as well as the means by which God acts within creation (Bonting 2006, 715).

Moving into the New Testament, one finds support also for the conception of the Spirit’s activity in nature as advocated by this essay. Indeed, the Greek verb *kenown*, from which the term *kenosis* is derived, can mean either “to empty,” or “to pour out.” In the literal sense its Hebrew equivalent (LXX) is used, for example, in Isa 32:15: “Until the spirit be poured upon us from on high. . . .” This essay posits that the kenosis of the Spirit into nature had a similar effect as the Spirit being poured out from on high. Furthermore, this usage of the term *kenosis* eerily resembles that which is found in Isa 53:12, which reads that “He *poured out* his soul to death.” What God does particularly and punctiliously by pouring out his soul unto death, God does generally and continually by the kenosis of the Spirit into nature. The Spirit is the breath of life, the very giver of life, and is thus the creative power of the Father. The Spirit, then, is the vital energy that enlivens, as well as the potent force that enervates innovation and compels complexity. The kenosis of the Spirit into the natural world, the very pouring out of life, makes possible not only otherness as properly conceived, but also its gradual actualization. There is an inherent selfless others’-centeredness in kenosis in reference to the Spirit’s kenosis into nature in that the Spirit was poured out for the creation of that which was *not yet*, but *could be*.

Several years ago, a collection of essays by theologians and scientists explored the natural world as *The Work of Love*, pointing to divine action as kenosis (Polkinghorne 2001). In it, Polkinghorne adopts the understanding of kenosis as an affirmation of God’s voluntary self-limitation that allows creatures to enjoy power and freedom. Classical theology, according to Polkinghorne, envisions God in total control and invulnerable such that there is no reciprocal effect of creatures upon the divine nature. According to Polkinghorne’s view of kenosis, however, the kenotic Creator interacts with creatures. For Polkinghorne, the creating Spirit submitted to the quasi-free process of evolutionary creation, and was, as it were, “taking a risk” in creating a world kenotically, as it necessarily

involves both chance and randomness through the processes of evolution (cf. Sanders 1998, 10-12). Polkinghorne notes that the kenotic Spirit is the exemplar of humility, for he kenotically interacted with the created world, and as such, at least in some qualified sense, limits his eternity and omnipotence (Polkinghorne 2001, 106).

Polkinghorne's view of kenosis is similar to Moltmann's view of kenosis, which notes that kenotic self-surrender is "God's Trinitarian nature, and is therefore the mark of all his works 'outward'" (Moltmann 2001, 141). The kenotic creating Spirit does not overrule nature or the creatures found therein, but continuously interacts with them instead. Polkinghorne summarizes his view by intimating that God allows the created other to be and to act, so that, while all that happens is permitted by God's general providence, not all that happens is in accordance with God's will or brought about by divine special providence. Such an understanding, I submit, is basic to the interpretation of evolutionary history as "creation" making itself.

IV. Kenosis of the Spirit into Nature and Emergence Theory

Polkinghorne's theory of kenosis as found within *The Work of Love* is helpful, but incomplete (especially when one considers the problem of evil). The kenotic theology advocated herein maintains that the Spirit completely shares and imparts himself *into* nature. The Spirit of God "poured himself out" into the natural world, thereby causing it to emerge from chaos and become a structured and orderly system of life-bearing entities. As a result of this *breath of God* imparted, nature gives birth to life, and life-bearing creatures are the end result of biological evolution. So then, the Spirit is the life-giving force that enables the natural world to strive toward becoming its fullness via the process of evolution and the kenotic act of self-offering. One may accurately posit, then, that nature, in a qualified sense, possesses the Spirit of God from its very origin. Instead of reducing the created world into a pantheistic entity, however, God is an "all embracing unity" in that the world exists "in" God (panentheism) in the sense that God is the ground of being for the created world. Being panentheistic in relation, there is both distinction and relatedness between the Spirit and nature.

In an interesting contribution to the compilation edited by Michael Welker, *The Work of the Spirit*, Amos Yong discusses the contributions (if any) of pneumatology to the broad notion of divine action (Yong 2006,

183-204). According to Yong, the Spirit causes the emergence of order and presides over it from within through the processes of division, distinction, differentiation, and particularization (Yong 2006, 194-95, 202). Yong's hypothesis gains support by Morowitz, who argues that the Spirit powers—even empowers—emergence by being the selection rules between God's immanence and the development of the earth. Morowitz writes, "emergence selects the restricted world of the real from the super-immense world of the possible" (Morowitz 2002, 197). One can perceive God within evolution, then, for the processes themselves, unveiled by the biological sciences, are God-acting-as-co-creator. Indeed, the Spirit enables emergence by endowing nature and the creatures therein with the ability to unfold by apparent natural processes according to their own inherent potentialities and possibilities.

This essay posits that there is a definitive lure of the Spirit within the propensities of nature, which seamlessly coalesces with the notion of the Spirit's kenosis into nature, for this potential, as it were, is actualized by the Spirit. This advocacy of "lure" is quite similar to the one used by the process theologian Peacocke, who argues that God is the co-creator with finite agents, luring them without coercion and without pre-determining the outcome of the lure (Peacocke 2004, 306). By creating in a kenotic manner, the Spirit both allows and invites the input of creatures in the activity of "creation," and reacts according to that input. Thus, God has chosen to allow the other to act, and has chosen to invite nature into a cooperative relationship. Indeed, the Spirit did not create in a manipulative, single act, but instead was able to create a process in which nature was allowed to develop.

This notion of creation through development also leads to an understanding of biological evolution in which the Spirit is seen as using a type of continuing creation. There exists overwhelming evidence of a universe marked by development, which points to a "creation" by kenosis. And it should be noted that the Spirit is present "in, with, and under" the processes of biological evolution within the created world. The kenotic creating Spirit is present within the historical contingency of evolution, as well as its lawful regularity (Polkinghorne 2001, 96). Seen in this manner, the Spirit acts within the causal nexus of nature, which consists of natural law, providence, and later human action (Polkinghorne 2001, 101). Thus, the Spirit did not bring about "creation" in a single, definitive action, but instead used a process of evolution guided by natural laws.

V. Emergence and Final Causality

In his *Physics* (ca. 350 BCE), Aristotle sought to determine the number of causes or accounts for why something is what it is. Based on his observation and logical analysis, Aristotle concluded that four causes were necessary for a complete explanation of an object: 1) the formal cause, the principle that makes a thing what it is; 2) the material cause, the principle out of which a thing comes to be; 3) the efficient cause, the principle responsible for the motion of a being; and 4) the final cause, the principle for the sake of which something is done (McKeon 1947, 240). Based upon these four causes, Aristotle developed a philosophical system to explain the universe (McKeon 1947, 248). Beginning with Aristotle, and throughout the late-nineteenth century, philosophers generally accepted the sufficiency of the four causes. However, many modern scientists and philosophers dismiss the notion of a final cause, arguing that these types of “causes” are not justifiable, since they cannot be verified empirically. As Copleston puts it, since the time of Descartes, “explanation by means of final causes, of ‘souls,’ of occult vital principles, and of substantial forms [did] nothing to promote the advance of physical science and were therefore discarded” (Copleston 1959, 138). Consequently, modern science only grapples with material and efficient causes in its explanations. Yet this same science can now be the basis for a reasonable argument for the consideration of final causes in philosophical modeling.

In relation to emergence, Clayton elsewhere notes that “God could guide the process of emergence by introducing new information (formal causality) and by holding out an ideal or image that could influence development without altering the mechanical mechanisms of evolution or adding energy from the outside (final causality)” (Clayton 2002, 273). It may indeed be likely that final causality has more import in this discussion of emergence than Clayton seemingly allows for it, especially in light of a Pneumatic understanding of the lure/woo of God toward eschatological fulfillment, and when viewed from the kenotic position argued by this current essay. In recounting the emergence theories within the twentieth century, Clayton notes that Conway Lloyd Morgan anticipated, by some sixty-five years, Niles Eldredge’s postulation of “punctuated equilibrium.” Morgan perceived that emergence entails an evolution that is punctuated; Morgan resisted his contemporary’s view that an *e’lan vital* (vital energy) was introduced from a force outside of nature. In contrast, Morgan advocated a position in which the underlying forces driving evo-

lution toward greater emergence are thoroughly immanent within the natural world. Clayton relays that perhaps “punctuated equilibrium” could be thought of in terms of final causation (cf. Clayton 2004, 13–14). If so, the big transitions in “punctuated equilibrium” are signs of divine intervention.

VI. Conclusion

Whereas Clayton has offered an explanative and informative survey of emergence theory, this essay seeks to supplement his account by highlighting the metaphysical realities that may give rise to emergence within the evolutionary advance. The earth is an active, empowering environment—even an empowering *agent*—that brings forth life by various independent processes of self-reproduction. Evolution is the overall process, but emergence punctuates the steps of the evolutionary epic. At the same time, the earth must be seen as an environment of various heterogeneous life-processes. So then, the earth brings forth, but it does not bring forth itself. By releasing the power of the self-directed earth, the Spirit enables—potentially—the continual production, variation, and sustenance of vegetable and animal life (cf. Welker 1999, 42). Moreover, in order to be consistent within the causal nexus, the Spirit kenotically bestows causal power unto the created order, and in effect thereafter becomes the chief cause amongst causes; however, the created world is docile before the Spirit, and is therefore ever open to the Spirit’s causal influence. The entire mission of the Spirit could be succinctly envisioned as one of kenosis (Lucien 1997, 116). By extrapolation, one may infer that the Spirit was poured into nature so that it might develop fully into various levels of complexity, just as the Father had intentioned from the beginning. By focusing on the Spirit, via kenosis into nature, as both originator of and (co-)operator with the created world, one can see that the Spirit is both directly and indirectly involved in the world from beginning to end.⁶

Clayton asserts that God as the primary cause never conflicts with secondary causes. In view of this assertion, it is important to realize that

⁶In personal communication on 6 June, 2007, Clayton said that he holds the assumption that final causation conflicts with the explanatory paradigm of the biological sciences. So then, if he argues that God does something biologically impossible, then Clayton opens up a chasm between himself and biological scientists. Clayton said that he follows Thomas Aquinas, with God being the primary cause, and with creation being the secondary cause(s).

Clayton's form of emergence is predominantly bottom-up, as opposed to top-down. Is Clayton's God entirely stripped of divine power and divine alterity by being immanent within the causal structure of the world? Apparently not: "one can accept an epistemic presumption in favor of naturalistic interpretations and still hold that it is metaphysically possible that . . . the regularities of the natural world are occasionally, or perhaps frequently, broken by direct interventions of God" (Clayton 2004, 163). Moreover, Clayton states that emergentists must "give up" the principle of causal closure, which is common to modern physics (Clayton 2004, 56). Whereas this essay agrees with Clayton's dismissal of a thoroughly fixed notion of finalistic causes in biology, it suggests that instead of the organs/isms being guided by the potentialities that are open to it, that they are instead lured by the potentialities that are open to it. The concept of lure instead of guide would entail the Spirit to be ever-before the evolutionary advancement of organs/isms, wooing them toward their eschatological fulfillment in Christ. These statements regarding finalistic causes are reminiscent of A. N. Whitehead, who posits that the divine lure is at work since the moment of the initial creation of the world. This essay, however, breaks with Whitehead because his theory entails the notion that every unit of reality is a fully experiencing agent, whereas I affirm biologists in thinking that the degree of agency evolves over time, conditioned with respect to the level of complexity of the species in question.⁷

The Spirit, it is herein affirmed, ennobles nature to possess emergent capabilities.⁸ The Spirit imparts propensities into nature that eventuate the rise of higher forms of life.⁹ The *breath of life*, thus, enables and empowers the emergence of nature and the creatures that inhabit it.

⁷Samuel Alexander stated that there is a principle of development *within* evolution, i.e., something that drives the whole process, which he terms the "nisus" (Samuel Alexander, *Space, Time, and Deity*, the Gifford Lectures for 1916-18, 2 vols. [London: Macmillan, 1920]). Alexander noted this was a creative metaphysical principle that bore resemblance to Whitehead's principle of Creativity. If we could perhaps wed Whitehead and Alexander together, it could be very effective because Whitehead has a theory of agency and lure whereas Alexander has various evolving levels of agency.

⁸Cf. Welker, *The Work of the Spirit*, xii.

⁹Peacocke, for example, suggests that information-processing systems, as well as information-storage systems, are examples of necessary things that arise as evolution proceeds, and are necessary for higher forms of life (Peacocke, "The Cost of New Life," 30).

Moreover, this Spirit of emergence endows nature with the ability to unfold by “natural” processes according to their inherent potentialities. A pneumatological interpretation of emergence easily allows for the notion of common descent, granting that it is a (more than) probable inference, based upon homology, fossil progression, embryological similarity, and rudimentary organs. In this aspect, the complexity seen everywhere within the biotic world is ultimately the result of the Spirit, but evolution is an intricate—if not the most important—part of the mechanism of its derivation.

In this essay, the ever-present call for dialogue between religion and science has been taken seriously, in part by interacting with Clayton’s seminal work, *Mind & Emergence*, wherein Clayton contends that emergence is a viable option in contrast to the waning explanatory power of both reductionistic physicalism and substance dualism. Moreover, this essay has presented the biblical basis of kenosis of the Spirit into nature, arguing that it presents the Spirit as being the active agent of God in the world, particularly regarding the Spirit as life-giver and animator of all of the natural world. In using Clayton’s text as the source of its extrapolations, this essay has also made a contribution toward a systematic theology of creation by elucidating the connections between kenosis of the Spirit into the natural world, emergence theory and final causality. God, in the person of the Spirit, is at work within natural processes, luring, wooing, and awaiting the ever-increasing complexity within the natural environ.

THE CHURCH AND HOMOSEXUAL PRACTICE: THE DISTRACTION OF COMPETING VISIONS AND A WAY FORWARD FOR THE WESLEYAN TRADITION

by

Dean Smith

Introduction

That there are deep divisions between theological liberals and conservatives within the Church is an unremarkable claim.¹ And over the past couple of decades the acrimony between the two groups has become particularly evident in relation to the issue of homosexual practice and the Church. It would appear that no Christian denomination has been spared the ongoing fallout from this debate.

But the heat generated by the debate over homosexual practice and the Church continues to mask some fundamental epistemological differences between the combatants. According to Nancey Murphy these differences can be traced to the philosophical agenda of modernity² that saw liberals and evangelicals adopt different epistemic foundations for their theological method. Liberals chose experience while evangelicals chose scripture as the foundations for their theological projects.

Now while the postmodern turn has seen the undermining of foundationalism as the guiding metaphor for knowledge, these defining differences have endured.³ The primacy of either experience or scripture has now become the “firm” beliefs in a postmodern holist epistemology. And

¹See <http://subversivewesleyan.wordpress.com/2014/04/08/an-open-letter-to-the-left-and-right-of-the-united-methodist-church/> Retrieved February 19, 2016 from World Wide Web.

²Nancey Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism & Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 2007), 1-7.

³The shift from epistemological foundationalism to holism does not entail discontinuity of the two approaches. Quine and Wittgenstein show that in holistic systems there are beliefs that are “firm” and these give strength to those that are “fluid.”

what has historically been characterized in terms of different positions along a theological spectrum can now be framed in terms of different spectra. Or to use the language of Thomas Kuhn we could say that we are really dealing with different paradigms.⁴

It was Thomas Kuhn who, in seeking to understand the progress of science through disruption and revolution, described the relationship between two competing scientific paradigms as incommensurable.⁵ And given the importance of Kuhn's seminal work, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, and in particular the notion of incommensurability, it is somewhat surprising how little attention has been given to this idea in the course of understanding contemporary theological and ethical debates.⁶ It would seem that the very idea of the incommensurability of theological paradigms with talk of different worlds⁷ is simply a bridge too far for many theologians.

And if there is a parallel between Kuhn's understanding of science and theology, it may well be the case that the ongoing failure to recognize the incommensurability of liberal and evangelical paradigms (progressive and conservative from hereon in)⁸ has resulted in the confounding of issues within the debate over homosexual practice and the Church, and as a result, little progress has been possible. While the debate appears on the surface at least to be about homosexual practice and the church what is often being contested is epistemic authority and frameworks.

This failure to recognize incommensurability, and the energy expended in talking past each other, has been an unfruitful distraction from the pressing task of addressing the issue of homosexual practice and

⁴I am using the term paradigm in the more global sense in this paper. Paradigm is not just a model but more akin to a worldview.

⁵Admittedly this was in the context of science but I would argue is relevant to theology as well.

⁶See my unpublished Master's thesis *The Incommensurability Thesis and the Implications for Theology and Ethics* (Trinity Theological College, Brisbane Australia, 2000).

⁷Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 111.

⁸Nancey Murphy uses the descriptors liberals and evangelicals in her book *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism*. Gary Dorrien believes that the fundamental divide in Christian theology is between various forms of conservative orthodoxy and progressivism. To reflect Dorrien's distinction I will refer to the two theological camps as conservative (shortened form of conservative orthodoxy) and progressive from this point on.

the church by those who do inhabit the same socially embodied paradigm, be that progressive or conservative. There does seem to be a reluctance by both progressives and conservatives to give up the modernist assumption that by an appeal to some universal standard of reason it should be possible for all contested belief to be eventually arbitrated. In other words, progressives and conservatives continue to debate their positions “as if” they inhabited the same conceptual framework.⁹ However, I think there are good reasons to believe that this is not the case. It is my contention that progressives and conservatives inhabit incommensurable socially embodied paradigms. Combatants from the different paradigms continue to speak past each other with the net effect being continued growing hostility and suspicion on all sides.

If I am correct in my assessment of the incommensurability of progressive and conservative paradigms within the Wesleyan family, and indeed like a fault line running through all of Western Protestant Christianity, then addressing this issue becomes a matter of urgency. Perhaps a more general recognition of this incommensurability may result in a split within Wesleyan denominations and the reorganisation into progressive and conservative traditions.¹⁰ At the very least we might hope for more considered dialogue between those inhabiting the incommensurable paradigms.¹¹

Now accepting the possibility and implications of incommensurability may be for some an unacceptable capitulation to postmodern sensibilities. But perhaps it is a better outcome than the futility of engaging in an imagined dialogue. It certainly remains to be seen,¹² in the debate over

⁹The title of the book, *Homosexuality in the Church: Both Sides of the Debate*, reflects this idea that arguments are being made from within the same commensurating framework.

¹⁰Much like the split in the Society of Friends tradition between the Liberal Friends and traditional or Evangelical friends.

Some may wish to argue that John Wesley’s understanding, “that the living core of the Christian faith was revealed in Scripture, illumined by tradition, vivified in personal experience, and confirmed by reason,” clearly points to the primacy of scripture within the tradition and therefore that the designation “progressive Wesleyan” must be an oxymoron. But to do so would simply ignore the obvious and empirical fact that the Wesleyan tradition does currently include both progressives and conservatives.

¹¹I do not hold to the view that incommensurability of paradigms entails incommunicability between paradigms.

¹²In some traditions it would seem that a split is inevitable, hence my reference to the eleventh hour.

homosexual practice and the church what are the prospects for maintaining unity of the incommensurable positions within the Wesleyan family.¹³

With my purpose identified I will now set out the steps I will take to achieve it. Firstly, I will restate the incommensurability thesis as an appropriate context for understanding the current debate over homosexuality and the church. Next, I will support my claim of incommensurability with reference to the debate over the Church and homosexual practice within the United Methodist Church. Finally I will explore some of the implications of my argument and propose a way forward for the Wesleyan family.

The Incommensurability Thesis as a Context for Understanding the Intractability of the Debate Between Progressives and Conservatives Within the Wesleyan Tradition

The differences and divisions between progressives and conservatives have historically been characterized in terms of positions on a continuum or spectrum. To the far left are the progressives (liberals in the old money) with a low view of scripture; that is, they approach the scriptures as you would any other literature. To the far right are the ultraconservatives or fundamentalists with a high literalistic view of scripture and who are wary of modern critical methods of scripture scholarship. In the center are the Evangelicals who, according to themselves, have a balanced view of things, maintaining a high view of scripture yet also having a respect for modern methods and learning.¹⁴

Such a characterization of progressives and conservatives in terms of positions along a spectrum, of course, presupposes that those identified along the spectrum share the same overarching conceptual framework with shared standards and methods of rational justification. And as Alasdair MacIntyre has argued, it was indeed the goal of the Enlightenment thinkers to establish such a framework with universal standards and methods of rational justification against which individuals could test belief and action to determine whether such were rational or irrational, just or unjust, enlightened or unenlightened.¹⁵ These “first” principles

¹³While the same conditions are to be found in Catholic Christianity the role of the Magisterium provides a framework for managing what are sometimes radical differences in the Church.

¹⁴This is a characterization as presented to a first year theological student studying at an Evangelical College. This is how the author remembers it.

¹⁵Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice, Which Rationality*, (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 6.

were thought to be independent of personal, social, cultural, and historical bias. Such particularities were considered to be “the mere accidental clothing of reason in particular times and places.”¹⁶

However, it is now widely accepted that the “Enlightenment Project” has failed to deliver any such universal principles or standards of justification. The idea that all Christians really are, or even could be, on the same page and that we should all the more determinately press on in the belief that we can finally overcome our differences and discord is now more than ever difficult to defend in a post-Enlightenment world. Yet many progressives and conservative theologians carry on in “the belief that every rationally defensible standpoint can engage with every other, the belief that, whatever may be thought about incommensurability in theory, in practice it can be safely neglected.”¹⁷ I would add that those same theologians carry on in the belief that whatever may be thought of about incommensurability in theory, that the metaphor of the spectrum is still meaningful and can be adopted to identify progressive and conservative theological positions.

The differences and divisions between liberals and conservatives should rather be understood and characterized in terms of incommensurable paradigms or traditions.¹⁸ Thomas Kuhn and Alasdair MacIntyre¹⁹ have contributed significantly to our understanding that when it comes to our knowledge of the world we may have to allow for the possibility of a plurality of competing frameworks of interpretation, worldviews, conceptual schemes, paradigms, or traditions,²⁰ and further, that there is no

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopedia, Genealogy, and Tradition*, (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 22.

¹⁸See my article, “Are Liberals and Evangelicals Singing from the Same Song Sheet?” *The Heythrop Journal* 51, no. 5 (September 2010): 831-846.

¹⁹I would also include with these individuals, Paul Feyerabend and Michael Polanyi as significant contributors to the discussion.

²⁰My own preferred term is socially embodied paradigm. While I believe MacIntyre’s “tradition” captures the important idea that competing frameworks of interpretation are socially embodied and Kuhn’s “paradigm” captures the idea that those same frameworks of interpretation not only shape our knowledge of the world (a rational capacity), but also our perception of the world (a psychological capacity), neither term sufficiently captures both capacities. From this point on I may resort to the term “paradigm” as shorthand for socially embodied paradigm.”

purely objective point of view from which to survey the epistemological landscape, no independent standards by which to judge competing knowledge claims made from within competing paradigms.²¹ This is in stark contrast to Enlightenment thinkers who believed that such a universal point of reference could be established—Thomas Nagel's view from nowhere.

In the philosophy of science Thomas Kuhn rejected the notion that science progresses toward some hypothetical final theory of everything. This is the bucket analogy—the idea that knowledge is cumulative, that our understanding is like water filling an empty bucket until one day our bucket is full and our knowledge is complete. Kuhn ruffled feathers when he suggested that science is not cumulative in this way at all. Science does progress, but through disruption and revolution and the eventual victory of each successive and incommensurable paradigm.

As the history of science bears witness, there are times when a crisis in science will occur that disrupts the practice of normal science. Scientists become aware of anomaly, problems become increasingly difficult to solve within the accepted paradigm and during these times of crisis, some, mostly young, scientists seek alternative theories to explain the data available to them. A mix of initial success in problem solving along with the aesthetic appeal of an alternative paradigm is often sufficient to get some scientists interested in exploring an alternative paradigm. During a scientific revolution a critical mass is eventually achieved with a significant number of scientists undergoing a paradigm shift.

At least for a time during a scientific revolution there are at least two competing paradigms with scientists working in each. Kuhn makes the important point that “the decision to reject one paradigm is always simultaneously the decision to accept another.”²² After a scientific revolution normal science resumes with the defeat of one paradigm and the victory of a new one.

²¹This of course is not the first time something like “incommensurability” has been recognized in the history of philosophy. Classical thinkers had themselves made the observation that the major philosophical schools taught are what we might now call “incommensurable” doctrines. It was for this reason that the Pyrronistic sceptics thought that the only proper response to any philosophical enquiry was the indefinite suspension of judgement.

²²Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 77.

According to Kuhn, scientists working in different paradigms during times of scientific revolution really do see the world quite differently. A change in paradigm is not simply a change in particular commitments, problems, and methods, although it does involve all of these. For Kuhn a change in paradigm can be likened to a gestalt shift in the scientist's perceptions:

It is rather as if the professional community had been suddenly transported to another planet where familiar objects are seen in a different light and are joined by unfamiliar ones as well. Of course, nothing of quite that sort does occur: there is no geographical transplantation; outside the laboratory everyday affairs usually continue as before. Nevertheless, paradigm changes do cause scientists to see the world of their research-engagement differently. In so far as their only recourse to that world is through what they see and do, we may want to say that after a revolution, scientists are responding to a different world.²³

Paradigms in the Kuhnian sense, therefore, have to be understood as being somewhat self-contained and historically distinct.

The existence of competing paradigms necessarily leads to problems in communication. Kuhn talks of partial communication, of men talking through each other, of proponents of competing paradigms being always slightly at cross-purposes. These problems in communication arise during times of revolutionary science when scientists who have undergone a paradigm shift enter into dialogue with scientists committed to the traditional paradigm. The language and instruments used in post-revolutionary science may well go unchanged; however, due to a change in fundamental assumptions the scientist will employ them quite differently.²⁴ Kuhn captures the dissonance in communication this way:

The proponents of competing paradigms are always at least slightly at cross-purposes. Neither side will grant all the non-empirical assumptions that the other needs in order to make its case. Like Proust and Bertollet arguing about the composition of chemical compounds, they are bound partly to talk through each other.²⁵

²³Ibid., 111.

²⁴Ibid., 30.

²⁵Ibid., 148.

As we have seen then, Kuhn understands paradigms as developing and changing through time, allowing for periods of revolution when there are competing paradigms. The eventual outcome is always victory for one paradigm in which a period of “normal” science follows. By contrast, the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre speaks of traditions rather than paradigms, and recognizes the possibility of competing traditions not only during times of revolution, but extended through time. In MacIntyre’s account any such “normal” period of enquiry characterized by a lack of conflict is not a sign of progress within a tradition but rather is the mark of dissolution within that tradition.

According to MacIntyre, a living tradition is a historically extended, socially embodied argument. It is in fact the conception of rational enquiry as embedded in tradition that, according to MacIntyre, the Enlightenment succeeded in excluding from view.²⁶ The conclusion reached by MacIntyre is that there is no such thing as rationality that is not the rationality of some tradition.

According to MacIntyre, those working within a particular tradition should not assume that they are contributing to a shared socially embodied argument. Without the promise of a universal set of standards we must live with the reality that there are different epistemological traditions with rival epistemological commitments or first principles, and different standards and methods of enquiry that are quite unique to those traditions. We can no longer assume that we are all really speaking the same language, nor indeed are we all on the same epistemological page.

It is Kuhn’s and MacIntyre’s understanding of incommensurable and competing paradigms or traditions of rational enquiry that I think correctly characterizes progressive and conservative socially embodied paradigms within Protestant Christianity in general and Wesleyanism in particular. Both competing traditions have their own histories.²⁷ Both have different epistemological commitments, that is, first principles and standards of rational justification, which have emerged through their own historical development.

The Kuhn-MacIntyre thesis can be outlined as follows:²⁸

²⁶Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice, Which rationality*, 7.

²⁷For a comprehensive account of the history of liberal/progressive theology see Gary Dorrien’s trilogy *The Making of American Liberal Theology*.

²⁸A modification of my view as presented in my unpublished Masters thesis entitled *The Incommensurability Thesis and the Implications for Theology and Ethics*.

a) There are paradigms or traditions that are incommensurable. This means that there is no overarching framework within which two conflicting paradigms or traditions can be judged, reconciled, or resolved.

b) Such incommensurability cannot be recognized, let alone characterized adequately, by those who inhabit one of the two conflicting paradigms or traditions.²⁹

c) Incommensurability does not entail strong relativism (communication between those who inhabit incommensurable conceptual schemes is possible).

d) Incommensurability refers not only to objective description but also subjective perception.³⁰

e) Central to these paradigms or traditions are competing orienting core commitments that are given the status of first principles³¹ and;

f) These core commitments or first principles are inter-subjectively chosen and as first principles are beyond testing.

g) Beliefs inform the language within each scheme and this necessarily leads to problems in communication.³²

h) Standards are internal to a particular conceptual scheme so that each scheme has to be understood as a coherent whole and judged in its own terms.

Different Orienting Core Commitments as First Principles

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to deal with each of these points in turn, I would like to give attention to e) in order to show that the incommensurability of progressive and conservative socially embodied paradigms can be seen in the different orienting core commitments that are given the status of first principles, which in turn determine the relative ordering of the sources of theology. In the case of progressives, the orienting core commitment is made in favor of the constellation of

²⁹Alastair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 113.

³⁰Thomas Kuhn

³¹Alastair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice, Which rationality*, 8. This is no less true in the postmodern context than in the modern context. The progressive tradition took its rise during the period we refer to as modernity but continues as an ongoing tradition in a postmodern context. What were foundational principles are now to be conceptualized as central epistemic commitments within a holist epistemological context.

³²Often the same words are used by those who inhabit incommensurable traditions or paradigms but the meaning of the terms, which is tied to the inter-connected beliefs of the paradigms, may be very different.

experience and reason,³³ while in the case of conservatives, the orienting core commitment is made in favor of the constellation of scripture and tradition.³⁴ For both progressives and conservatives, reasoning on any theological or ethical issue will then be framed by the relative ordering of sources as determined by the original core commitment made in advance of any theological reflection. Further, this relative ordering of the sources then delimits the conclusions drawn in relation to questions about the status of homosexual practice in the Church.

Now these orienting core commitments that inform our thinking may not be obvious to us or to those with whom we engage. Indeed, we may remain unaware that any alternative exists and so be oblivious to our own epistemological bias.³⁵ I contend that this is certainly the case in the debate over same-sex relations and the Church. We carry on the debate assuming that those with whom we are discussing same-sex relations share our orienting core commitments even when they don't.

Because this is not always obvious to us in the course of our discussions, the result may well be that all we do is talk through each other. For many Christians, it may be the case that they have not ever considered *how* it is that they have arrived at their particular conclusions. Yet if we give due attention to what we and our dialogue partners say in the course of a discussion about same-sex relations we can often pick up clues as to the orienting core commitments that determine the ordering of epistemic authorities, and in the process foreground our most basic assumptions and those of our dialogue partners.

³³Consider the following definition: "Liberal theology is defined by its openness to the verdicts of modern intellectual inquiry, especially the natural and social sciences; its commitment to the authority of individual reason and experience . . . and its commitment to make Christianity credible and socially relevant to modern people." (Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion 1805-1900*, xxiii.)

³⁴Protestants who have adopted a more radical version of the *sola scriptura* principle have historically given less attention to the authority of tradition in the scripture-tradition constellation than Catholic and Orthodox conservatives. However, the key to understanding the difference between scripture-tradition constellation and the experience-reason constellation is that the former represents [external] authority-based orthodoxies according to Dorrien.

³⁵According to Alasdair MacIntyre a person who experiences an epistemological crisis may for the first time come to recognize the existence of "alternative and rival schemata which may yield mutually incompatible accounts of what is going on around him." Alasdair MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative and the Philosophy of Science," 454.

For example, when someone makes the claim that practicing homosexuals should not be allowed full participation in the Church and then follow up that claim by an appeal to the authority of Scripture and/or the historic teaching of the Church we may infer that for this person the orienting core commitment has been made in favor of the constellation of scripture and tradition. This does not mean that experience and reason are unimportant. Only, that in terms of their place and role in the conservative socially embodied paradigm, they are seen as confirming and/or shaping the revelation as enshrined in scripture and tradition. In his *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, Alister McGrath presents two approaches to the question of the relation of experience to theology.³⁶ In the first approach experience provides a foundational resource for theology and in the second theology provides an interpretive framework within which human experience may be interpreted. I would argue that the first of these approaches is the one that best captures the progressive mindset while the second is the one that best captures the conservative mindset. So for conservatives with an orienting commitment in favor of the constellation of scripture and tradition, it is these primary authorities that frame and shape experience and reason in the life of the Christian believer. This order of things can be seen in the United Methodist Church's Book of Discipline which states that "Wesley believed that the living core of the Christian faith was revealed in Scripture, illumined by tradition, vivified (activated, energized) in personal experience, and confirmed by reason."³⁷

On the other hand, when someone else claims that practicing homosexuals should be allowed full participation in the Church based on a feeling, on genetics or identity, that is, because "this is who I am," then we have a hint that for this person the orienting commitment to experience and reason has been made and as such takes epistemic priority in the shaping of their theology. In the book *Faithfulness in Fellowship: Reflections on Homosexuality and the Church*,³⁸ Graeme Garrett reflects on his

³⁶Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* 2nd edn. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 225.

³⁷United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2004), 77.

³⁸*Faithfulness in Fellowship: Reflections on Homosexuality and the Church*. Papers from the Doctrine Panel of the Anglican Church of Australia. (Victoria: John Garratt, 2001)

own struggles in coming to terms with the “coming out” of his own niece. We have a possible insight into his orienting core commitment in the following quote.

I know that matters of virtue and vice cannot be decided merely from a context of personal sentiment. Wider issues of revelation, reason, tradition and Scripture must be part of any judgment the Church seeks to make. But I am also aware that I have been deeply affected by personal relationships in this regard. They have changed my mind and heart, and heavily influenced the stand I take in the debate. The long and the short of it is that I have a gut-level sense of what is right in this matter. I guess I am looking for ways of reading the truth of God in this light.³⁹

In this instance it is not scripture and tradition providing a framework for experience but rather experience determining how scripture and tradition are to be interpreted.

It is important to restate that our orienting core commitments and the way we order our sources, at least in the beginning, is not something we consciously choose. It is not something we have reasoned ourselves but rather is given to us through our primary community of influence. If we are born into, or find faith in, a conservative evangelical community then it is more than likely the scripture-tradition constellation that will determine the ordering of the sources for theology. Experience and reason will be subordinate to the role played by scripture and tradition in our theological and ethical reasoning. If, on the other hand, we are born into a progressive Christian community, it is more than likely that the experience-reason constellation will determine the ordering of sources, with scripture and tradition being subordinate in theological and ethical reasoning.

This state of affairs, however, does not imply some sort of fixed determinism. Embodying a particular paradigm and the reasoning entailed does not always go unchallenged. There are many examples of people who have found themselves radically questioning their community's way of thinking to the point where they have undergone, in Kuhn's terminology, a paradigm shift that has left them thinking in a different

³⁹Ibid., 184.

way and seeing the world quite differently.⁴⁰ Consider the following comment of a progressive senior pastor in the United Methodist Church.⁴¹

Now it is our turn to get honest. Although the creeds of our denomination pay lip service to the idea that Scripture is “authoritative” and “sufficient for faith and practice,” many of us have moved far beyond that notion in our theological thinking. We are only deceiving ourselves—and lying to our evangelical brothers and sisters—when we deny the shift we have made.

We have moved beyond Luther’s *sola Scriptura* for the same reason the Catholic Church moved beyond the canonized Scriptures after the fourth century. We recognize that understandings of situations change. “New occasions teach new duties.” We have moved far beyond the idea that the Bible is exclusively normative and literally authoritative for our faith. To my thinking, that is good! What is bad is that we have tried to con ourselves and others by saying “we haven’t changed our position.”

Furthermore, few of us retain belief in Christ as the sole way of salvation. We trust that God can work under many other names and in many other forms to save people. Our views *have* changed over the years.

This being said, under “normal” conditions the orienting core commitments that determine the relative ordering of the sources within a particular socially embodied paradigm remain relatively stable or fixed points that will logically determine the range of conclusions that can be drawn as we engage with others in theological and ethical debates. It is only under the conditions of “epistemological crisis” that this stability of equilibrium can be lost.

I think that what is clear is that we can no longer assume with respect to any denomination, and in particular the Wesleyan family of denominations, that all within those denominations will have made the same orienting commitment in favor of the constellation of scripture and tradition. If, as I have been arguing, incommensurability provides the best explanation for the failure of the Church to resolve the seemingly intractable problem

⁴⁰Gordon Lynch, *Losing My Religion: Moving on from Evangelical Faith*, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 2003).

⁴¹William J. Abraham, “United Methodists at the End of the Mainline,” June 1998, accessed November, 18, 2016, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/1998/06/002-united-methodists-at-the-end-of-the-mainline>.

of the status of practicing homosexuals within the church, and further, that historically, progressives and conservatives differ in their core orienting commitments, then we should acknowledge that incommensurability does not simply characterize differences between denominations, but also within denominations. For conservative Wesleyans, scripture and tradition will be quite naturally the orienting commitment determining the ordering of the sources. This being the case, the focus of the debates around same-sex relations will naturally focus on biblical and textual hermeneutics. For progressive Wesleyans on the other hand, experience and reason will just as naturally be given epistemic priority in the process of reasoning. We should therefore not be surprised to find that the debate over same-sex relations will center on the findings of science or the experience of the person in coming to terms with their sexuality.

Supporting the Claim of Incommensurability with Reference to the Debate Over the Church and Homosexual Practice Within the United Methodist Church

In this part of the paper I will support my claim about the incommensurability of progressive and conservative socially embodied paradigms with reference to the debate over the church and homosexual practice within the United Methodist Church (UMC). The UMC is one of the largest, if not the largest, of the Wesleyan denominations and has been grappling with the issue of homosexuality and the church for over four decades. Given the constraints of a single research paper I am unable to carry out a comprehensive case study. Rather, for the purposes of this paper, I will focus on the document by William J. Abraham titled *The Birth Pangs of United Methodism as a Unique Global, Orthodox Denomination*,⁴² distributed following the general conference in Oregon in May 2016, and a selection of responses in the wake of that paper's release.

In his paper Abraham acknowledges the divide between progressives and conservatives over the question of homosexual practice.⁴³ Indeed he states as plain fact that "the General Conference failed to end the conflict between traditionalists and revisionists on the contested issues in and around human sexuality."⁴⁴ But while he holds out little hope for a resolu-

⁴²<https://peopleneedjesus.net/2016/08/25/the-birth-pangs-of-united-methodism-as-a-unique-global-orthodox-denomination/> Accessed 18th November 2016.

⁴³Abraham prefers the identifiers revisionists and traditionalists.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 1.

tion to this long-running conflict and sees no future for a third way, he does indicate a preference for the progressives to exit the UMC leaving a “big tent United Methodism of traditionalists, evangelicals, friendly fundamentalists, charismatics, evangelical Catholics and middle-of-the-roaders to ‘take up in earnest the wider reform and renewal of the denomination.’”⁴⁵

Now for Abraham there are two interrelated issues at stake in the debate over homosexual practice and the UMC. First is the seeming irreconcilability of the positions taken by progressives and conservatives within the Church. Second is the conciliar nature of the United Methodist Church and the constraints this places on the outcome of the debate. That the issue of church polity is important to Abraham’s understanding of the way forward for the UMC can be seen in the way he addresses a proposal put forward by two UMC leaders⁴⁶ who argue for a “local option” with an “agree to disagree” policy for the Church to consider. According to the Hamilton and Slaughter proposal, local congregations would determine “how they will be in ministry with gay and lesbian people including whether they will, or will not, allow for homosexual marriages or unions.”⁴⁷ Such a move though, according to Abraham, would be a fundamental shift of the United Methodist Church’s connectional polity to a congregational model.⁴⁸ Further, according to Abraham, the proposal is more likely to “extend, localize and exacerbate the acrimonious debate over the issue by forcing every congregation and annual conference to continue arguing about it for years to come.”⁴⁹

What might be overlooked in this exchange between Abraham, Hamilton, and Slaughter is the fact that while on the surface it appears to be primarily addressing differences over the question about the church and homosexual practice, Abraham correctly identifies it as fundamentally a difference over church polity. Abraham does disagree with Hamilton and Slaughter on the question of the Church and homosexual practice, but he recognizes this as a difference between those who share and embody the same conservative paradigm with differences in conclusions

⁴⁵Ibid., 12.

⁴⁶<http://mtbethel.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Hamilton-Letter.pdf>. Accessed 18th November 2016.

⁴⁷Ibid., 2.

⁴⁸Rob Renfroe, “An Open Letter to Revs. Adam Hamilton and Mike Slaughter,” June, 12, 2014, accessed November 18, 2016, <https://goodnewsmag.org/2014/06/an-open-letter-to-revs-adam-hamilton-and-michael-slaughter/>

⁴⁹Ibid.

that are the result of differing hermeneutical approaches to the scriptures,⁵⁰ rather than differences in orienting beliefs—that is, differences over whether the scripture and tradition or reason and experience are ultimately authoritative. In this context, given the connectional polity of the UMC, it would be reasonable to suppose that unless and until a different polity is agreed upon by the General Conference, those who differ in their conclusions over the issue of the Church and homosexual practice based on differing hermeneutical approaches to scripture, while legitimately able to present their views within the General Conference, would be constrained by the consensus of the conference.

But Abraham recognizes that while UMC's polity is a crucial factor in determining how the Church should move forward on the question of the Church and homosexual practice, it is not in his view the source of the present crisis.⁵¹ Abraham gets to the heart of the matter by identifying the assumptions informing the progressive and conservative claims—the question of orienting core commitments. At the heart of the conservative tradition is the acknowledgement of the importance of divine (special) revelation that is made known through scripture and tradition. In a reference to the conservatives in the UMC, Abraham makes the following claim:

At a personal level they reject pluralism in favor of a vision of the church that remains faithful to divine revelation enshrined in scripture and tradition. At bottom they find it well-nigh impossible to live in a church that rejects the truth of revelation.

Interestingly, Abraham frames the human sexuality debate in terms of the battle of orthodoxy over heresy. Indeed he likens the present challenge to the Arian controversy in the fourth century. He also makes reference to the battles in the nineteenth century when the church battled to uphold the power and authority of special divine revelation that funded and undergirded its deepest convictions and practices. According to Abraham, “what was at stake in all of these crises was either heresy in which this or that group kept what it could of the faith but set its own person-relative judgment above the faith of the church.”⁵²

⁵⁰<https://peopleneedjesus.net/2016/08/25/the-birth-pangs-of-united-methodism-as-a-unique-global-orthodox-denomination/> Accessed 18th November 2016.

⁵¹<https://peopleneedjesus.net/2016/08/25/the-birth-pangs-of-united-methodism-as-a-unique-global-orthodox-denomination/> Accessed 18th November 2016.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 14.

Within the context of my own claim that conservatives and progressives inhabit incommensurable socially embodied paradigms, then, I believe Abraham is correct in identifying the different orienting commitments as the external authorities of scripture and tradition versus experience and reason. Where I think Abraham is wrong is that he has failed to appreciate the epistemological legitimacy of the progressive's socially embodied paradigm that is informed by different orienting core commitments. The orthodox/heretical binary simply does not apply if it is acknowledged that we are not all on the same page and that conservatives and progressives inhabit incommensurable socially embodied paradigms. Heresy, then, is judged against the standards of the embodied paradigm in which the claims are made, and not according to the standards of another paradigm, something that Abraham seems to be doing.

The Way Ahead

I have so far sought to provide what I take to be the best explanation for the increasing polarization in the debate over the church and homosexual practice and the seeming inability of the church to reach any consensus on the matter. It is my thesis that the acrimony experienced by those in the church stems from a failure to recognize that in many of the contemporary debates, and in particular the debates related to human sexuality, we are not simply dealing with contending ethical claims or different hermeneutical approaches, but rather with the incommensurability of theological socially embodied paradigms. Further, that this failure to recognize incommensurability, and the energy expended by progressives and conservatives in talking past each other, has been an unfruitful distraction from the pressing task of addressing the myriad of issues facing the universal church by those embodying the same paradigm, including the challenge that homosexual practice presents for the church. However, if I have had any success in establishing my claim, the natural question that now needs to be asked is, "where to from here"? What is the way ahead for a church where the dream of a shared Christian worldview is no longer possible? In what follows I present three options for consideration. Two of these options (the first and third below) are explored in Abraham's paper with my own preferred option also presented. Now while these are particularly relevant to the UMC and other Wesleyan denominations with a connectional polity, they are not limited to this particular context.

The first option is for progressives to exit their denominations and to join with existing progressive communities of faith, or establish their

own. No doubt many progressives who believe the church has reached a critical point in the history of the debate, and have become impatient with the speed and direction of the process are seriously entertaining this option. In relation to the United Methodist Church this is Abraham's preferred option given the current state of play. He argues that the balance of blame for disunity "must surely lie on those who are determined to undo the teaching and practice of the church by what they euphemistically call 'biblical disobedience.'" ⁵³

Given that the conservative tradition was historically prior to what Abraham calls the progressives "undoing," and given that the doctrinal statements of the great majority of Protestant churches uphold some form of the Reformation doctrine of *sola scriptura*, then it seems reasonable to argue that the onus is on progressives to separate with dignity from their host denominations and establish new communities of faith. In the context of a discussion over the future possibilities for the United Methodist Church, he makes the following observation in relation to a possible exit for progressives.

To objective observers it will surely appear obvious that exiting would also be the honorable thing to do. After trying for over forty years to persuade the church to change its ways, and failing again and again to secure this goal, there naturally comes a time when a principled response requires that one face up to such failure.

Now while Abraham is not particularly sympathetic to the progressive cause, he at least acknowledges that progressives will not die on the vine should United Methodism fall apart.⁵⁴ Indeed according to Abraham,

There is no reason why the progressive tradition should not continue to exist and in some local cases thrive in the foreseeable future. Given future autonomy such prospects are likely to increase rather than decrease. Conservative predictions of doom and gloom are misleading half-truths. There is a future for progressives even though it is likely to be one of solid survival rather than immediate decline.⁵⁵

⁵³<https://peopleneedjesus.net/2016/08/25/the-birth-pangs-of-united-methodism-as-a-unique-global-orthodox-denomination/> Accessed 18th November 2016; pp.10-11.

⁵⁴Ibid., 12.

⁵⁵Ibid.

It is not difficult to imagine that within the foreseeable future a significant number of progressives within the UMC will follow through on this option and split from the church. But not all progressives will want to exit the Church they have committed their lives to. For those for whom social and connectional ties trump theological and ideological principles, the desire to keep the “family” together will be of upmost importance. A second, and my preferred option, would require progressives to moderate their expectations for fundamental change around the issue of homosexual practice with a genuine commitment to consensus, thereby accepting the status quo for the foreseeable future while at the same time working for change that takes incommensurability seriously. While this may be an uncomfortable option for many progressives who are interpreting the events through a narrative “that the conservatives have won,” other than exiting the denomination, this seems the logical fallback position unless progressives are committed to maintaining a course of action that will ultimately mire the church in destructive rhetoric and debate and ultimately damage the church’s witness for perhaps decades to come.

Now in relation to adopting this fallback position in good faith, I wish to make a couple of points. First, it is at least conceivable that the very idea of incommensurability might cause both progressives and conservatives to view each other and each other’s projects differently and perhaps more respectfully. Progressives may come to see why conservatives see things so differently and appreciate the very real constraints on moving away from the status quo in the matter of the church and homosexual practice. Alternatively, conservatives may come to appreciate why it is that progressives seem impatient to move on from the status quo. This level of understanding may take some heat out of the current debate and open a space for reflection on a reality that acknowledges incommensurability.

Second, progressives need not interpret such a commitment in good faith to the principle of consensus as capitulation to the status quo. There are two areas where change could eventually come. These are in the areas of hermeneutical shift and church polity. In relation to hermeneutical shift, it is at least conceivable that over time the numbers of specialists and non-specialists in agreement with the hermeneutical approach of Hamilton and Slaughter could reach critical mass and become the generally accepted view by conservatives. If this were to occur then progressives and conservatives would have arrived at similar conclusions about homosexual practice and the church but from very different epistemic places. But any such change is likely to come later rather than sooner. The

hurdles to be overcome by conservatives are not simply related to the required hermeneutical shift but also the gravity of overturning the historical orthodox understanding of the church. This though is a debate to be had by conservatives embodying their shared paradigm.

Perhaps the most significant area where progressives may be change agents is by working to bring about changes in church polity. As Abraham readily acknowledges in his disagreement with Hamilton and Slaughter, it is as much ecclesial constraints as doctrinal ones that presently limit the resolution of the debate over homosexual practice and the UMC. If something less than strong incommensurability is true, where communication is possible across different socially embodied paradigms, then a different approach to ecclesiology is required. The question to be addressed then is “how do we remain connected given real incommensurability in the Church?” The church would need to be open to explore whether the connectional model in its present form is able to meet present and future needs or if indeed other models would be more adequate given the church’s current challenges.

While dealing with this in any depth will be a project for another day I would like to offer some initial thoughts based on the work of the political theorist Keenan Ferguson.⁵⁶ In *All In The Family*, Ferguson reconsiders the family, in its various forms, as an exemplar of democratic politics. Of particular significance for my own discussion he takes incommensurability seriously as a political reality, but rather than sink in despair over the difficulties this suggests, he offers a possible way forward that takes seriously the very real and incommensurable disagreements within families. His starting point is the actual lived reality of the family and not some idealized or normative starting point.⁵⁷ This is particularly important given the fact that progressive Christians within every evangelical Protestant denomination seems to be a fact of life.

A third option, as presented by Abraham, sees no changes to doctrine or fundamental church polity but rather to a form of wording declaring the church teaching about homosexuality to stand but allowing a conscience clause to opt out on the part of conferences and local congregations. This would lead to the possibility of creating different jurisdic-

⁵⁶Keenan Ferguson, *All in the Family: On Community and Incommensurability* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2012).

⁵⁷In the context of our discussion this would apply to the Church’s ecclesial constitution or statements of faith.

tions inside the United Methodist Church. This proposal ultimately depends on a subtle distinction being made. According to Abraham "The United Methodist Church could legitimize, say, same-sex marriages without fully endorsing them; it could permit same-sex marriage without mandating it." Now while such a move would not ultimately bring resolution to the conflict, and indeed Abraham considers that any such legitimization of same-sex marriage would be considered by many conservatives to represent a line in the sand that could not be crossed, it may just buy time for all concerned, staving off schism and providing opportunity for rapprochement between progressives and conservatives.

While offered as a thought-experiment and in the end not optimistic about its take up, Abraham does recognize that allowing a conscience clause would lead to some positive outcomes for conservatives in the UMC. In the first place it would release them to respond morally and pastorally to the challenge posed by issue of homosexual practice and the church. Secondly, new congregations could be planted without concerns about conference boundaries. Thirdly, it would allow theologians to shift focus to other important questions demanding attention. Fourthly, it would allow conservatives within the denomination to build relationships with other Christian groups who want to preserve the Church's teaching on marriage. Finally, it would make possible a concerted effort to engage in evangelism across the nation and elsewhere.

Conclusion

I began my paper by highlighting the deep divisions that are threatening the unity of the Church in general, and the Wesleyan family in particular, as it seeks to respond theologically, ethically and pastorally to the issue of homosexuality and the church. By drawing on the notion of incommensurability in the work of Thomas Kuhn and Alasdair MacIntyre I then provided what I believe is the best explanation for the conceptual and cognitive dissonance experienced by many contemporary Christians as they engage with others who fundamentally disagree with them on this and many other significant issues. In making my case I gave particular attention to one of the distinctive characteristics of the incommensurability thesis, namely the different orienting core commitments of those embodying progressive and conservative paradigms. These different epistemic commitments have led to very different conclusions on many different theological and ethical issues, especially those related to the debate over homosexual practice and the Church. I went on to illustrate this

claim of incommensurability by reference to the ongoing debate within the United Methodist Church as it grapples with the issue. In the final section of my paper I offered some suggestions for a way forward for a community divided.

From my investigation what has become clear is that any positive way through the current impasse requires the Wesleyan family as a first step to recognize and come to terms with the reality of incommensurability as a fact of Christian community life. Of course recognition of this fact will not resolve all the significant differences. These will remain. However, genuine recognition and understanding of incommensurability will help progressives and conservatives clarify their own positions and allow them to again make progress in their theological and ethical endeavors. It will also hopefully open a fruitful space for genuine dialogue and understanding between those who inhabit the incommensurable socially embodied paradigms.

IN MEMORY OF DR. DENNIS F. KINLAW

by

Christopher Bounds



Dr. Dennis F. Kinlaw passed away at 94 on April 10, 2017 in Wilmore, Kentucky. His life represented the dawn of a new generation of Wesleyan-Holiness theologians, who combined passionate commitment to the doctrine, proclamation and experience of entire sanctification with a rigorous pursuit of truth in the academy. Like many of his peers, Kinlaw pursued education in some of the world's most venerable institutions. After graduating from Asbury College and Asbury Theological Seminary, he studied at Duke University, Princeton Theological Seminary, the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, and finished his PhD at Brandeis University under the tutelage of Cyrus H. Gordon. Kinlaw became a premier Old Testament scholar and theologian, helping to give Wesleyan-Holiness theology a voice in mainstream Methodism and larger evangelicalism, moving it from the unnoticed peripheries of the academy. Significantly, the formation of the Wesleyan Theological Society in 1965 and the publication of the bi-annual *Wesleyan Theological Journal* provided an indispensable platform for academic engagement to Kinlaw and his generation of scholars.

Born on June 26, 1922 in Lumberton, North Carolina to Wade and Sally Kinlaw, he received what he called “the most significant spiritual

experience” in his life during the Indian Springs Camp Meeting of 1935 in Flovilla, Georgia. As Kinlaw listened to the evangelist Henry Clay Morrison preach on personal holiness, he testified to his heart being “flooded with a surprising love” and a “profound desire to please Jesus,” recognizing that Christ had given “himself in his fullness to me.” He left the service with a cleansed heart and a burning desire for the whole world to know Christ in his fullness. This experience and passion set the trajectory for his life as a student, pastor, professor, college president, writer and evangelist.

Kinlaw attended Asbury College from 1939-43, where he distinguished himself as a leader: class president, student body president, debate team chair, and religion editor for the campus newspaper. After graduation he married his classmate Elsie Blake, completed his ministerial studies at Asbury Theological Seminary and by 1951 was ordained in the North Carolina Conference of the (United) Methodist Church. While continuing formal biblical and theological studies, Kinlaw became the founding pastor of Loudonville Community Church in Loudonville, New York, where he ministered from 1952-63. He later became professor of Old Testament, languages and theology at Asbury Theological Seminary.

After completion of his PhD from Brandeis in 1967, Kinlaw accepted the invitation to serve as president of Asbury College. During his thirteen-year tenure (1968-81), the college grew institutionally, academically and spiritually despite cultural, political and economic upheaval in the nation. Significantly, Asbury experienced a spontaneous revival that began on February 3, 1970. During an ordinary chapel service, a profound experience of repentance swept over the college community as they sensed God’s purifying presence, becoming a catalyst for 144 hours of unbroken revival. This in turn ignited similar movements of the Holy Spirit on church and college campuses throughout the country and touched many parts of the world. Kinlaw famously said of the revival, “Give me one divine moment when God acts, and I say that moment is far superior to all the human efforts of man throughout the centuries.”

When Kinlaw stepped down from Asbury’s presidency, he and Harold Burgess established the Francis Asbury Society in 1983 for the expressed purpose of “spreading Scriptural holiness to the ends of the earth” through evangelism, discipleship and publication. While he returned to the presidency of Asbury College from 1986-91, later serving as its first chancellor, Kinlaw continued to pour his energy into the mission of the Society. Through his leadership the Society worked to bridge

the gap between the academy and the church, between formal study and evangelistic ministry, and between old and new theological paradigms of heart holiness.

During the peak of his ministry Kinlaw's influence extended beyond the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition. He served over twenty years on the editorial board of evangelism's flagship magazine, *Christianity Today*; participated actively in the National Association of Evangelicals; played a vital role in the establishment of *Good News*, a renewal movement in United Methodism; and chaired the board of One Mission Society. He regularly lectured and preached in Roman Catholic, Baptist and Reformed circles throughout the United States and world.

Kinlaw's passion for Jesus Christ, whom he believed to be "the ultimate metaphysical principle of reality," made him intellectually curious. His questions led him to seek the truth of Christ across diverse academic areas, forging an interdisciplinary approach characteristic of his scholarship. The foundation for his spiritual and academic life was Scripture. His work in the 1960s at Brandeis in ancient languages, grammar and etymology provided the tools for his penetrating insights into the Bible. Kinlaw's extensive work and reflection upon the Old Testament culminated in his *Lectures in Old Testament Theology: Yahweh in God Alone*. While president of Asbury College in the 1970's he read carefully in philosophy and the liberal arts. A festschrift written in Kinlaw's honor, *A Spectrum of Thought*, reflected his creative engagement with the humanities. Through the influence of Thomas C. Oden in the 1980s, Kinlaw immersed himself in Patristic literature and began to read more intensively in historical and systematic theology. In the 1990's and 2000's Trinitarian theology and personhood dominated his study, leading to his most significant contribution to theology: *Let's Start with Jesus: A New Way of Doing Theology*. During his final years, Kinlaw focused his research and reflection on Christian anthropology. He became convinced of two ideas: to be a person is to be "permeable," open to others, as seen within the Triune God; and the model of a whole person is Jesus Christ, the perfect Adam.

As an evangelist-theologian, Kinlaw's intellectual life always expressed itself in ministry. Gifted with the ability to take the best of academic scholarship and apply it at popular levels, he worked to bring people into a deeper experience of Christ and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. Four of his books capture the heart of this work: *The Mind of Christ; We Live as Christ—The Christian Message in a New Century; This Day with the Master*; and most recently *Malchus' Ear and Other Sermons*.

Dr. Kinlaw's passing represents the sunset of a generation of Wesleyan-Holiness scholars who played a crucial role in helping to move holiness theology and experience from the "backwaters" of American religion into serious engagement with larger Christianity through the church and the academy. Like many of his peers, Kinlaw was as comfortable communicating the riches of God's sanctifying grace in the pulpit as he was a lecture hall, in a popular book as in a scholarly article. Dr. Dennis Kinlaw has joined the saints at rest in the presence of the One whose love abounded in his life. He now waits in hope, with all the saints, for the sure and certain hope of the resurrection of the dead. Thanks be to God for his life, his scholarship and investment in the lives of the scholars, pastors, and evangelists influenced by him.

BOOK REVIEWS

Anatolios, Khaled, ed. *The Holy Trinity in the Life of the Church*. Holy Cross Studies in Patristic Theology and History. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2014. 270 pages. ISBN-13: 978-0801048975.

Reviewed by Jerome Van Kuiken, Associate Professor of Ministry and Christian Thought, Oklahoma Wesleyan University, Bartlesville, OK.

The decades surrounding the turn of the millennium have seen an explosion of interest in the Trinity and its relevance. Among the most influential publications of this “trinitarian renaissance” has been Eastern Orthodox Bishop John Zizioulas’ *Being as Communion* (1985, 1997), which found in the Cappadocian Fathers’ teaching on the Trinity a paradigm for ecclesiology. In 2008, Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Brookline, Massachusetts hosted an ecumenical conference on the same threefold theme as Zizioulas’ pioneering work: the relationship among patristics, the Trinity, and the church. This volume collects presentations from the conference along with additional related essays.

After a foreword that introduces the series, the volume divides neatly into three sections of four chapters apiece sandwiched between a preface and conclusion. Editor Khaled Anatolios’ preface opines that the trinitarian renaissance may be adjudged a success not by making novel claims about God but by raising ordinary Christians’ consciousness of the thoroughly trinitarian character of their faith and practice. Brian Daley sounds a similar note in his conclusion, subtitled “Ministering the Trinitarian God”: he contrasts the church fathers’ willingness to speak of the Trinity with many a contemporary preacher’s hesitation, lamenting, “The mystery of God has become a puzzle rather than an invitation” (219). Daley points to two implications from the Trinity for those made in God’s image: we are personal as the Trinity is personal (here Daley nods to Zizioulas); we are to be missional as the Trinity is missional. Between this preface and conclusion, the first section focuses on the Trinity and worship; the second, on the Trinity and salvation (particularly deification); and the third, on the Trinity and the nature of the church.

The section on the Trinity and worship contains two chapters on sacraments and two on prayer. Joseph Lienhard (ch. 1) surveys the theo-

logical uses to which patristic exegetes put Matthew 28:19–20's trinitarian baptismal command and concludes that scripture, liturgy, catechesis, and theology belong inseparably together. Robert Daly (ch. 2) traces the evolution of a trinitarian theology of the Eucharist from the diversity of proto-eucharistic strands detectable in the New Testament through to the fourth- and fifth-century standardization of eucharistic practice with formal prayers to the Trinity. Paul Hartog (ch. 3) argues that the trinitarian doxology in the second-century *Martyrdom of Polycarp* is not a later interpolation and has a precedent in the New Testament itself. Nonna Harrison (ch. 4) asks how it is that Christians may pray to three divine persons yet only one deity, then replies by summarizing Gregory of Nyssa's doctrine that God is one and incomprehensible in essence yet revealed in a plurality of attributes and persons.

John McGuckin (ch. 5) begins the section on the Trinity and salvation by insisting that patristic trinitarian dogma is fundamentally doxological. As such, it is ever-relevant to the worshiping community and has been present in the church from the beginning. McGuckin faults the textbook depiction of the gradual development of trinitarianism for identifying orthodoxy primarily with later dogmatic declarations, not perennial doxological experience. Brian Daley (ch. 6) shows that Maximus the Confessor and John of Damascus build on the Cappadocian Fathers' legacy by applying technical terms originally used in Christology (e.g., *hypostasis*, *ousia*, *perichoresis*) to the doctrine of the Trinity. Turning from Eastern to Western patristics, Matthew Drever (ch. 7) defends Augustine against accusations of being more Neoplatonic than trinitarian and of neglecting the doctrine of deification. The final chapter in this section is doubly unique. First, Bruce Marshall's "Justification as Declaration and Deification" (ch. 8) looks not to patristics but to Martin Luther for a doctrine of deification, which he seeks to harmonize with Luther's more well-known advocacy of forensic justification. Secondly, Marshall—now a convert to Catholicism—pens a postscript in 2014 to the essay that he originally had written in 2002 while still a Lutheran in dialogue with Eastern Orthodoxy. His postscript concedes that it is harder to reconcile Luther's statements on forensic justification and deification than he had admitted in his original essay.

The book's third section opens with Khaled Anatolios' stellar attempt to mediate between Orthodox theologians of the Trinity like Zizioulas and their critics (ch. 9). Zizioulas and his ilk are committed primarily to a personalist theological agenda as a cure for current social ills;

they read this contemporary personalism back into the Cappadocian Fathers' trinitarian teachings, then claim them as a precedent. Backlash against this projectionism comes from patristics scholars, who correctly protest that the Cappadocians were not personalists in the (post)modern sense. Anatolios cautions that the lack of complete continuity between the patristic and contemporary senses of "person" does not equate to a complete lack of continuity. He offers a number of observations on both method and content that, if heeded, would do much to bind together the trinitarianisms of the New Testament, the patristic era, and the present renaissance. John Behr (ch. 10) challenges the prevalence in ecumenical dialogue of "communion ecclesiology" modeled on the triune life of God. Rather than imitating the Trinity, the church is incorporated into the Trinity. Furthermore, "communion ecclesiology" overemphasizes the Eucharist at the expense of baptism, with ecumenically damaging effects. In stark contrast with Behr's denial that the Trinity supplies the church a model, Thomas Cattoi (ch. 11) borrows Gregory of Nyssa's trinitarian doctrine to argue that, just as the Father is the source of unity and authority in the Trinity, so the papacy is in interchurch relations. (In his preface, Anatolios replies to Cattoi, "If a certain church holds the place of the Father, is there another church or group of churches that holds the place of Christ and that of the Spirit, respectively?" [xvi]) Lastly, Kathleen McVey explores fourth-century hymnist Ephrem the Syrian's use of feminine language for all three persons of the Trinity as a precedent for incorporating feminine God-talk into contemporary liturgy (ch. 12).

Taken as a whole, this volume demonstrates the abiding significance of patristic trinitarianism for Christian worship, interchurch dialogue, and constructive theology. Wesleyan scholars interested in patristics, liturgical theology, ecumenical studies, the trinitarian renaissance, or the doctrine of deification will find it a valuable resource.

Chapell, Bryan. *Christ-Centered Sermons: Models of Redemptive Preaching*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013. 241 pages. ISBN-13: 978-0801048692.

Reviewed by Douglas R. Milne, Lead Pastor, Grace Church of the Nazarene, Rochester, NY; Adjunct Professor of Religion, Roberts Wesleyan College, Rochester, NY; Ph.D. Candidate, McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.

Dr. Bryan Chapell currently serves as Senior Pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church in Peoria, Illinois. Prior to his pastorate, Chapell had a distinguished 30-year academic career at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis. In addition to his current pastoral work, he is the Distinguished Professor of Preaching at Knox Theological Seminary in Florida. Chapell has written numerous books on varying topics including preaching and theology. He is specifically interested in preaching and practical theology, holiness by grace, daily Christian living, and pastoral training.

Christ-Centered Sermons serves as a companion text to Chapell's earlier published *Christ-Centered Preaching* (2005) in that it offers actual sermon manuscripts, which illustrate the various types of sermons introduced in the latter text. Although it serves as a companion, *Christ-Centered Sermons* is a stand-alone volume that offers multiple examples of well-written sermons with various themes, structures, techniques, and practices Chapell intends for fruitful communication. The book is divided into three sections titled "Structure," "Biblical Theology," and "Gospel Application." Within these categories, Chapell introduces and describes four to five sermon types and offers sample manuscripts for each type. The book has thirteen sermon samples in all.

Chapell intends to use his sermon structures and samples "to explore the supernatural aspects of our union with Christ and the power of the Word in order to provide preachers the hope and boldness they need to preach in challenging circumstances." (viii) He is most concerned about preachers offering sermons that center on the work of God through Christ and the Holy Spirit, thus his sample sermons focus on topics such as redemption, the divine solution to humanity's fallen condition, grace, the gospel itself, the enabling power of God, the power of joy, and holiness. All of these topics serve as examples of preaching what Chapell calls "the whole counsel of God" (xi-xii).

In addition to his varying theological topics, Chapell introduces and describes sermon structures that illustrate both technique and delivery. In

the first section, Chapell focuses on three types of expository sermons followed by one example of a topical sermon. Section two offers five different types of structures all under the unifying concept of Christ-centered interpretation. More specifically, the model sermons in this category identify “how the passage *predicts, prepares for, reflects, or results* from the person and work of Christ” (71). Sermons of this type can include passages from the Old Testament, but they conclude with a Christological message for both closure and application.

Finally, section three focuses on the application of Scripture to everyday life. Therefore, the manuscripts center around two main ideas: who believers are as redeemed individuals and what they are supposed to do as the redeemed (157). Chapell introduces four thematic sermons in this section. The four sermons seek to encourage Christians’ faith into action in their world, especially since they have been saved, reconciled, and empowered by Christ and the Holy Spirit. From this section, in particular, it is very clear that Chapell desires to see Christians living in the power of the Holy Spirit because of Christ’s redeeming work. Furthermore, Chapell encourages spiritual growth and maturity in these four sermons.

Although the structures are technical, Chapell’s text is for a wide audience of preachers. Those who teach preaching and homiletics will find use for it, but there are better-designed texts for teaching in the field. Chapell’s section designations and sermon topics are well-defined and clear. The sermon models match their respective sections, although the first section, “Structure,” is possibly mislabeled since there are sermon structures offered throughout the text. However, the section titles do not lead readers astray as the text is both understandable and navigable.

Chapell does not necessarily urge the exact use of his sermon types; rather, he is modeling a rhythm of preaching. This rhythm is more than a mere outline with an introduction, a Bible passage, some points, life illustrations, and a conclusion—Chapell wants preachers to approach the Biblical text to find ways of conveying the living Christ, so that Christ can convince and convict listeners. Divine love, grace, holiness, and redemption are the convincing factors and Christ charges the preacher to proclaim such truths. In fact, Chapell contends that preachers should “enable” believers to serve Jesus through preaching (xxiv). The rhythm of preaching includes good exegesis and interpretation, but it is also a crafting together of Scripture into everyday life. Although the structure and passage change from week to week, the “whole counsel of God” does not, so it is up to the Holy Spirit and the preacher to creatively convey biblical and theological realities to the people.

Wesleyan readers need to be aware of Chapell's Reformed leanings: they can be seen in his biblical interpretation, his theological assumptions and framework, and his understanding of grace and holiness. However, knowing this about the text does not diminish the value of Chapell's effort, nor does it diminish its importance for the Wesleyan reader and preacher. There are many biblical, theological, and homiletical points Wesleyans will find valuable. Biblically, Chapell encourages thorough exegetical and hermeneutical work in sermon preparation. Theologically, he also maintains usage of the whole tenor of Scripture. Despite theological differences between the Reformed and Wesleyan definitions of grace, Wesleyans will resonate with Chapell's use of grace as enabling and motivating believers. Additionally, Wesleyans will appreciate his emphasis on growth and maturity. Homiletically, Chapell contends, "Preaching remains a joy when pastors discern that their task is not to harangue or guilt parishioners into servile duty but rather to fill them up with love for God by extolling the wonders of his grace" (xxvii). Chapell's sample sermons are rich with this wonder of God's grace and each sermon seeks to convey what Christ and the Spirit have done and are doing in the world.

Readers are not at a disadvantage if they have not read his earlier text, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, despite multiple references to it in the newer text. Chapell does not intend for *Christ-Centered Sermons* to be an introductory preaching text, but there are elements of that throughout, particularly with the introductions of sermon models and samples. Chapell is not arguing for a revision of preaching or homiletics, but he is arguing for well-researched, well-written, and well-executed sermons. *Christ-Centered Sermons* has many benefits and it is worth a serious read by any preacher or teacher of homiletics.

Dalferth, Ingolf U. *Crucified and Resurrected: Restructuring the Grammar of Christology*. Translated by Jo Bennett. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2015. 325 pages. ISBN-13: 978-0801097546.

Reviewed by Jerome Van Kuiken, Associate Professor of Ministry and Christian Thought, Oklahoma Wesleyan University, Bartlesville, OK.

Ingolf Dalferth is the Danforth Professor of Philosophy of Religion at Claremont Graduate University, having previously held academic posts in Germany, England, Switzerland, and Denmark. He has also been active in Lutheran-Anglican ecumenical dialogue. *Crucified and Resurrected* is the English translation of a book originally published in German in 1994 as the second part of a two-volume study on the distinctiveness of Christian theology in relation to the two main categories in historical Western thought: mythological religion (*mythos*) and philosophical speculation (*logos*). Against these alternatives, Dalferth sets divine self-revelation centered in the resurrection of the crucified Jesus. This revelation led to the development of the dogmas of Christ and the Trinity, which provide the “grammar” for practical Christian living.

The tension among the three alternatives appears in Dalferth’s first and final chapters. Chapter One asks if belief in the Incarnation is essential to Christian faith. Chapter Five poses the same question of belief in Christ’s atoning sacrifice. Both doctrines have been dismissed as irrational myths by post-Enlightenment liberals and defended as indispensable truths by conservatives. Dalferth subjects both positions to searching criticisms for their linguistic and theological assumptions. He concludes against the liberals that the language of incarnation and atonement appropriately signals the unique, saving presence of God in the crucified-yet-risen Jesus but that, against the conservatives, such language is not irreplaceable: it is the reality to which the words point, not the wording itself, that is essential. Furthermore, Dalferth denies that Jesus’ death is substitutionary: on the cross, God dies *with* us but not *instead of* or *on behalf of* us.

Rather than focusing on the “person of Christ,” protologically conceived (i.e. via doctrines of pre-existence and Virgin Birth) or on the “work of Christ” on the cross (i.e. satisfaction theories of atonement), Dalferth’s middle three chapters seek to reconstruct a trinitarian Christology on the same basis as the earliest Christians: the Easter event. Thus Chapter Two examines Jesus’ resurrection in light of his crucifixion; Chapter Three, Jesus’ identity in light of his crucifixion and resurrection; and

Chapter Four, God's identity in light of Jesus' identity. The end of Chapter Five spells out the practical implications of Dalferth's reconstruction.

In good Lutheran style, Chapter Two articulates a contemporary "theology of the cross": Jesus' crucifixion is not to be minimized as just another case of injustice, a moral model for us to mimic, a catch-all symbol for ideological fads, or even as a tragedy to be negated by the Resurrection. Rather, the cross reveals God's compassionate condescension to be present with us even in death. But the New Testament doesn't stop there: it claims that the crucified one is risen. Dalferth explores the various explanations for the Resurrection, determining that it was a real, eschatological event that Scripture attests using figurative language.

If Jesus truly died yet truly rose again, what does this say about his identity? Chapter Three briefly reconstructs Christology's development from the historical Jesus through the various New Testament authors' deepening theological reflections and onward to the fully-formed dogma of Chalcedonian Christology. Dalferth critiques Chalcedon for its substance metaphysics and naïvely realistic view of the relationship between words and their subject matter. Rather than working out a precise and complete "dual ontology of human-divine facts" (148), Christians need only confess that God is so uniquely present in the quite human Jesus of Nazareth that his personal identity is that of God the Son. This is the truth that Easter discloses.

The dogma of the Trinity arises from the recognition that the one whom God raised to life is himself God. Chapter Four studies Easter's implications for theology proper, although unfortunately without Chapter Three's extensive appeals to biblical data. Dalferth's portrait of God resembles Open Theism's (albeit without using that term or interacting with the movement's Anglophone proponents): for instance, "God exposes his selfhood to the risk of our free acceptance because he is wholly love and is trusting and hoping that his love will be requited, even though he neither wants nor is able to compel this in any way" (160). Dalferth does clearly distance himself from panentheism (224, 231–32). The significance of the Resurrection for God is that, in raising Jesus, God redefines Godself as unconditional love in tripersonal form: as creator and revealer ("Father"), reconciler and revelation ("Son"), and consummator and enabler of revelation's recognition ("Spirit"). In line with his hermeneutical concerns, Dalferth stresses that the language of classical trinitarianism is imagistic, not conceptual (contrary to speculative theology) and non-analogous, not analogous (contrary to feminist theology).

Against social trinitarianism, he claims that the Trinity is not “three different acting subjects” but “three activity centers” (202). Dalferth generally concurs with the *filioque* (227) while later, in Chapter Five, arguing for a corresponding *spirituque*: the Son’s identity is shaped by the Spirit as much as the Spirit’s is by the Son (278–79).

Trinitarian dogma provides the “grammar” for all Christian belief and conduct. Already in Chapter Two, Dalferth had expounded this conviction in Wesleyan-friendly fashion: the Spirit enables us to know God as merciful Father through faith in Christ and to fulfill Christ’s summons to be merciful like God and to love God and neighbor. Such a lifestyle is no “impossible command” for those who “surrender their entire lives, with all their successes and failures, their happiness and suffering, to God’s mercy” (47–48). In Chapter Five, Dalferth returns to Christian practice—and to Christianity’s relationship to *mythos* and *logos*. By rejecting animal sacrifice while retaining worship and promoting social ethics, the early church stood between the *mythos* of pagan religions and the *logos* of pagan philosophies. But the post-Constantinian church backslid into the *mythos* of cultic ceremonies and sacred-secular distinctions (e.g. between clergy and laity). Living in the Trinity requires the church to deny such distinctions, seeing all Christians (including women) as priests; all activity, however “worldly,” as worship; and all people as objects of God’s non-coercive saving concern: “if the grateful surrender of one’s entire person to God is the worship God desires, then the grateful surrender of every person to God is the worship he is waiting for. Christians are distinguished by the fact that they know this, and because of this they must do all they can to make this happen” (311).

Crucified and Resurrected is a sophisticated piece of constructive theology in dialogue with contemporary (primarily German-language) philosophical, theological, and biblical studies and the whole sweep of Western intellectual history. Both theologians and philosophers of religion will find much to contemplate in its proposals.

De Graaff, Guido. *Politics in Friendship: A Theological Account*. London: T&T Clark, 2014. 231 pages. ISBN-13: 978-00567667502.

Reviewed by Jason A. Heron, Adjunct Professor of Theology, University of Dayton, Dayton, OH.

Guido de Graaff's book examines the relationship between politics, friendship, and Christian charity. DG suggests the problem with such inquiries is that reflection on friendship and its relationship to politics too often idealizes the political, placing politics at the heart of social reality. According to dG, a properly Christian perspective sees this idealization as problematic because it does not account for the provisional nature of politics in a fallen world. DG searches for ways to speak of friendship's political significance from a theological perspective that takes Aristotelian politics and Augustinian "pessimism" seriously. The aim of the book is twofold: to examine "the dynamics between friends on account of which friendship has been identified as bearing the seeds of civic and political relationships" (2); and to unpack the Hauerwasian claim that "friendship is the church's gift to the world for redemptive politics" (202). To accomplish these aims, dG uses the unique friendship of Bishop George Bell and Dietrich Bonhoeffer as a case study. Christians from a variety of theological backgrounds will find dG's book useful.

Chapter 1 defines key themes: friendship (mutual affection of two or more people), politics (processes of governing and supporting governance), and Christian theological perspectives on both. DG clarifies how he will examine friendship and politics and what Christian perspectives he considers relevant. Regarding method, dG does not examine the friendships of politicians or the nature of "civic friendship." Instead, dG examines the kinds of friendship available to Christians and whether/how the seeds of political life are germinating therein. Most critical here is dG's criticism of Meilaender's "Augustinian objection" that civic friendship is essentially idolatry. DG is particularly insightful as he challenges Meilaender's minimalist politics, suggesting Meilaender relies on a deficient social vision of "two spheres" rather than a social vision replete with the multiple spheres of civil society. DG wants to avoid such reductionism.

Chapter 2 begins dG's exploration of Bell and Bonhoeffer's friendship. This chapter provides initial insight into dG's thesis that particular friendships have a political dimension. By his own admission, this particular friendship may not serve dG's purposes well. And the reader wonders whether dG has developed a conceptual frame and then squeezed

the Bell/Bonhoeffer into it, or discovered the Bell/Bonhoeffer story and then derived materials for his conceptual frame from that story. This ambiguity hamstrings dG's continual use of the Bell-Bonhoeffer friendship throughout the rest of the book.

Chapter 3 raises important conceptual questions regarding relations between friendship and politics. DG uses Aristotle and Arendt to analyze "common action" in friendship. The work is well done and provides us with much-needed philosophical precision regarding *how* political action for the common good does in fact differ from other forms of human action. Moreover, dG's use of Arendt modernizes some of the Aristotelian moral philosophy, rescuing it from its classical chauvinism. DG accomplishes this important feat by showing the enduring relevance of Aristotelian action for Arendt's examination of labor (human consumption/survival), work (producing artifacts necessary for labor), and action (intrinsically good self-disclosure). DG's analysis shows how the common action peculiar to both friendship and politics need not be instrumentalized for extrinsic purposes. Both friendship and politics are possible because humans are not only laborers and workers. Humans are also actors who disclose themselves in common action that is a good in its own right.

Chapter 4 turns to theological (O'Donovan) and philosophical (Arendt) precisions concerning human judgment (of the good, the right, the true, the possible, the practical, the necessary, etc.). DG insightfully summarizes how judgment is related to both promise-keeping and forgiveness in that all three social phenomena are human responses to the unforeseen and the irreversible. Arendt's work on judgment, dG shows, relies heavily on Kant's aesthetics and the role of spectatorship in social relations. The Christian challenge to this spectator's distance is the reality of living under and within God's judgment.

Chapter 5 continues this challenge by introducing the Christian categories of repentance and obedience. DG delves deeper into a particular episode of the Bell/Bonhoeffer story where the friends exercise a peculiar form of judgment in light of Christ's final victory over sin, death, and the social/political mechanisms we create to deal with our fallen state. Bell and Bonhoeffer demonstrate how ecclesial judgment is not necessarily apolitical so much as it transcends the political by living a new form of political life "beyond judgment."

Chapter 6 turns to the church and its relevance in forming friends capable of common actions and judgments critical for true politics after

Christ's redemption. The chapter is devoted to a reading of friendship in light of John 15 and Romans 12. DG derives from scripture an insightful portrait of mutual submission, following Christ's sacrifice, as the ecclesial practice that makes it possible for Christians to discern and enact God's will in time. This mutual submission is the "friendly" politics of the church and the gift it gives the world in order to redeem earthly politics.

In chapter 7, dG states that after examining the Bell/Bonhoeffer friendship in light of the practices of judgment, we can see that the "significance of friendship is that it brings the order of mutual submission to bear on political responsibility: what might otherwise become a task threatening to crush its bearer is now drawn into the sphere of the body of Christ, and transformed by its 'friendly' politics" (199). Thus, Christian friendship is "anything but a retreat from political society" (203).

DG successfully defends the political significance of friendship without idealizing political life. But it remains unclear how the Bell/Bonhoeffer friendship works as a case study better than would conventional Christian friendships. Most Christians will not find themselves in Bell or Bonhoeffer's shoes. Moreover, the Bell/Bonhoeffer friendship, as a friendship, appears to have been easy for the two friends, despite their almost impossible historical circumstances. But other Christians will live out friendships that are far more challenging *as friendships*. DG does not attend to this reality. Given the depth of dG's insights elsewhere in the book, it would be a rich addition to the work to consider Christian friendships that are challenging to the friends outside of the contexts of world war and genocide. Contemporary Wesleyans, for instance, would find it helpful to hear from dG on the role of friendship in the midst of theological divisions that threaten ecclesial unity.

Some may question dG's dismissal of analogy in his treatment of the relation of different social bodies to each other. DG is careful to dismiss analogical accounts of friendship, ostensibly in order to preserve the peculiar integrity of friendship. But he also relies on the post-liberal analogy of the church as *polis*. The ecclesial, social, and political career of Paul's organological metaphor in Western theological and political thought could be instructive here inasmuch as that metaphor has worked in a variety of ways to describe the analogical similarities and differences between social bodies. Analogy would actually clarify dG's descriptions of the church as a *polis*, as "parapolitical," as fostering the seeds of "redemptive politics," and as "transcending" politics.

It is difficult to overestimate the importance in our context of an author who can provide us with helpful ways of speaking about friend-

ship and politics as non-instrumental goods. From a Christian perspective, whether one wants to resist technocracy in politics or to expose consumerism's depredations in our deepest intimacies, philosophical precision regarding intrinsic goods is essential. DG's work with Aristotle, Arendt, and O'Donovan can assist us in understanding whether and how certain social, political, and ecclesial activities and relations are intrinsically good precisely because Christ is the Lord of history.

Koskela, Doug. *Calling and Clarity: Discovering What God Wants for Your Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015. 120 pp. ISBN-13: 978-0802871596.

Reviewed by Joshua R. Sweeden, Dean of the Faculty and Associate Professor of Church and Society, Nazarene Theological Seminary, Kansas City, MO.

When reviewing a theology book, the expectation that it be “useful” sits relatively low on my priority list. I hesitate to judge theological texts by their “use-value.” I suppose this is due to my conviction of the inherent value of the art and task of theological inquiry itself—of the journey and possibilities that follow theological curiosity. Or maybe it is one small way of resisting a marketplace that privileges utility and demands immediate import, even at the cost of theological coherence. As such, I celebrate Doug Koskela’s ability to speak concretely into the lives of his readers without foregoing theological substance. *Calling and Clarity* is a reminder that theology can be “useful” without being *entirely* co-opted by the market or modern anthropocentrism.

Calling and Clarity is written with early undergraduate students in mind. Koskela offers vital insights for young adults navigating the increasing occupational pressures in colleges and universities. Well-known to the world of higher education is the way job placement and occupational earning have become key metrics for student success. Inevitably, the ripples effect programs, curricula, and vocational discernment processes. Many Christian colleges and universities have been proactive by increasing opportunities for vocational discernment alongside the growing the occupational pressures students face. *Calling and Clarity* is designed for such a context.

Koskela argues that traditional categories of vocation—namely general and particular calling—present shortsighted understandings for contemporary ministry. He is especially attentive to how a missional theology which emphasizes the full scope of God’s work requires a missional understanding of vocation. Whereas general calling “refers to what God desires for all people” and particular calling highlights “a task or purpose God desires for a specific person,” Koskela notes this distinction “doesn’t go far enough” (xiii). Beyond this simple duality, Koskela proposes two sub-categories under the banner of particular calling: missional and direct. His development of these two sub-categories comprises the first two chapters of the text.

Koskela defines missional calling as “the main contributions your life makes to God’s kingdom . . . the ‘mission statement’ of your life” (2). Throughout the first chapter, he parses that definition by noting how missional calling “aligns with your gifts,” “involves something you are passionate about and which gives you joy,” takes “time, prayer, and communal involvement to discern,” and is expressed “in many ways throughout a person’s life, not just through work.” He points out that it is generally the case that “people only have one such calling in their lifetime” (3-6). Koskela wants to convey that missional calling is about the unique way “God has wired you” to contribute to God’s kingdom and purposes (7). He devotes ample attention to clarifying the differences between one’s missional calling and their job, even helping readers understand the significance of the everyday and ordinary in service to the kingdom of God. Extremely valuable in this chapter is the way Koskela provides scriptural grounding for missional calling and employs images of journeying for his audience. Unlike direct calling, which can be prescriptive, missional calling contains tremendous freedom as it finds concrete expression along one’s life path.

Koskela defines direct calling as “a clear calling from God to a particular task that a person may not be prepared for or want to do” (xiv). Accordingly, his description of direct calling is closest to what is traditionally understood as particular calling. Koskela devotes a chapter to unpacking his definition of direct calling, which contains some features that are the inverse of the features of missional calling. He notes how direct calling “may not necessarily align with your gifts,” and “may not align with your passions or give you joy.” Additionally, direct calling will leave “little doubt about what is being asked of you,” though it can “vary significantly in duration and scope.” Finally, direct calling is not for everybody; “some people may have many experiences of direct calling in their lives, while others may have none at all” (26-32). Koskela is deliberate to reiterate the role of confirmation in direct calling, highlighting the importance of spiritual disciplines and ecclesial affirmation for faithful response.

Following a helpful description of the concept of general calling, especially well-suited for undergraduates wrestling with what it means to be faithful in a variety of professions and circumstances of life, Koskela devotes his final chapter to the theological underpinnings of vocational discernment. Any theology of vocation inevitably intersects with and leans on other theological categories, and Koskela rightly explores how

the doctrine of God, doctrine of the Trinity, theological anthropology, and Christian worship inform vocation.

Professors and pastors will appreciate Koskela's ability to offer a substantive and coherent theology of vocation without neglecting accessibility. One of the strengths of his short text is its attentiveness to the context of its audience, clearly addressing the questions and concerns of young adults. Undoubtedly, that audience is limited to those privileged enough to have the freedom to discern 'what God wants for their life', and Koskela's text will certainly struggle to connect with young adults who are not afforded the space for vocational discernment processes. Additionally, while Koskela is insistent about the significance of community in vocational discernment processes, he too seems trapped by the individualistic tendencies often prominent in vocational theology—undoubtedly a reflection of the audience for whom he writes. For those who yearn for a theology of vocation that speaks to the individual—to particular calling—without bowing to modern self-centered inclinations, this text does not quite deliver. Yet it is an important step in the right direction. As with all worship, the subject of our vocation is God, *not us*, which is hard to keep in focus when titles like "discovering what God wants for your life" sell.

In all, Koskela is to be commended for his concise treatment of vocation, and especially his development of missional calling. Too long have theologies of vocation left Christians who seek more than a general calling, yet do not experience a direct calling, in an ambiguous and indefinite tension. For such persons, Koskela certainly offers confidence and clarity.

Oden, Thomas C. *A Change of Heart: A Personal and Theological Memoir*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014. 384 pages. ISBN-13: 978-0830840359.

Reviewed by J. Russell Frazier, Coordinator of the D.Min. Programme and Senior Lecturer, Africa Nazarene University, Nairobi, Kenya.

As the subtitle indicates, *A Change of Heart* is Thomas C. Oden's personal and theological memoir. Oden served as the Henry Anson Buttz Professor of Theology at The Theological School of Drew University in Madison, New Jersey. He was a prolific author of over 50 books, including *Agenda for Theology: Recovering Christian Roots* (1979), *Pastoral Theology: Essentials for Ministry* (1983), a three volume *Systematic Theology* (published from 1987-1992, later revised in 2009 as *Classic Christianity: A Systematic Theology*), and *John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity: A Plain Exposition of His Teaching on Christian Doctrine* (1994). Oden also served as the general editor of numerous publications, notably the 29 volume *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*. Thomas C. Oden died on December 8, 2016.

A Change of Heart chronicles Oden's life from his beginnings in the home of Methodist laity in Altus, Oklahoma. It unfolds in three parts (Part 1: Early Years; Part 2: Change of Heart; Part 3: Homeward Bound) which are further subdivided into chapters of the various decades of Oden's life from the 1930s to the 2010s.

Oden's memoir depicts a rather idyllic upbringing in Oklahoma which was interrupted when he was 10 years old with the engagement of the United States in World War II. The war effort uprooted his family with a move to Oklahoma City where the federal government employed the services of his lawyer father in prosecuting black marketers. At the end of the war, the family returned to their home in Altus, Oklahoma.

In August 1949, Oden left his hometown for the University of Oklahoma where he entered the new Letters program which allowed him to read deeply and widely in the humanities. He described his reading succinctly: "The ideas I most loved were expressed by three in particular: the will to power (Nietzsche), the desire to understand the sexual roots of all behavior (Freud), and the search for radical social change (Marx)" (42-3). Through the auspices of the Methodist Youth Movement, Oden imbibed pacifism, the social gospel, and radical idealism, and became involved as political activist during this period of his life (48-9). He confesses that during this period, every turn was a "left turn" (46) in which he aban-

doned his patrimony and what he knew of classic Christianity (56). He confesses losing love for prayer, Scriptures and hymns (54). Despite such loss of love, he found the love of his life, Edrita, and they were married, the beginning of nearly 46 years of marital bliss. Oden began serving as a pastor at a church in Norman (one of many such short term assignments during his life). Eventually, he and Edrita moved to Dallas, Texas for him to begin seminary studies at Southern Methodist University's Perkins School of Theology, then later to Yale University for Ph.D. studies. He completed his dissertation on *The Concept of Obedience in Bultmann and Barth* under the guidance of Richard Niebuhr (67-8). Niebuhr challenged all of his students to develop "some serious interdisciplinary competence beyond theology" (68), and as a result, Oden focused on the psychology of religion.

In 1958, Oden began his teaching career at Southern Methodist University, but after two years, he returned to the University of Oklahoma for his first full-time teaching position. He spent the decade of the 1960s as "a movement theologian" by which Oden means a continual "shifting from movement to movement toward whatever new idea I thought might seem to be acceptable to modernization of Christianity" (80). He delved into situation ethics, Bultmannian demythology, existential theology, political activism motivated largely by the philosophy of Saul Alinsky, the intersection of theology and psychotherapy, early feminism, and ecumenism. A sabbatical in 1965-1966 included conversations with Bultmann, Barth, and Pannenburg, as well as observing at the Second Vatican Council and traveling by road with his family in a Volkswagen from Heidelberg, Germany to Jerusalem! The sabbatical left him disenchanted with many of his ideals. In speaking specifically of ecumenism and his experiences at the Geneva Conference of the World Council of Churches, he realized that the ecumenism which he had previously promoted "had deeply disrupted the fragile unity of the body of Christ in an attempt to heal it" (114). His experience as an observer at Vatican II gave him a deep appreciation for the conciliar process: "From that point on, classic conciliar consensus became an impassioned issue for me" (100).

In 1970, Oden, at age 39, assumed a tenured position at Drew University where he encountered Will Herberg, a Russian Jewish philosopher and colleague at Drew. Oden credits Herberg with his "change of heart": "Though Herberg was not a Christian, he made it possible for me to become one" (134). Herberg pointedly said to Oden, "If you are ever going to become a credible theologian instead of a know-it-all pundit,

you had best restart your life on firmer ground. You are not a theologian except in name only, even if you are paid to be one" (137). From that point on, Oden had not only a change of heart but also a change of mind. The focus of his remaining years was upon reading and disseminating the literature of "the great mind of ancient Christianity" (136). It was a 180 degree spiritual and theological revolution. He provides this summary statement: "*My life story has had two phases: going away from home as far as I could go, not knowing what I might find in an odyssey of preparation, and then at last inhabiting anew my own original home of classic Christian wisdom*" (140, emphasis in the original). The remaining years of the decade were characterized by a transformation of Oden's mind as he divested himself of modernistic consciousness and relearned the ancient Christian wisdom at the feet of the ancient Christian writers – an experience which is typical of his agenda for modernity (164) and, for him, is *the viable option* in the "breakdown of modern ideologies" (165).

Oden's 1980s, subsequent to his heart change, were filled with controversies with theological educators promoting liberal theological agendas, fulfilling experiences teaching and supervising students in the graduate school, and publishing numerous works. The 1990s were filled with meetings with John Paul II and the then Cardinal Ratzinger who had, in 1988, inspired Oden with the idea of publishing a voluminous verse by verse commentary based upon the ancient Christian Fathers' own comments on the entire canon. Oden discusses at length the preparations made for the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. The same decade included invitations to lecture at Moscow State University and to observe firsthand the ideological reversal within the universities. He also visited Cuba to witness the revival of evangelicalism and the demise of modern ecumenism at the World Council of Churches World Assembly at Harare, Zimbabwe. He discusses the background for his 1995 publication *Requiem: A Lament in Three Movements*, which addressed his concerns over the liberal trends in theological education within the U.S.

In the last several chapters, Oden discusses his publications in depth and the positive impact, from his perspective, that the return to ancient Christian writers was having upon a new movement toward ecumenism, enhancing the dialogue between Catholics and evangelicals (272f.) and Orthodox theologians and evangelicals (279). Three of his later works promulgate the African thesis: the idea that African Christian intellectuals "would put a permanent stamp on Western European culture and would dominate much of Western thought" (332). In this period of his life,

Oden was instrumental in founding the Center for Early African Christianity (311).

Oden's memoir is a fascinating read. He intersperses his own story and that of his life and family with reflections on the theological currents of his day. His conversations with some of the greatest theologians of the 21st century and his role in promoting a classic ecumenism will interest theologians of any ilk. His behind-the-scenes account of his own prolific writings and of his impact upon theology of the era will grab the attention of academicians and laity alike. The author is an impassioned evangelist who invites his readers to experience an intellectual transformation, the divestment of modern consciousness and a return to the study of patristics, as well as an evangelical and spiritual transformation – *A Change of Heart*.

Okello, Joseph B. Onyango. *A History and Critique of Methodological Naturalism: The Philosophical Case for God's Design of Nature*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016. 235 pages. ISBN-13: 978-1498283748.

Reviewed by John Culp, Professor of Philosophy Emeritus, Azusa Pacific University, Azusa, CA.

As his title clearly indicates, Joseph Okello offers a historical study and criticism of the reasoning involved in methodological naturalism that led to the widespread rejection of the notion of a supernatural being that interacts with nature. He identifies two types of methodological naturalism. Definitional methodological naturalism argues that science excludes non-naturalistic explanations. Even though non-naturalistic explanations may be possible, science only deals with naturalistic explanations. The second type of methodological naturalism, substantive methodological naturalism, argues that the success of naturalistic methods makes any non-naturalistic explanation irrational. The natural is the repeatable reality and the only reality. Okello undertakes his study of the history of methodological naturalism in order to account for the broad acceptance of methodological naturalism in spite of its inadequate defense by proponents. His goal is to show that methodological naturalism's rejection of supernaturalism was fundamentally unsound; the reasoning that led to the general rejection of supernaturalism in Western thought lacks adequate justification.

Chapter 1 identifies the historic Christian understanding of creation as the result of the supernatural God acting intelligently. Chapter 2 argues that the marks of design in nature provide a rational basis for accepting those marks as the result of an intelligent designer. Chapter 3 provides a description of the prominent scientists of the 16th-17th centuries who held supernatural commitments. In chapter 4, Okello turns to the anti-supernaturalism of the deists, explaining how their rational belief in God based on the testimony of nature undercut their arguments against miracles as manifestations of the supernatural. The five basic deistic arguments against miracles are very similar to Hume's criticisms of miracles. Chapter 5 argues that both 16th and 17th century forms of methodological naturalism and current forms of methodological naturalism unsuccessfully defend Hume's criticisms. In his final chapter, Okello first traces the loss of the God-affirming worldview in the scientific field. However, he does not stop with this absence of God in science. He also presents a supernaturalist view that is not contrary to reason but is consistent with

the way natural features present themselves to cognitive faculties. Supernaturalism avoids the problem of gaps in explanation by holding that God created and sustains the universe. God constantly and directly acts in creation. Natural laws are either regularities in the ways that God creates or counterfactuals due to divine freedom. Cooperative work between science and religion can lead to a more complete context for both science and religion that includes metaphysical or religious principles specific to each approach. Okello suggests that Christian supernaturalism can enter into the work of science by 1) specifying and using the hypothesis that God does some things in a direct way, 2) specifying and employing hypotheses that God does some things in an indirect way, 3) appraising theories recognizing the importance of background data including Christian theism, 4) employing presuppositions such as humans being created in God's image as background either directly or indirectly, 5) employing other theological doctrines such as original sin as background, and 6) deciding what needs explanation by referring to all types of background data.

Okello makes several contributions to the contemporary dialogue between science and religion. He shows the close connections between theology and science in the early modern period, helping readers challenge the popular modern understanding that science and religion have always been opponents. Second, his extensive citations of early modern methodological naturalists supporting and challenging supernaturalism enables readers to examine the primary sources for themselves. Third, Okello relates the deistic reasons for the rejection of miracles to Hume's arguments against miracles. He does not claim that the deists provided Hume with arguments, but he does provide a context that helps in understanding Hume's arguments.

Several issues hinder the effectiveness of Okello's consideration of the historical development of methodological naturalism. One issue is his use of the phrase "methodological naturalism." Naturalism today is often identified as methodological and ontological, which seem roughly to fit with his definitional and substantive naturalism in that his definitional naturalism relates to the concept of naturalism as a way of doing science while substantive naturalism excludes any reality other than natural reality. For many, "methodological naturalism" emphasizes the methodology of science independent of any metaphysical concepts such as materialism/physicalism. As Okello points out, Plantinga and others have critiqued the possibility of a methodology with no philosophical assump-

tions. Okello rejects the logic of the historical move from early modern methods of science to metaphysical assumptions that exclude divine action but does not explain that this move to metaphysical assumptions is what he means by “methodological naturalism”. “Naturalism developing out of a historical methodology” is an awkward phrase and does not function well as a label but seems to be what Okello means by “methodological naturalism.”

Also, his historical account is limited to only showing how many of the scientists and thinkers in the early modern period affirmed divine action and how the rejection of those affirmations failed to recognize the logical inconsistencies in that rejection. He does not give an account of why the rejection of past understandings and the acceptance of illogical understandings became the dominant understanding. He does not account for the general acceptance of a closed causal system that excludes divine agency. He provides evidence that not all scientists rejected the possibility of a divine purpose; he does not offer any suggestions for why the rejection of special divine action and ultimately any divine action became the accepted position.

Finally, Okello accepts that the early modern period’s struggle between rationalism as a way of understanding reality and skepticism about the possibility of knowledge resulted in a gradual emphasis upon miracles as interventions in the natural order. This leads him frequently to refer to divine action as supernatural and a divine intervention. His historical account does identify a variety of understandings of divine action in miracles. There were three options for understanding God’s interaction with nature: action contrary to nature, action above nature, and action alongside nature. This variety of concepts of divine action points toward a more comprehensive approach that is not limited to intervention. In spite of his narrowing of emphasis often to intervention, his account of past acceptance of divine action and recognition of the logical failures in rejecting divine action can play an important role in coming to a more adequate understanding of divine action. Sarah Lane Ritchie, for instance, directly addresses the challenge for such efforts by dealing with the issue of causality (*Zygon* 52:2, 361-379).

The primary value of this book will be for apologists seeking a more comprehensive case for supernaturalism. The specificity of his treatment and the technical aspects of his discussion limit its availability to non-specialists in the history of science or early modern philosophy.

In conclusion, Okello's historical treatment provides a helpful account of the development of methodological naturalism and the criticisms of methodological naturalism at different points of time. However, his own criticisms of methodological naturalism do not deal with questions about understanding the causal nature of divine action.

Schwanda, Tom, ed. *The Emergence of Evangelical Spirituality. The Age of Edwards, Newton, and Whitefield*. Classics of Western Spirituality. New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2016. xxi + 306 pages. ISBN-13: 978-0809106219.

Reviewed by Martin Wellings, Wesley Memorial Church, Oxford, UK.

The Classics of Western Spirituality series has a well-deserved reputation for offering judicious selections of texts illustrating major spiritual traditions, accompanied by helpful introductions. The series includes volumes on John and Charles Wesley (edited by Frank Whaling) and on the Pietists (edited by Peter C. Erb). The present work, focusing on eighteenth century evangelical spirituality, and edited by Tom Schwanda, Associate Professor of Christian Formation and Ministry at Wheaton College, therefore deliberately omits the Wesley brothers and includes a relatively small number of Methodist and Moravian texts, but incorporates material from a wide range of other authors, from both sides of the Atlantic.

The introduction to the volume discusses the definition of evangelicalism, using the familiar quartet of characteristics developed and defended by David Bebbington: conversionism, activism, biblicism, and crucicentrism. Schwanda notes the historical antecedents of evangelical religion in Puritanism, Pietism, and the High Anglican tradition, adding Scots/Irish Presbyterianism and the Welsh Revival of the early eighteenth century to the familiar trio. From this background he draws out six thematic categories for his exploration of evangelical spirituality, emphasising that evangelicals of all types prioritized authenticity, lived experience, and an affective and intensely emotional spiritual life, over against what they saw as the dry formalism of other schools of thought. Schwanda explores the unique media of expression favoured by evangelicals: first, letters, where evangelical leaders like George Whitefield and Howell Harris sustained an extensive correspondence, and then hymns, written to instruct and inspire, but also providing an experiential means of response to the gospel. With thousands of letters and hymns to choose from, to say nothing of sermons, treatises, and journals, the sheer volume of material is daunting, and Schwanda justifies his principles of selection in terms of gender, ethnic and theological background, and appropriate topical representation. Brief biographies are also provided of the forty seven authors included in the collection; they comprise thirty six men and eleven women; three are African American and one Native American.

The substance of the volume is made up of six thematic sections, each of some forty pages. A single-page introduction is given, followed by

a selection of texts on “New Life in Christ,” “Holy Spirit,” “Scripture,” “Spiritual Practices,” “Love for God,” and “Love for Neighbour.” Each section contains about a dozen texts. Some are complete – for example, hymns of Isaac Watts, Anne Steele, and A.M. Toplady; others are edited extracts – for instance, sermons of Gilbert Tennent, treatises of Samuel Hopkins and the journal of Richard Allen.

An appraisal of this book must begin by congratulating Tom Schwanda on the clarity and helpfulness of the explanatory material provided to support the selection of texts. The introduction effectively conveys the essence of the evangelical movement; the biographies place the authors in context; the end-notes, bibliography, and index are all thorough and comprehensive. The volume, moreover, is well-produced, and an attractive addition to the series.

The selection of authors and texts is an unenviable task, but Schwanda has achieved an excellent balance of voices and styles. Isaac Watts (1674-1748) represents an older Dissenting tradition, initially suspicious of evangelicalism; Philip Doddridge (1702-51) and Jonathan Edwards (1703-58) stand for the generation caught up in the Revival. There are Anglicans (Thomas Adam, William Romaine, Henry Venn, Devereux Jarratt), Congregationalists (Joseph Bellamy and Joseph Hart), Presbyterians (Samson Occom and Gilbert Tennent) and Baptists (Anne Dutton, Andrew Fuller and William Carey). Methodists in the Wesleyan tradition are represented by Mary Bosanquet Fletcher and her husband John, by Hester Anne Rogers, Sarah Jones, Richard Allen, Thomas Walsh and Francis Asbury. Familiar texts, like Watts’ “When I survey the wondrous cross” (32) and Jonathan Edwards’ “Personal Narrative” (165-71) sit alongside the diary of Thomas Walsh (120-24) and extracts from Thomas Scott’s Bible commentary (134-37). The selection allows the reader to hear George Whitefield preach (73-80), to share in Henry Venn’s devotional guidance (124-30), and to eavesdrop on the spiritual reflections of Susanna Antony and Sarah Osborn (226-34).

In his introduction, Tom Schwanda notes that the selection of texts was guided by Mark Noll’s list of “100 Primary Sources of the Era,” in his *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* (2003). It is, perhaps, a pity that the voices here are all evangelical leaders, of one sort or another: preachers, poets, and exemplars. Use might have been made of texts like the “Early Methodist Conversion Narratives,” or the *Arminian Magazine*, to introduce humbler folk alongside the celebrities of the evangelical movement. But this is more an argument for a companion volume, or a sequel, than a criticism of an excellent and useful resource.

Thompson, Richard P. *Acts: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*. Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2015. 429 pages. ISBN-13 978-0834132399.

Reviewed by Robert W. Wall, The Paul T. Walls Professor of Scripture and Wesleyan Studies, Seattle Pacific University & Seminary, Seattle, WA.

Richard P. Thompson has provided us with a readable, nicely organized, and well-informed commentary on Acts. Thompson's other published work on Acts has established his reputation as an important interpreter of this biblical book, while his current position as Professor of NT at NW Nazarene University has helped shape his evident pedagogical sensibilities: this commentary is not only well-informed by contemporary scholarship but it is well-suited for classroom and clergy use.

Thompson's commentary carefully follows the narrative plotline of Acts episode by episode. Each episode is closely engaged and considered in three parts by the well-known interpretive rubric, "behind the text, in the text, from the text." By targeting both the historical event narrated and how Luke, the implied story-teller, reshapes his traditions of that event, Thompson presents a commentary on a canonical narrative that responds to the implied question that lingers following our reading of the fourfold Gospel: what happens, if anything, to what Jesus began to do and say following his departure?

In regards to what historical goods might be found "behind the text" at the point of its compositional origins, the brief introduction (pp. 41-56) provides readers with a set of historical markers that earth Acts at ground level. Of course, these markers are indeterminate and based mostly on inductions from textual cues and evidence from the Roman world and Judaism (Second Temple and Formative). These historical markers include the identity of its anonymous author (probably not the historical Luke), his audience (probably members of the second century church), date of composition (probably mid-second century), its genre and rhetorical/literary conventions (a complex of forms and devices is used in Acts), sources (mostly second century traditions are used by the story-teller, including Pauline letters and the church's version of the Greek OT), brief snapshots of the Roman social world, and so on. Thompson accepts the consensus that the real identity of "Luke" (as he is referred to in the commentary) cannot be pinned down, but he tells his story as a Roman historian who writes history from a theological perspective. That is, the narrator's theology shapes his story-telling.

The better part of this commentary is spent discussing what the reader should look for “in the text.” And here Thompson is at the top of his game as he guides readers paragraph by paragraph through the story by explaining key Greek words, pointing out intertexts (OT, Gospels, Pauline letters), giving substance to theological ideas, developing how rhetorical devices narrate the story, solving difficult grammar/syntax, and closely following the narrative’s own logical flow. This work is well done.

Often, Thompson pauses from his exposition to write excurses of big-ticket ideas (mostly theological and textual) and issues (mostly historical background) that provide added depth of understanding readers might otherwise have missed if tracking only the text’s plain sense or narrative logic. Almost without exception, I found Thompson nailing down things that are routinely raised in classes and in sermon preparation. While this is a popular-level commentary and does not include an extensive critical apparatus (for this, see Keener’s massive, multi-volume commentary on Acts), I do not think readers will be short-changed for vital information: Thompson provides a well-informed, carefully studied exposition of this book’s narrative world.

In a commentary series dedicated to showcasing the “best scholarship in the Wesleyan theological tradition” (p. 11), readers should have expected to find a Wesleyan theological reading of Acts in the final, “from the text” sections of the commentary. While in his introduction, Thompson happily provides readers with a Wesleyan hermeneutical key (via *salutis*) that may unlock the story’s potential for cultivating a congregation’s Wesleyan practices and theology (pp. 53-56), he does little with this idea in the commentary itself. This final section of each exposition mostly seeks to tell us how Luke’s theological grammar shapes the telling of his story; I sometimes found it strangely detached not only from the Wesleyan tradition but from the critical exposition of the text itself. I much prefer a commentary that works hard to integrate a theological reading with a rigorous exegesis of the text rather than to separate them from each other. What should we expect of a commentary whose intention is to present a Wesleyan theological reading of Acts that flows naturally from a rigorous linguistic analysis of the text and a curated history of the social world that shaped it, all of a single piece?

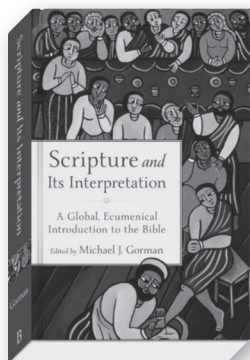
Let me voice a couple of other gripes about this otherwise excellent work. Thompson is hampered by his obliged use of the NIV whose translation of Acts is not very good (among its many critics, see my commentary on Acts in the *New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 10). I’m pleased that he

sometimes appeals to his own translations to guide his readers. The lack of a scripture, author, or subject index also is a minus, while the addition of an extensive bibliography is a clear plus.

More importantly, it should come as no surprise that I am disappointed that Thompson spills virtually no ink on the recent development of a “canonical approach” to Acts (e.g., Childs, Wall, Schröter, Trobisch, Smith). While he mentions the earliest interpreters of Acts (e.g., Irenaeus), he says nothing about their initial reading of Acts as scripture (and a generation after its composition—see the works of A. Gregory and C. Mount) within the social world of the late second century; or their reading of Acts without Luke’s Gospel (the idea of “Luke-Acts” is a modern invention); or a history of reception that reads Acts with the canonical collections (i.e., fourfold Gospel, Apostolic Letter collections) that surround it in the final redaction of the NT canon. In fact, Acts is not Luke’s book but the church’s book, and the very shape of the NT canon the church receives with the holy Spirit should in turn shape its interpretation and proclamation. Similarly, I found no mention of the church’s use of Acts in its lectionary readings for Easter and Pentecost. Any commentary located in “the Wesleyan tradition” must be concerned with how the church preaches it in forming a loving and holy people. While Thompson surely does this heavy-lifting, his exhortations would have an added depth had they been connected more carefully with the canonical and lectionary impresses of this holy text.

Every scholar engaged in a serious study of Acts for the church and classroom will not agree on every point. Nor should we. What fun would that be?! What we do agree on, however, should determine our final verdict on whether a commentary should find a place on our bookshelf. Richard Thompson’s commentary on Acts is now on my bookshelf among the handful of go-to resources I use whenever preparing to preach or teach this canonical story of God’s saving graces. Highly recommended.

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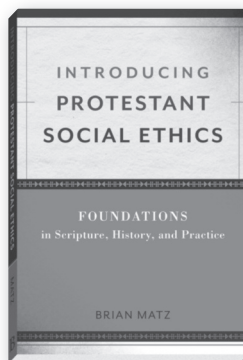


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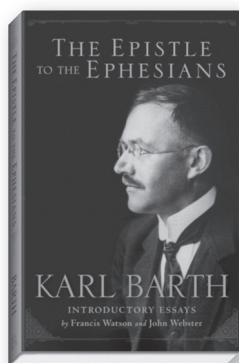


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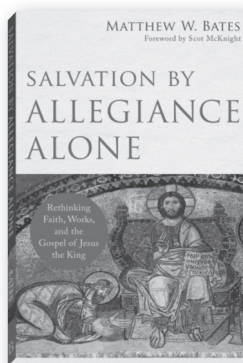
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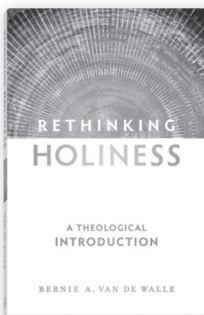
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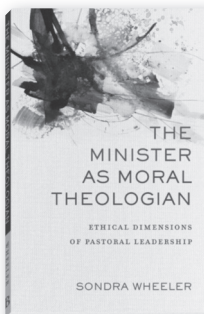
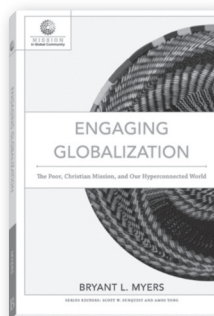
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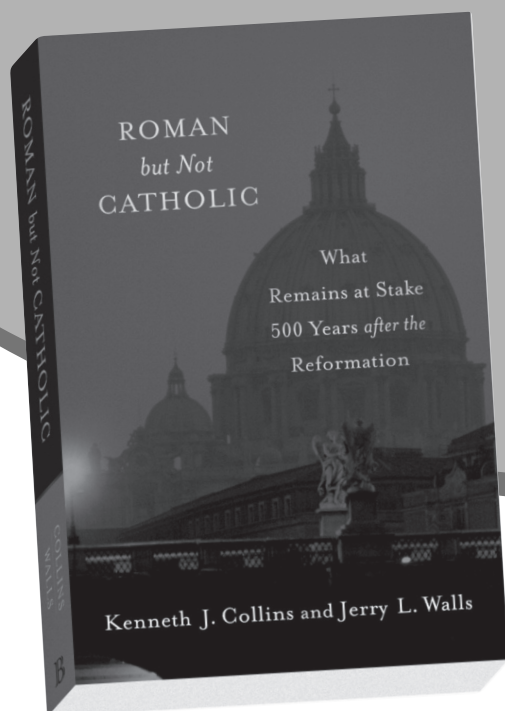
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