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EDITORIAL NOTES

The 2010 annual meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society convened at Azusa Pacific University on March 4-6, 2010. Under the careful guidance of Dr. Rob Wal of Seattle Pacific University, the program was organized around the theme “The Future of Scripture” with guest keynoters William J. Abraham and Richard B. Hays. These two presentations and ten select others will appear in the Spring 2011 (46:1) issue. The 2011 annual meeting of the WTS will convene on March 3-5, 2011, on the campus of Southern Methodist University with the theme “Empire, Ecclesiology, and the Missio Dei.” It is being developed under the skilled supervision of Elaine Heath of Southern Methodist.

Our thanks goes to the fifteen article writers and eight book reviewers who have made outstanding scholarly contributions to this present journal issue. The subjects may be wide-ranging in their time reference and discipline focus, but all are highly relevant to understanding more fully the history and current relevance of the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition of Christianity.

Be aware that all issues of the Wesleyan Theological Journal, 1966-2010, are now available on a searchable CD (see the Wesley Center, Northwest Nazarene University, at http://wesley.nnu.edu). This is a rich research tool! Many new books have been published recently from within or about some aspect of the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition. Nine are reviewed in this issue.

Whatever information is needed about the Wesleyan Theological Society is readily available in these pages, including the identity of all officers of the Society and their email addresses. The WTS web site is Wesley.nnu.edu/wts. Also found here is an application for membership in the Society. The WTS officers to contact for particular needs you may have are:

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

Barry L. Callen, Editor
October, 2010
All Wesleyan congregations are likely to include, at one time or another, adults with various mental disorders. Wesleyan soteriologies, which at least at the congregational level seem to emphasize the role of adult consciousness in the decision for faith, present the perhaps unintended theological implication that adults with mental impairments that affect the soundness of their consciousness may not be able to make a decision for faith, and thus may not be saved. While including mental illness in these considerations, my focus is currently limited to biomedical and neurological issues in recognition that symptoms of spiritual oppression may overlap with symptoms of some brain disorders. This calls for humble acknowledgement that human consciousness is complex and likely cannot be reduced to identification with either “brain” or “spirit.”

Even if we allow (whether based upon Wesley’s own assertions or as a gracious divine exception) that by God’s grace those with mental disabilities may be saved monergistically, the question of Christian perfection remains.

Any discussion of Wesleyan soteriology is necessarily predicated on Wesleyan understandings of justification and sanctification. Therefore, in

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1I am grateful to my colleagues Dennis Okholm (theologian) and Kenneth Waters (New Testament scholar) for helping me clarify this issue in a May, 2009, conversation.
order to discuss from a Wesleyan perspective the meaning of “decision” and its role in salvation for people with neurological or developmental disabilities, we must first understand Wesleyan views of the role of individual consciousness in justification and sanctification. In both cases, citing Pauline sources, John Wesley himself seems to emphasize the gracious work of God, Christ, and Spirit in and for the individual. In terms of his explicit statements on the matter, it seems that Wesley argued that salvation is not actually based on individual behavior (such as a decision) nor on individual character (including consciousness). These assumptions are illustrated by Wesley’s own acceptance of infant baptism; unlike those of his followers in the later holiness tradition who have insisted on believers’ baptism, he does not assume that conscious consent or decision is required to join the Christian community through baptism. Therefore, it might be more consistently Wesleyan to emphasize the synergistic transformation or regeneration of individual behavior, character, and consciousness in justification and sanctification as a result of and in relationship with God’s saving activity.

What is the role of the individual in justification and sanctification in Wesleyan soteriology?

It must be admitted that this theological problem is not easily solved. Wesley emphasizes a relationship between justification and individual belief that has raised questions about the role of conscious adult decision in his understanding of justification. It is true that he clearly defended both the classic Protestant emphasis on justification by faith and the monergistic idea that Christ alone is the author, purchaser, and cause of justification. Faith, he argued, is not the cause of our justification; thus we are not the authors of our own salvation. Faith is simply the means or method by which God has chosen to justify us.

This point has been by no means as clear to Wesley’s hearers and readers as it was to him. For example, in his “Thoughts on the Imputed Righteousness of Christ,” he cites and amends Romans 10:3 as follows: “They being ignorant of God’s righteousness,” (method of justifying sin-
ners) “and going about to establish their own righteousness” (a method of their own opposite to his) “have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.” While Wesley may not have intended to imply that submission to God’s righteousness (seemingly a conscious act or decision) is needed in order for God’s justification to take place, it is nevertheless easily inferred. Wesley seems to make this implication explicit in “The Lord Our Righteousness,” a sermon on Jeremiah 23:6 in which he asks and attempts to answer the question: When is the righteousness of Christ “imputed to us, and in what sense is it imputed?” His response suggests that individual consciousness decision or assent have some role to play in his view of justification: “When they believe: In that very hour the righteousness of Christ is theirs. It is imputed to every one that believes, as soon as he believes. . . .”

The difficulties of articulating a Wesleyan understanding of the role of human consciousness in the work of salvation have not been resolved by contemporary Wesleyan scholars, who have not achieved consensus on this issue. Kenneth Collins, for example, seems to focus on the aspect of Wesley’s view of justification that emphasizes that “the righteousness of Christ must be graciously given to” sinners, who do not possess and cannot achieve righteousness on their own. Larry Shelton, however, seems to make explicit the synergistic implications underlying Wesleyan soteriology:

The expectations of the covenant are fulfilled by Christ, and the believer in him actually fulfills them and enters into proper relationship to God as well. . . . Believers are expected to base their faith for salvation in the atoning work of Christ. They do so, and thus are declared righteous and are actually righteous. This declaration of “righteousness” involves a basic concept of relationship. One is righteous who fulfills the demands required by the relationship in which he or she stands.

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4 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
Perhaps Shelton’s articulation of Wesleyan soteriology relies on an unnecessarily artificial distinction, affirming the centrality of relationship while separating the activity of Christ from the activity of the believer in justification. This may also be the reason that Wesley’s own statements on this issue seem somewhat self-contradictory.

The role of human consciousness in Wesleyan understandings of justification may be somewhat more ambiguous than Wesley himself intended. The activity of the individual according to the Wesleyan view of sanctification seems to be clearly synergistic. Contemporary Wesleyan theologian Thomas Oden maintains the common Wesleyan distinction between justification and sanctification. As Oden explains, while the biblical understanding of justification “means to declare or deem upright so as to acquit from guilt and punitive liability,” sanctification is “an act by which the sinner’s nature is changed or by which one is . . . subjectively made righteous,” spiritually mature. “In taking up the question of justification, we are asking exclusively about what God has done to acquit sin, not yet about what persons do in response. Only after dealing with the new juridical position of humanity in Christ is it possible to take up responsive concerns. . . .”

Oden, like Collins, argues that justification is an act of God alone, a view that Wesley too espouses—at least explicitly. However, sanctification, as Oden seems to indicate, includes both the activity of God and the human response to God’s saving work.

**To what extent did Wesley understand individual consciousness or decision to be involved in salvation, justification, and sanctification?**

In fact, while the role of conscious assent in Wesleyan soteriology may remain ambiguous as a theological issue, the pastoral and congregational issue of the salvation of adults with intellectual or other mental challenges may be more easily addressed. As part of his response to arguments between Christians over theological concerns, some of which he attributed to dissimilarity of language rather than belief, Wesley preached that the experience of relationship with God is not necessarily impaired by lesser “natural faculties.” It is possible that some believers may not have a distinct apprehension of the very blessing which they enjoy:

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Their ideas may not be so clear, and yet their experience may be as sound, as ours. There is a wide difference between the natural faculties of men, their understandings in particular; and that difference is exceedingly increased by the manner of their education.\textsuperscript{10}

Further, in a 1738 collection of prayers, Wesley recommended that Christians make the following weekly intercession which suggests that God monergistically sanctifies those who cannot work with the Spirit synergistically:

Give a strong and quiet Spirit to those who are condemned to Death, Liberty to Prisoners and Captives, and Ease and Cheerfulness to every sad Heart. O give Spiritual Strength and Comfort to Scrupulous Consciences, and to them who are afflicted by Evil Spirits. \textit{Pity Idiots and Lunatics, and give Life and Salvation to all to whom Thou hast given no Understanding.} Give to all that are in Error the light of Thy Truth; Bring all Sinners to Repentance...and give to all Heretics Humility and Grace to make amends to the Church, by the Public Acknowledgement of an Holy Faith.\textsuperscript{11}

The implicit assumptions of this prayer may also give hope to families struggling with dementia or Alzheimer’s disease when a family member can no longer give rational consent to the work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification and may even exhibit such apparently “unholy” behaviors as loss of temper, the use of foul language, and even physical violence due to issues with neurological rather than spiritual origins.

The centrality of relationship to Wesleyan soteriology is one matter on which Wesley and his contemporary followers seem to agree. Shelton, for example, emphasizes the believer’s participation, union, and relationship with Christ as an essential part of justification and salvation:

Because the believer . . .participates in the life of Christ, the inheritance of Christ becomes the believer’s own. Saving faith and union with Christ go together. . . . We are so brought into relationship with Christ by faith that we become the righteousness of God in the sense of Jeremiah 23:6; 33:16. The right-

\textsuperscript{10}Wesley, “The Lord Our Righteousness,” 238.

eousness still is God’s, however, and not an attribute that can be isolated from him. But, through the work of the Holy Spirit, the believer is linked with Christ and God’s righteousness (1 Cor. 6:11).12

Patterns of Crisis on the Spiritual Journey

It may be especially useful to articulate a Wesleyan theological position on this issue as a response and alternative to the Reformed theological approach, which may be more clear and explicit about the issues of theological anthropology and the morphology of conversion that underlie discussions of the condition of human consciousness and its impact on salvation. In his “theology of encounter,” Reformed theologian Emil Brunner insists on a theological anthropology that allows humans to receive and respond to revelation, which he understands as God’s act of communicating with human beings.13 Brunner argues that human nature has a “formal” and “material” aspect. The formal aspect is God’s good creation, the image of God in humans, which includes the conscience and capacity for speech and provides a continued point of contact between humans and God. The formal part of human nature can be addressed by and respond to the divine. Only the “material” aspect of human nature, “the natural man,” is fallen and in bondage to sin, which limits the individual’s actual response to God.14 Karl Barth famously rejected Brunner’s view, though both of them share a Swiss Reformed theological background. According to Barth, we can be chosen, called by Jesus Christ, but we cannot choose Jesus Christ.15 While Reformed and Wesleyan theologians may be in opposition on many points, it seems that disagreement about whether and how humans can respond to the divine is common. However, the reason for disagreement between Reformed theologians is not due to explicit disagreement about the doctrines of God and human nature, but ambiguity or self-contradiction, which unfortunately is how Wesleyan soteriology can come across.

Brunner posits a universal capacity for speech that serves as the

12 Shelton, 116-117.
basis for communication with God, an assumption which is challenged by the very issue under consideration now, the existence of people in our churches who live with mental disabilities, some of whom may be severe enough to preclude the capacity of speech. The Wesleyan emphasis on relationship and experience as central to salvation provides an important alternative to Brunner’s Reformed natural theology. According to Wesleyan soteriology, those who do not possess the capacity for speech, who cannot understand the Word preached or assent to God’s revelation verbally, can still experience and be in relationship with God and thus still be justified (and perhaps even sanctified).

Barth’s kerygmatic emphasis on the Word of God and on believers’ publicly hearing, proclaiming, confessing, and living this Word individually and in community also implies a necessary relation between faith and speech. In fact, Barth called the preaching of the Word the only Protestant sacrament. In fairness to Barth, his emphasis on community and obedience may resolve any problem his kerygmatic theology would pose for congregations including members with mental disabilities that impair verbal understanding and expression. For Barth, hearing, proclaiming, confessing, and living the Word must happen publicly and in community. The community must confess Christ, and it might be argued that the community’s confession, by God’s grace, would be accepted as including its members who are unable to confess for themselves due to mental impairment. It might also be argued that Barth’s emphasis on obedience allows for those who can obey Christ based on their relationship with and experience of Him, even if or when they cannot understand or articulate that relationship verbally. This may, however, be my own Wesleyan reading of Barth.

Thus far, I have considered issues of salvation with regard to mental disability generally, with implicit emphasis on issues of developmental disabilities. In many ways, it may be easier to accept that God would show saving grace to those who, through no fault of their own, are prevented neurologically from adult development and spiritual formation. Wesley himself allowed that those whose “natural faculties” impaired their theological sophistication and biblical understanding were able to

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16Ibid., 695-710.
experience God in just the same way as those with greater abilities and education. However, the forms of mental disability we are more likely to encounter in our congregations are probably age-related dementia and mental illness, both of which can cause radical alterations of personality in formerly healthy individuals, even those whose lives had previously seemed to exhibit holiness.

According to recent estimates, nearly seventeen percent of adult Americans suffer from major depression at some point in their lives. The situation is particularly acute for young adults near the typical age of conversion or faith crisis. More than twenty-seven percent of young adults between eighteen and twenty-four have a diagnosable form of mental illness. Suicide now ranks as the third leading cause of death among college students. More than one thousand students between eighteen and twenty-four commit suicide each year. In spite of the importance of addressing this issue in our churches, contemporary theologians may hesitate to explore it as outside our discipline. In this spirit, Barth himself once interrupted the first presentation at a 1936 conference because the paper focused on religious experience and included references to psychology. Shortly after the presenter had begun, Barth stood up and publicly corrected him: “If the paper is on the psychology of religion, why should we listen to it? This is a conference of Christian theologians; only the word of God, not talk about psychology and religious experience, is appropriate here.” Yet Wesleyan theologians may rightly explore the implications of our soteriology on Wesleyan congregations with members struggling with psychological concerns.

The relationship between soteriology, mental illness, and Wesleyan theological orientation is not just an issue of psychology of religion. Wesleyan understandings of conversion and Christian perfection have a par-

18 Wesley, “The Lord Our Righteousness,” 238.
19 I am again grateful to my colleague William Yarchin for making explicit the relationship of dementia and Alzheimer’s disease to these considerations.
ticular bearing on issues of mental illness in Christian believers in ways that are distinct from the way the same issues arise in the Reformed tradition. Julius Rubin’s 1994 study of religious melancholy, a deep depression precipitated by theological and spiritual crisis prevalent among Protestants (especially evangelical Pietists) during the revival era of the seventeenth to nineteenth century, provides a historical framework for exploring this theological issue. Religious melancholy, first identified by Robert Burton in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* in 1621, was not a psychological but rather a theological diagnosis, “a distinct form of love-melancholy caused by a defect in man’s relationship to God.” Sufferers experienced a humiliating “self-loathing that augurs the promise of this-worldly peace and heavenly salvation,” a dark night of the soul experienced as forsakenness by God, the absence of God’s love.

During that revival era, Christian writers and preachers sometimes celebrated this melancholy as a voluntary and natural “godly sorrow.” A particularly severe form of religious melancholy, melancholia attonita, “struck down or assaulted patients, in the blink of an eye, with the judgment and wrath of God.” Those with melancholia attonita suffered “anguish over the commission of unpardonable sin, food refusal, suicidal inclinations, and the certainty that God had abandoned” them. Because religious melancholy was not considered in terms of psychological science (which did not yet exist) but rather as a theological issue, its ontological character as an “attribute at the core of the human condition” was ascribed to original sin. Melancholy was a natural and understandable reaction to the theological recognition of the ontological reality that “man is a diseased creature in a disordered world, alienated from what he once was—God’s perfect creature in an ordered universe. . . . Flawed by innate depravity, human reason falls prey to incessant misunderstandings, error, and perturbations of the mind, will and heart.”

In his *Treatise of Conversion* (1830), Puritan Richard Baxter

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24Ibid., 33, 41.
25Ibid., 33.
26Ibid., 177.
27Ibid., 176.
28Ibid., 38.
observed that, in general, evangelical Protestants with religious melancholy passed through three stages, each described more in theological than psychological terms.\(^29\) First, “salvation panic” set in.\(^30\) This first stage of religious melancholy was characterized by “extreme guilt” and “obsession with having committed unpardonable sins.”\(^31\) This was followed by the second stage, “melancholy terrors,” a crisis of conversion and feeling forsaken by God’s love leading to “the most intense religious melancholy.”\(^32\) These terrors led into the third stage, severe depression, a sort of personal eschatological crisis, finding “no solace in this world” and expecting “eternal punishment in the next.”\(^33\) Though these descriptions of the triggers for depression are theological, the results were the same as for a contemporary psychological diagnosis of clinical depression—“Untreated, religious melancholy frequently resulted in suicide or confirmed madness.”\(^34\) Melancholia attonita, the most severe form of religious melancholy, progressed quickly, even instantly, from religious melancholy’s depressive third phase to “complete passivity and extreme social withdrawal” and on to attempting suicide by starvation either out of self-punishing guilt over sin or hopeful perfectionist desire to overcome sin.\(^35\) According to Burton, the only cure for it was sanctification: “Only the regenerate, twice-born soul can escape” religious melancholy, overcoming it with “a life of religious moderation [through diet, air, exercise, and pastoral care], calm reason, and measured fellowship and work,” “developing a character of methodical self-control and reason,” and reforming society to conform to the Word.\(^36\)

In general, both Calvinist and later Wesleyan evangelicals assumed that a Christian’s relationship with God “needed to be warm, personal, and constant. . . . The . . . believer’s hearth growing cold and distant . . .

\(^{31}\)Rubin, 5.
\(^{32}\)Ibid., 33, 5, 39.
\(^{33}\)Ibid., 5.
\(^{34}\)Ibid., 30.
\(^{35}\)Ibid., 177.
\(^{36}\)Ibid., 39-40; Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 1621, 963-964.
would cause God to withdraw . . . replacing the assurance of love with doubt, the rapture and comfort of communion with despair and melancholy.” However, the crisis of religious melancholy has historically taken on a particular character depending on the theo-practical emphasis of the believer or community in question.

**Calvinist Evangelicals.** Calvinist evangelicals, in particular Presbyterians and Congregationalists, embraced the “steps of the *ordo salutis* [order of salvation]” outlined by Jonathan Edwards in *A Faithful Narrative and Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*. Calvinist evangelicals, whose soteriology of Reformed monergism led them to emphasize calm rational reflection as integral to conversion, experienced religious melancholy in a way consistent with their theology—as “crushing self-condemnation. . .as an enemy of God.” Yet because of their Edwardsian understanding of religious melancholy as a necessary stage of the conversion process, “emotional torment…was [seen as] the mark of the Holy Spirit” without which “no true religion was possible.” In other words, depression was understood as a necessary and inevitable part of a realistic self-assessment by the sinner prior to conversion.

**Arminian Evangelicals.** Arminian evangelicals, whose ranks grew as a result of the Second Great Awakening, emphasized the free will of the individual believer as an agent able to choose between God and holiness or Satan and selfishness, worldliness and sin. For example, the Oberlin School, Nathaniel Taylor’s Taylorism and New Light theology, and Charles Finney’s revivals promoted the understanding of Christian discipleship as related to believers’ free choices for faith and life. Taylor taught an Arminian soteriology that emphasized both personal freedom and personal accountability: “God endowed each believer with moral agency, the self-determining power of the will, and the capacity to choose sin. . . . Each person’s capacity to choose made him or her an omnicausal agent of either holiness and benevolence or damnation and sin.” Because Arminian evangelical soteriology was synergistic and emphasized individual moral responsibility in and after conversion, Arminian

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37 Rubin, 132.  
38 Ibid., 127.  
39 Ibid., 128.  
40 Ibid., 131.  
41 Ibid., 132.
evangelicals tended to experience religious melancholy differently than those in the Reformed tradition. Unlike the Calvinists, they did not condemn themselves as enemies of God while accepting their torment as a necessary or inevitable mark of all true religion. Rather, Arminians experienced religious melancholy as personal moral failure, an experience of “unrelenting self-torture arising from charges of hypocrisy” when they “lacked the strength of character to fulfill their [moral] resolutions.”

**Pietist Evangelicals.** A third theological orientation, evangelical Pietism, was and is still more closely associated with religious melancholy than either Calvinist or Arminian evangelicalism. While Arminian evangelicalism may be more easily identified with the Wesleyan tradition, evangelical Pietism is also a contributing influence, particularly in the Wesleyan-Holiness churches. Evangelical Pietists emphasized religious experience and intimate relationship as central to their soteriology, in a sense creating a space for religious melancholy before it occurred. Evangelical Pietism focused on “(1) experiential oneness with God; (2) the quest for spiritual perfection through the *ordo salutis* of conversion,” a “continual journey of devotional piety marked by inner struggle”; (3) “reliance upon the objective authority of the biblical Word as interpreted by the heart of the new man” transformed by a relationship with Christ; and (4) opposition to and effort to reform “by evangelical means, the sinful orders of the natural man and the world.”

Pietist evangelicals understood conversion as ongoing progress toward Christian perfection rather than a moment of crisis; thus they emphasized private devotion to and personal relationship with Jesus. Oberlin theology professor Charles Finney, among others, taught that Christian perfection (perfect obedience, complete holiness, and freedom from sin) is possible because, after conversion, the regenerated will tend to choose godly (rather than sinful) conduct. With this expectation of perfection and emphasis on relationship with Jesus, Pietist evangelicals tended to experience religious melancholy not as rational self-condemnation as the Calvinists did, nor as a sense of personal moral failure as the Arminians did, but rather as a kind of bereavement, a “desperate dark

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42Ibid., 128.
night of the soul” due to alienation from intimacy with their personal savior. This experience might or might not be part of one’s ongoing journey to deeper relationship with God and greater Christlikeness but, as in the Catholic mystical tradition, would neither be assumed to be permanent nor grounds for self-recrimination.

Those influenced by both Arminian and Pietist strains of evangelicalism, namely Wesleyans, experienced not only what we might recognize as depressive mental illness in the form of religious melancholy but also perfectionist self-starvation, behavior that today tends to be associated with the mental disorder anorexia nervosa. In the nineteenth century, many of the “twice-born” tried to transcend the self in order to attain Christian perfection. Rubin cites the controversial examples of Charles Finney and Oberlin College, where ordained Presbyterian minister “Sylvester Graham’s secular healing cult, founded upon vegetarianism and self-control of human appetites” were embraced with notable fervor, “turning into excessive fasting and asceticism in the quest for religious devotionalism.” Graham considered the use of bleached flour, spices, sugar, and caffeinated beverages to lead to masturbation (“self-pollution”) and advocated a “systematic rationalization of the body” by suppressing sexual and other appetites through “plentiful fresh water, fruit, vegetables, and wholesome bran bread” to “promote sexual purity” and to ensure regular bowel movements. Graham urged his followers to eat only the smallest quantity of food necessary to fuel the body—“more than this is evil!” Finney himself connected fasting with the experience of feeling God’s presence and in his autobiography describes frequent fasting to clear away feelings of distance from God. It should be noted that within a little over a decade after starting at Oberlin, Finney had repudiated the strictness of his earlier teachings on fasting.

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44 Rubin, 126-127.
45 Teresa of Avila, The Life of Saint Teresa by Herself (1588), especially chapters 19, 22, 35, and 37; John of the Cross, Dark Night of the Soul (1578-1585), especially Book I, chapters VIII-XIV.
46 Rubin, 190, 189.
Rubin speculates that while some religious melancholia was no doubt genuine depression, in other cases it was a self-destructive form of covert rebellion. The believer incapacitated by “disabling illness . . . could not be expected to fulfill the agenda of evangelical character and annihilate the self in service to divine mandate. Invalidism, mental distraction, and the hopelessness of mental alienation immobilized the sufferer.”

Whether deliberate or involuntary, this strategy of mental breakdown was particularly effective as an escape from oppressive interpretations of Christian perfection. In some extreme cases (like that of William James, Sr.), Christian perfectionists killed the “natural self” with excessive fasting or intentional starvation. Likewise, some “psychiatric patients…embraced. . .the possibility of Christian perfectionism” (as they interpreted the doctrine of entire sanctification taught by Wesley) but “languished under the opposite spiritual extreme,” fasting “obsessively in private rituals of purification, convinced that eating compounded their sinfulness.”

Whether Wesleyan or Pietist believers descend into mental illness and then begin to misinterpret their own tradition or whether people already mentally ill are drawn to what seems to be a misunderstanding of Wesley’s doctrine of Christian perfection, the theology of Christian perfection can be seen to interact with mental illness in ways that foster self-destruction. History seems to suggest that Wesleyan theologians and congregational leaders should articulate the doctrine of sanctification and Christian perfection with great care in a context of pastoral and peer support, with special attention to self-destructive misinterpretations by those already in mental distress. Though this doctrine is perhaps not widely preached to lay people any more, special care may be needed when exposing undergraduate students of theology and seminarians to these concepts, particularly given the special vulnerability of young adults to depression and suicide.

According to Rubin, religious melancholy still affects contemporary American evangelicals in ways we may recognize as especially applicable to those influenced by Wesleyan and Pietist soteriological assumptions: “Believers who strive to cultivate a lifelong personal relationship with God, often find themselves bereft of the Spirit—foresaken by God.”

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49Rubin, 133.
50Ibid., 196.
51Ibid., 191.
52Ibid., 239.
“religious life founded upon the immediacy of the indwelling spirit (spirituality or God’s presence in one’s heart)” produces problems when adherents “feel bereft of God in their hearts,” which leads to religious melancholy.\(^{53}\) The Wesleyan emphasis on “heart religion” may create the preconditions for religious melancholy. In fact, Pentecostal church historian Allen Tennison confirms that in his pastoral and scholarly experience, the emphasis on heart religion among Wesleyan holiness congregations leads to spiritual crisis when people can’t “feel” God.\(^{54}\)

Recent innovations in psychopharmacology have also raised new debates with related soteriological implications. In a 2003 article in *Christian Scholar’s Review*, neuropsychologist Michael J. Boivin observes that some “devout Christian” patients report “emotional and spiritual improvement [even inner transformation akin to conversion] as a result of treatment with Prozac.” Boivin argues that successful psychopharmalogical treatment (including enhancing spiritual well-being) may reveal “how inextricably interwoven the biochemistry of the brain is to who we are and how we are related to each other and to God.”\(^{55}\) Other Christian scholars and church leaders, however, reject the idea of psychopharmaceutical treatment for mental illnesses, equating the relief from mental illness that medication provides with the “cheap grace” of a faulty soteriology. A paper presented at the 2002 meeting of the American Scientific Affiliation exemplifies this type of thinking:

Prozac spirituality can lead some to become “comfortable with their sinfulness.” The drug provides a new feeling of freedom, to live by worldly concepts of reality and truth, where one no longer needs to belong to and follow the Lord. But God does not draw us to Him so that we will feel good. Prozac may bring happiness in letting us feel good but it can’t bring joy which comes only from belonging to and following Jesus. Prozac cannot show people the ultimate reality revealed only by religion.\(^{56}\)

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\(^{53}\)Ibid., 238.

\(^{54}\)Allen Tennison, May 28, 2009, conversation.

\(^{55}\)Ibid., 161.

Clearly, contemporary Christians disagree about whether God’s grace can work through medical treatment in such a way that a believer’s consciousness can be transformed to receive salvation and experience sanctification as never before. Either position raises pneumatological and soteriological questions. In a 1995 Christianity Today article, three Christian writers asked, “Can a pill do what the Holy Spirit could not? Why is it that a drug influencing the levels of a certain neurotransmitter can have such dramatic results in people when prayer and good intentions seem to have been inadequate?”

Boivin asks whether believers should rely on pharmaceutical intervention, rather than prayer, faith and inner healing through the Holy Spirit in response to Christian counsel and support. The renewing of the mind that results from medical treatment for mental illness raises a question about the seemingly lesser roles of the Spirit, prayer, and will in the salvation of the mentally ill. Because those in the Reformed tradition take the ineffectiveness of the human will to partner with God in salvation as a given, these questions are specifically Arminian theological considerations, which Wesleyan theologians and congregations will have to address further.

Conclusion

In general, Arminian evangelical soteriology tends to be synergistic, emphasizing individual moral responsibility in and after conversion. Wesleyan soteriologies, influenced by the Arminian theological tradition, also emphasize individual responsibility with regard to the decision for faith and the synergistic process of sanctification. Living out this responsibility in relationship with God, so central to the Wesleyan understanding of salvation, would seem to require a sound adult consciousness. In fact, when depression has impaired the consciousness of Arminian Christians, the inability to take responsibility for making progress toward Christian perfection or entire sanctification often has plunged them into spiritual crisis and religious melancholy. Likewise, the negative impact of depression on the ability to experience intimacy in relationship with God and others has plunged into despair those whose understanding of salvation and sanctifi-

58 Boivin, 161.
cation depends on heart religion. While aspects of Wesleyan soteriology have been seen to exacerbate existing tendencies to various mental disorders, Wesleyan theology and theo-praxis have not yet proposed a satisfactory solution to the problems they may be aggravating in some of their followers. I believe that by reclaiming Wesley’s own soteriological emphasis on God’s grace and Christ’s righteousness, perhaps some of the psychological burden created by faulty soteriology might be lifted from Wesleyan believers, especially benefiting those prone to intense anxiety, obsessive perfectionism, and intense self-loathing caused by mental illnesses.

In the lives of congregations and individual believers, Wesleyan spirituality seems to emphasize individual piety, holiness, and relationship with Jesus. Justification and sanctification are too often understood and discussed individualistically. I believe that this practice also exacerbates existing problems for congregants struggling with mental illness, the very nature of which creates a sense of isolation and social withdrawal. It would help all Wesleyans to place greater emphasis on a different soteriological reality. Regardless of the mental state of the individual in whom God’s Spirit is working, the divine relationship that transforms individual character and behavior takes place not only in the individual mind or soul but also in and through the individual’s relationship to Christ’s body, the church. The church community can convey or embody divine grace in relation to the individual. Specifically, justification and sanctification of the individual always occurs in community—in union with Christ and in communion with Christian brothers and sisters in the congregation. Salvation is not a private or lonely affair. It does not take place in isolation. Because God’s Spirit is responsible for transforming the individual, and because this transformation occurs in community, the state of adult consciousness need not be a central soteriological concern. The Wesleyan holiness tradition of infant dedication may provide a possible model for making this explicit to congregations as a ritual wherein the community expresses support for caregivers and an individual who is not (yet) able to give rational consent to a conscious faith decision.59

Much of what is central to Wesley about salvation, justification, and sanctification might apply equally both to those who have mental or emotional disabilities and to those who don’t. In fact, it may be more consis-

59Further thanks to Allen Tennison for our conversation on this.
tent with Wesley’s clear and firm insistence upon grace to understand belief not as an act of the human mind or will but rather in the Pauline sense, as trust and union with Christ. Understanding belief in this way, as trusting God and being united with Christ (in part through relationship with the church), may not only be more consistent with biblical and Wesleyan teaching but also encourage the church to affirm the Christian faith and even the sanctification of those with developmental or neurological disabilities, including those that manifest in mood disorders or other forms of mental illness.
By 1820 the Wesleyan Methodist Church faced a mounting crisis when a number of its ministers elevated reason to the same level as revelation. Trained through a course of study that relied largely on the works of John Wesley and John Fletcher, these preachers imbibed the Enlightenment spirit that urged them to reject doctrines they could not reconcile with reason. Some wrestled with the doctrines of the Trinity and the Person of Christ. Others struggled to balance Arminianism and Calvinism,


2Wesleyan ministers were to “preach no other doctrines than are contained in Mr. Wesley’s first four volumes of invaluable sermons, and his excellent notes on the New Testament, which form the standard of religious opinions in our connexion.” Bristol Circuit, *A Correct Statement of Facts, Connected with What Mr. George Pocock Has Termed “The Ejectment of Certain Ministers from the Society of Wesleyan Ministers in the City of Bristol.”* Published by Order of the Leaders’ Meeting (Bristol: Nathaniel Lomas, [1820]), 13.

points of contention and confusion in early Methodism. Joseph Cooke embraced rationalist principles for interpreting the Bible and claimed John Wesley’s authority for rejecting the witness of the Spirit, a path that led his followers to found the Methodist Unitarian Movement. Pastors needed a structured exposition that addressed unresolved points of doctrine. Indeed, the Wesleyan Methodist Church recognized its need for intelligent, systematic expression of its doctrines to disarm critics who misrepresented the movement and fomented opposition to its mission. Methodist preachers also needed resources to fortify their congregations against rationalist religion.

Responding to these challenges, Watson wrote his *Theological Institutes* as a “Methodist Code” to unify the Connexion and equip its ministers against error. But more was at stake than doctrinal standards. Primary source documents signal a major generational shift in this period. Those who had known John Wesley himself were dying at an accelerated pace. A new generation was ready to take their place; subsequently, Jabez Bunting and Richard Watson set out to reform the Connexion

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6Methodist leaders recognized this need even before Tucker issued his plea in his *Candid and Impartial Inquiry*. Methodism’s enemies sometimes alleged that its ministers were ignorant and illiterate.


8For a contemporary argument in support of the Conference as the representative of Methodism, acting on behalf of the entire body, see William Vevers, *Observations on the Power Possessed and Exercised by the Wesleyan Methodist Ministers, in a Letter to a Friend* (London: J. Mason, 1828), esp. 4-16.

9See The Annual Address of the Conference to the Methodist Societies in Great Britain, in the Connexion Established by the Late Rev. John Wesley, M.A. August, 1820. London: Thomas Cordeux, 1820.
through stronger oversight. They grounded these changes in a theology of the pastoral office that maintained church order and upheld ministerial authority. Here can be traced the origins of Methodist theological education in a formal sense. These issues undergird the Pastoral Address to the Conference of 1820, written by Watson. Within three years Watson published the first part of his Institutes, a defense of Scriptural Christianity and an instrument of ministerial reform.

Swept into Prominence

Born in 1781 of humble circumstances, Richard Watson began to preach at age fifteen and achieved a modest popularity for his youth. Controversy within the Wesleyan Methodist Church, related to sacraments and church government, created an unfavorable climate for his early ministry; moreover, he carried theological debates into the pulpit and thus alienated his parishioners. He returned briefly to secular employment and in 1801 transferred to the Methodist New Connexion. Even after his death, Watson’s critics attacked this move as evidence of personal ambition. Indeed, Watson’s return to the “Old Connexion” in 1811 placed him in circumstances which thrust him within a few years to the top levels of leadership.

A crucial element at this time was his friendship with Jabez Bunting. The close association with Bunting transported him into the
highest circles of Methodism.\textsuperscript{15} The Wakefield appointment gave Watson the opportunity to exercise his talents for the Old Connexion, and offered Bunting a chance to observe Watson’s immense talents. Even sixty years later, those who remembered these men characterized Bunting as one who brought Watson into prominence for the sake of Methodist missions, and Watson as one who welcomed every opportunity. Watson was fortunate enough to be stationed near a colleague who could direct his gifts into a prominent role.\textsuperscript{16} Indeed, Bunting may have encouraged Watson to write the \textit{Institutes}. Bunting had a keen eye for talent that could support the cause closest to his own heart—foreign missions. A brilliant orator, Watson preached powerful sermons for the missionary society and compelled Methodists to embrace its cause. His contributions led his colleagues to elect him Conference President in 1826. This honor crowned a series of events in which Watson’s talents had been employed on behalf of the Connexion.

After his service in the West Riding of Yorkshire from 1813 to 1816, where he had been “neighbors” with Mr. Bunting, Watson moved to the City Road Chapel in London. Here he preached a sermon at the first anniversary of the missionary society (1817) that propelled him into the top ranks of leadership. The Conference subsequently requested Watson to “draw up a plan for the government of the Missionary Society.” Watson thus provided the initial organizational framework for the Society, rendering an immense service for Methodism. Recognizing his high potential, the Conference elected him Chief Secretary in 1821 and President in 1826. Watson subsequently “found a field of exertion, worthy even of his exalted powers.”\textsuperscript{17} He wrote his \textit{Institutes} at the apex of his career, the first volume appearing in 1823 and the last in 1829. This became his \textit{magnum opus}, the first systematic theology commissioned by a Methodist Conference. His devotion to Methodism knew scarcely any bounds, for not only did he carry a heavy load of professional duties but also strug-

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item James Harrison Rigg called Jabez Bunting “the greatest man of middle Methodism” and “the greatest leader of Methodism in the century that followed the death of Wesley.” James Harrison Rigg, \textit{Jabez Bunting: A Great Methodist Leader} (London: Charles H. Kelly, n.d.), 5, 16.
\item From 1813 to 1816 Bunting and Watson were near enough neighbors to be frequently in each others’ company, and Bunting took pleasure in promoting the best interests of Watson in every possible way.
\item Jabez Bunting, \textit{Memorials of the Late Rev. Richard Watson}, 42.
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gled with serious health issues. Anticipating an early death, Watson set out to write his *Theological Institutes* with dispatch.

**Prodded into Action**

When Adam Clarke released the first volume of his commentary in 1818, his footnote on Luke 1:35 set off a fierce controversy. Clarke’s expert knowledge of ancient languages secured his reputation as one of the leading biblical scholars of his generation. Scoring creeds and despising systematic theology, he kept his theological opinions close to his exegesis. As a result, his views of Christian doctrine often conflicted with his colleagues’ opinions. In his footnote, Clarke observed that the term “Son of God” properly referred to Jesus Christ after the Incarnation. He applied the term “Logos” to the Second Person of the Trinity as existing prior to the Incarnation. Clarke never denied Christ’s divinity; however, his critics feared his interpretation of this passage undermined the case for a “High Christology.” As a consequence, those who adopted Clarke’s views might spiritualize or “explain away” doctrines they could not understand. This would diminish the system of human redemption.

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18 “Being now more than forty years of age, his mental powers were at their greatest vigour, whilst his capacious mind was full, from extensive reading, and much and deep thinking. From the continued feeble state of his health, however, it seemed highly probable that he would not live to old age. Accordingly, without delay, he addressed himself to a more weighty matter in authorship than had hitherto engaged his mind and pen; which, indeed, was nothing less than a *Complete Body of Divinity.*” Wrench, 15.


21 “This opinion was not new; though it does not appear that Dr. Clarke had adopted it from any other writer. It was, however, at variance with the tenets of Mr. Wesley and of the Methodist body; and was clearly opposed to almost every orthodox confession of faith, and to the general sense of the Christian Church in every age.” Jackson, *Memoirs*, 174.

22 Adam Clarke apparently shared hermeneutical perspectives with John Locke, especially as adumbrated in the latter’s *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695).
and foster a skeptical attitude toward supernatural elements, a path that led to Socinianism.

Watson feared that Clarke’s hermeneutical principle—that doctrines which could not stand the test of rational investigation should be rejected—had a dangerous tendency toward heresy, especially among younger ministers. Shortly after the publication of this first volume, critics attacked and defended Clarke with more than forty pamphlets. Clarke refused to respond, comparing the critics to a man who went to the seashore to hold back the tide with a pitchfork. He held the results of his scholarship with a tight grip; after his death, rumors circulated that Clarke had changed his mind on the Sonship issue. However, his widow insisted that her late husband “was no changeling”—once he had made up his mind, his position was fixed. Accused of obstinacy, Clarke wrote his Commentary from intense study, serious devotion and unwavering commitment to Methodism. To the end of his life, he maintained a silent dignity that was broken only in a few private moments. The majority of the pamphlets scarcely merited a reply; even those that defended Clarke often relied on unskilled arguments.

Today’s readers might question the significance of the debate; however, as William West recognized, “The Scripture doctrine of the Trinity depends entirely upon the eternal Sonship of Christ.” Thus, Richard Watson responded with a passionate plea for the doctrine of the “eternal generation” of the divine Son of God. As Secretary of the missionary society,

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23 “Against these principles Mr. Watson felt it his duty to raise the warning voice. He thought that, however innocuous they might be in the mind of Dr. Clarke, a man of established piety and orthodoxy, their influence upon young persons of limited reading, of speculative habits, and superficial religious experience, would be very injurious.” Jackson, Memoirs of the Life of the Rev. Richard Watson, 175.

24 An Account of the Religious and Literary Life of Adam Clarke, III: 168-169; Clarke, Christian Theology, 43-44.

25 Dunn, Life of Adam Clarke, 232.

26 Dunn, Life of Adam Clarke, 232.

27 E.g., Stephen Brunskill, Thoughts on the Divinity and Sonship of Jesus Christ. Liverpool, UK: Caxton Press, 1819.


he discovered that the issue had spread even to remote mission stations. He responded with a pamphlet regarded as the “official” response to Clarke’s exegetical opinion on Luke 1:35.30 The central issue was the extent to which reason could interpret Scripture. Reason, argued Watson, had been corrupted with Adam’s Fall; thus reason cannot apprehend God without revelation. Even redeemed humanity cannot clearly see God, because human understanding is limited.31 This issue did not begin with Clarke’s footnote, but had been agitated among Methodist preachers for some time.32 In the midst of the controversy, Watson wrote a letter to Richard Reece and enumerated the reasons for writing his pamphlet: (1) the controversy had been going on for some time, especially among the younger preachers; (2) Clarke’s statement of hermeneutical principles in his Appendix “had given it fresh impulse”; (3) the justification on grounds of reason was “infinitely more serious than the denial of the Eternal Sonship” and had a “very dangerous tendency”; and (4) the confusion that resulted in the minds of the younger preachers, including the missionary candidates. As the Secretary for the Missionary Society, Watson could not keep silent.

In the heat of controversy, Watson passionately argued for the priority of faith over reason (without denying the role of reason). He and Bunting examined all ministerial candidates on the Sonship issue, and those who could not produce a satisfactory answer were dismissed. The controversy created bitterness among those expelled, but evidence suggests that these were already leaning toward heterodoxy.33 Affirming the

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31For Watson, revealed doctrines lacked clarity at points because of these limits. See Jackson, Memoirs, 91-92. Watson stated in a letter to Mr. Absalom Watkin, “By reason we form opinions on such subjects only as are within the reach of human understanding. The limit of reason is human knowledge. Faith rises into a higher reason, and knows no limit but the infinite wisdom of God, and the revelations he may make. The proper work of reason, prescribed by faith, is, first, to examine the evidences of a revelation; and, secondly, to search its meaning; not to judge its doctrines, but to understand them.” Jackson, Memoirs, 105.

32For example, see Tucker, A Candid and Impartial Inquiry, 287-310.

33For example, see Joseph Forsyth, The Eternal Sonship of Jesus Christ Discussed. Three Letters to the President of the Wesleyan-Methodist Conference. . . London: John Stephens, 1835.
eternal Sonship, Watson and Bunting insured that Methodism remained Trinitarian, even at Clarke’s expense. And the publication of the Remarks secured Watson’s reputation as Methodism’s leading theologian.

Passing the Torch

By 1820, Methodist leaders recognized the urgent need to improve theological education. The popularity of “enlightened reason” as a criterion for reading Scripture encouraged preachers to distrust creeds and to harmonize reason and revelation. Younger preachers adopted Clarke’s perspective that refused to admit any doctrine that could not withstand rational investigation. Lacking Clarke’s strength of character and extensive knowledge of the Bible, some brought heterodoxy into their pulpits and resisted efforts at doctrinal reform.34 A strong challenge came from Unitarianism, a movement that resonated with the quest for a faith aligned with reason. Wesley’s works—along with Fletcher’s—lacked the systematic arrangement necessary to respond to these issues. Some strong personalities questioned whether they were obligated to follow the opinions of a “deceased fellow mortal” (e.g., Mr. Wesley).35 Others embraced the rationalistic spirit of the age and veered away from affirming the historic creeds of Christendom.

In early nineteenth-century England, theological education for Wesleyan ministers remained largely informal. The Conference required each preacher on trial to produce a reading list, and expected the more experienced ministers to advise them. Before their admission into full connection, these younger preachers were examined for their knowledge of Wesley’s works, especially his Sermons and Explanatory Notes on the New Testament.36 The Conference required them to purchase Mr. Wesley’s

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35 Tucker, Triumph of Scriptural and Rational Truth, 4. See also Vevers, Observations on the Power Possessed and Exercised by the Wesleyan Methodist Ministers, 5.

36 “In giving ‘a full and explicit statement’ of the Doctrines of ‘the Methodists,’ it will be peculiarly proper to insert some abstracts of Mr. Wesley’s writings upon the subject under consideration. His first four volumes of Sermons, united with his Notes on the New Testament may be properly termed, The Test of the Doctrines among them.” Jonathan Crowther, A True and Complete Portraiture of Methodism; or the History of the Wesleyan Methodists: Including Their
books, and directed the Book-Steward to allow the preachers to pay for them by installments. The Conference also recommended they purchase Joseph Benson’s commentary on the Scriptures, available to them at half-price. The 1822 Conference determined to exercise greater control and develop its own reading list, apparently as part of its increasing measures to insure doctrinal consistency among its preachers. Even when near death, Watson invested himself in the training of young missionaries, insuring their orthodoxy prior to departure for foreign lands.

The Wesleyan Methodist Church chose Watson to write a systematic theology for training young ministers, because he had a capacity for argument and “generalization” without peer among the Methodists of his day. Yet he had a more personal reason for his involvement in theological education. In the funeral sermon for his friend, Bunting blamed the lack of formal training as the major factor in Watson’s early departure to the New Connexion. As a precocious adolescent preacher, he unwisely engaged in theological disputations in front of his congregations. Rumors reached his colleagues, who suspected doctrinal aberration. His pastoral supervisors—self-educated men—might have been jealous of Watson’s precocious ability. Wounded by the conflict, Watson turned back to making fur-

Rise, Progress, and Present State: The Lives and Characters of Divers of Their Ministers: The Doctrines The Methodists Believe and Teach, Fully and Explicitly Stated: With the Whole Plan of Their Discipline. The Different Collections Made Among Them, and the Application of the Monies Raised Thereby; and a Description of Class-meetings, Bands, Love-Feasts, &c. Also, A Defence of Methodism, &c. (New-York: Daniel Hitt and Thomas Ware, 1813), 112-113.

37 See The Wesleyan Methodist Conference 1744-1932 [manuscript]. Journal. LXXII (31 July 1815), 122-123. Courtesy The John Rylands Library University of Manchester (Manchester, UK). This is the hand-written journal ledger taken down during each Conference, not the published material.

38 “Resolved, That in order to assist young men on trial in theological and useful reading, a Committee shall be appointed who shall prepare a select list of Books in Divinity, Biblical Literature, Civil and Ecclesiastical History, Natural Philosophy, etc., to be read by them during the four years of their probation;—that this selection of Books shall be laid before the next Conference for its approbation, with a plan to secure the careful reading of them on the part of the candidates;—that sufficient time shall be given to the young men on trial [i.e. sufficient time to pay for the books].” The Minutes or Journal of the Conference of the People called Methodists, begun in London on Wednesday, July the thirty-first, 1822, and continued by various adjournments to the fourteenth day of August following [manuscript], 555-556. Courtesy The John Rylands Library University of Manchester (Manchester, UK).
niture, the trade in which he had been apprenticed at age fourteen.\textsuperscript{39} The anguish left an enduring mark and contributed to his lifelong passion for theological education.\textsuperscript{40} These troubles—which involved personal issues with circuit leaders—may have also encouraged him to turn to the Methodist New Connexion for a new beginning in ministry.

Eventually, his frustration with lay leadership, the source of his troubles in the Old Connexion, turned Watson into a staunch opponent of the lay-oriented democracy of the New Connexion and a firm advocate of Bunting’s campaign for a centralized governance structure in the hands of the preachers.\textsuperscript{41} According to Bunting, Watson wrote his \textit{Institutes} to address the needs of young Wesleyan ministers.\textsuperscript{42} These needs included the disciplinary action of the Conference in educating pastors and keeping them faithful to Methodist doctrinal standards.\textsuperscript{43} In fact, the \textit{Institutes} were a milestone in the Conference’s campaign to overhaul theological education and strengthen the pastoral office. This revised system placed a protective hedge against the “hour of temptation” that often led young ministers to stray from divine revelation.\textsuperscript{44}

\textbf{Extending the Roots}

Certainly the \textit{Pastoral Address of 1820} [manuscript edition] underscores Methodism’s concern to communicate its historic identity to a new generation. The Conference observed the diminishing numbers of ministers who could remember John Wesley, and urged the rising generation to renew its commitment to Jesus Christ in the spirit of the earliest days of the movement. The key element lay in faithful adherence to Methodist doctrines, which were synonymous with Scriptural Christianity. Indeed, Watson wrote his \textit{Institutes} as an exposition of divine revelation, sup-

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Jabez Bunting, \emph{Memorials of the Late Rev. Richard Watson}, 26-27. See also Jackson, \emph{Memoirs}, 255-256.
\item See Bunting, \emph{Memorials of the Late Rev. Richard Watson}, 33-34, 67-68.
\item Bunting, \emph{Memorials of the Late Rev. Richard Watson}, 41.
\item Bunting, \emph{Memorials of the Late Rev. Richard Watson}, 40.
\item Bunting, \emph{Memorials of the Late Rev. Richard Watson}, 43.
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ported by patristic and modern authorities. Convinced that reason had been corrupted by Adam’s disobedience, Watson established his theology on the authority of the Holy Scriptures. While he could address speculative theological issues, Watson would conclude his observations by resting in the “saying of Christ”—the divine revelation recorded in Scripture. In opposition to the growth of irreligion, Methodists redoubled their efforts to spread their faith. Watson composed his *Institutes* at a critical moment when external challenges and internal dissension provoked the Conference to respond. As a movement tinctured with enthusiastic elements, Methodism received censure from rationalists and other free-thinkers. Furthermore, political movements such as Radicalism resulted in painful losses to church membership. Motivated by democratic ideals, these currents were deeply infused with anti-clericalism, the response of lay members and local preachers censuring the Methodist hierarchy and its support of the Crown.

Methodist leaders called for the dissemination of religious literature, particularly Wesley’s sermons, as an antidote to the errors that threatened

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47 See James Everett, *The Village Blacksmith; or, Piety and Usefulness Exemplified in a Memoir of the Life of Samuel Hick, Late of Micklefield, Yorkshire* (London: T. Woolmer, [1830]), 194-206. In this appendix, Everett notes that skeptics and infidels ridiculed the stories of supernaturalist credulity that characterized both John Wesley and Samuel Hick. See also Vicki Tolar Burton, *Spiritual Literacy in John Wesley’s Methodism: Reading, Writing and Speaking to Believe* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008), 27-28.

48 “The political miasma which continued to hang over the public mind, occasioned unpleasant feeling in the Doctor [i.e. Adam Clarke]. ‘The nation is becoming increasingly disaffected. The Methodist preachers, however, are all true men. It will pain you to hear, as it does me to relate, that this year [1821], through what is called Radicalism, we have lost between 5,000 and 6,000 members. This is such a blow as we never had since we were a people.’” James Everett, *Adam Clarke Portrayed*. 2 vols. 2nd ed., carefully revised and enlarged. London: W. Reed, 1866.

49 “The second quarter of the 19th century was in many ways the most disastrous period in the whole history of British Methodism. The far more serious secessions which we now examine had one thing in common: they were all rebellions against the centralized authority of the Conference and the autocracy of the ordained ministry.” Kenneth G. Greet, *Jabez Bunting* (n.p., n.d.), 23.
England. At the same time, they urged their members to renew their spiritual practice. Furthermore, Bunting and Watson (and Clarke) advocated better theological education, and persuaded the Conference to commission a comprehensive statement of Christian theology. The informal nature of Methodist theological education—where young ministers relied on older, experienced preachers for assistance—resulted in confusion, misunderstanding and in some cases outright heresy, particularly with regard to the doctrine of God. Imbued with the Enlightenment spirit that by the first quarter of the nineteenth century reached into the working classes (from which Methodism largely drew its adherents), these young ministers affirmed the capacity of their own reason to interpret the Bible, independent of human creeds. Alarmed at the growing crisis, Watson and Bunting set out to anchor Methodism in the historic faith of Christendom.

Expressing gratitude for the *Institutes*, Richard Wrench credited Methodism’s doctrinal strength to “Wesley’s works” and Watson’s “systematic theology.” Originating in the seventeenth-century Anglican controversialists, systematic theology defended the Christian tradition against contemporary challenges. Writing at a crucial moment in British Methodist history, Watson shared Bunting’s sense of responsibility toward the church. Indeed, Watson and Bunting (along with Adam Clarke) were among Methodism’s strongest advocates for theological education. Moreover, Watson dedicated his *Institutes* to Bunting at the appearance of the first volume in 1823. Watson shaped the thought and spiritual life of a

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50 The enemies of religion and of social order have been actively employed in spreading the poison of immorality and infidelity; and we are desirous that our friends, in every part of the Kingdom, should zealously counteract the leaven of evil, by carrying the doctrines of the Gospel into all the habitations of ungodliness, and labouring to rescue from the dominion of darkness those who have been led captive by the devil at his will. If the Sermons of Mr. Wesley and those religious Tracts which are most weighty and impressive, be widely circulated, we have no doubt they will be the instruments of leading multitudes of souls to an eternity of happiness.” *The Annual Address of the Conference to the Methodist Societies in Great Britain* LXXIX. London (31 July 1822), 343-344.


new generation of Methodist preachers. Through his *Institutes*, he set out to discredit rationalism and establish Scripture as the rule of faith. Even among the preachers, the Enlightenment spirit encouraged some of them to re-interpret the doctrine of God in terms of their own reason.

Alarmed at these developments at close range, Watson firmly grounded his theology in the Holy Scriptures, especially as interpreted through the lens of Anglican evangelicalism. Even in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, British Methodists regarded themselves as faithful to the Church of England. They were simply carrying forward the work of the English Reformation, believing that Methodism had found the well-spring of Scriptural Christianity. Watson assumed this perspective within the *Institutes*; he rarely mentioned John Wesley’s name and never used the word “Methodist.” He regarded Wesley’s works as definitive in their place as tradition. In writing his *Institutes*, Watson set out to establish the authority of Scripture and the primacy of faith over human reason. However, the Wesleyan Methodist Church never regarded Watson’s *Institutes* as the final word on systematic theology. As Watson’s son-in-law observed, “We are perfectly aware that Mr. Watson’s Institutes are not the legal standard of Methodist doctrine, and never can be; yet it may be unhesitatingly asserted that they constitute the moral and scientific standard of that doctrine, and that they are worthy of the position which they occupy.”

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53 Wrench cites Dixon on the circumstances that elicited the writing of Watson’s *Institutes*: “. . . We may say that bases of opinion,—rules of criticism and interpretation, claims of mental independence, irrespective of Divine authority and guidance, somewhat after the manner of the German Rationalism, had begun to disturb the quiet faith of the Methodist body. All this turned upon one point, the principles of reasoning; and these it was Mr. Watson’s aim to place in their true light, and employ in their legitimate use.” Wrench, *Eminent Divines*, 38.

54 “At the time he began his literary labours, a sort of Eclectic school in theology was beginning to exercise some influence in the body. Arguments, *a priori*, on the Being and Perfections of God were put forth; the person of Christ was judged of by these rules of reasoning, and his Eternal Sonship denied; the Divine Prescience subjected to a similar process &c. and the whole series of Scriptural truth, in some degree, made to pass through the crucible of a rationalistic examination.” Wrench, *Eminent Divines*, 38. Wrench may be referring to one of Watson’s most vocal adversaries, Samuel Tucker. Tucker advocated Scriptural Revelation and “enlightened reason” as the co-equal means to the knowledge of God, although in practice reason gained the advantage. See Tucker, *An Expostulatory Letter*, 30, 37.

Through Watson’s efforts, Methodist leaders affirmed the primacy of Scripture, recognized the authority of John Wesley’s theology, grounded Methodism in the Evangelical Anglican tradition, and reshaped Methodist theology for the next generation.\textsuperscript{56} Subsequent generations credited them with “saving” Methodism and re-establishing its doctrine on scriptural authority. Most Methodist reviewers hailed the \textit{Institutes} as a work of genius and Mr. Watson as “Methodism’s greatest man.”\textsuperscript{57} Yet even as Methodists embraced Watson’s \textit{Institutes} as a standard work that influenced Methodist ministers into the twentieth century, they recognized both its genius and its shortcomings.

\textbf{A Mixed Reception}

The greatness of Watson’s \textit{Institutes} came from their comprehensive vision and rigorous defense of “Scriptural Christianity” in the late British Enlightenment. They established the priority of faith over reason and strengthened doctrinal standards among Wesleyan ministers. Doing this, however, came with a price. Born of a crisis, Watson’s \textit{Institutes} relied heavily on Aristotelian logic. Through closely-argued debate, Watson sought to defeat the intellectual enemies of Scriptural Christianity. He assumed an air of confidence, citing scores of respected authorities from church tradition and interpreting selected Scripture passages to support his positions. Watson provided Methodist preachers with extensive citations from hard-to-find books he believed valuable for defending traditional doctrines. Unfortunately, some authors lacked ingenuity or the capacity to capture readers’ interest. Although the cited portions reinforced Watson’s arguments, they added prolixity at the risk of tiring readers. After the \textit{Institutes} were published, reviewers recognized Watson’s artlessness and attributed this to his personality. Even Wrench, who eulogized Watson to the point of hagiography, believed that Watson could have improved the \textit{Institutes} through revision.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{56}See Wrench, \textit{Eminent Divines}, 38-39.
\textsuperscript{57}Wrench, \textit{Eminent Divines}, 3.
\textsuperscript{58}“His sentences, in general, especially in the ‘Institutes,’ are much too long. . . . Watson had very little sprightliness, archness, or vivacity, and no humour. . . . This lack of pathos, tenderness, and burning intensity, despite other numerous and great excellencies, has prevented both Watson and Hall from becoming popular with readers generally.” Wrench, \textit{Eminent Divines}, 39.
Nevertheless, admirers hedged their criticisms with reminiscences of Watson’s preaching. After the Conference of 1829 appointed him again to London, his sermons attracted large audiences and chronic illness gave his delivery a pathos that magnified his serious tone. A master in the pulpit, Watson acquired a wide reputation for his sermons. Unlike many preachers of this era, he relied not on mere oratory but on the skillful expression of ideas. And though he preached from a manuscript, Watson balanced his written words with moments of freedom in the pulpit. Yet those who recalled his sermons thought them capable of improvement. Those who read his Institutes today might agree that some sentences are awkward and lengthy. Through sheer genius, Watson stretched for the heavens; his readers apparently had difficulty grasping those moments.

Watson’s posthumous opponents, including William S. Eccles, often misrepresented and caricatured his theology. And while Watson wrote sections of expansive brilliance, his excessive inclusion of extracts made other parts wearisome. Wrench singles out the extensive use of John Howe’s Living Temple, especially with regard to the pedantic minutiae that characterized natural theology. Watson appears constrained to complete the task expeditiously, and he later expressed concern for revision. He intended to make “scarce and expensive works” available to Methodist preachers and save them the cost of extra books, creating a compendium that could be readily transported in saddle bags. Watson thus rendered a valuable service and raised the quality of Methodist literature.

59 With reference to Mr. Watson’s sermon at the 1828 annual meeting of the Wesleyan Missionary Society, George Stevenson states: “The sermon was delivered with an energy and a glow of benevolent feeling not often experienced. The attendance was very large; and the wasted form of the preacher, and his pallid countenance, indicative of intense suffering, created a deep sympathy in the assembly.” George J. Stevenson, City Road Chapel London and Its Associations Historical, Biographical, and Memorial. With Engravings (London: George J. Stevenson, 1872), 298.

60 “To hear him preach in his happiest moods must have been one of the greatest treats imaginable to persons of culture and piety.” Wrench, Eminent Divines, 41.

61 See Wrench, Eminent Divines, 41.

62 “Indeed we cannot but wish that he had elaborated more; that, being less intent upon progress, he had bestowed more pains-taking care in selecting ‘picked and packed words;’ for now and then the clearness of his conception is obscured by the involved structure of his sentences.” Wrench, Eminent Divines, 41-42.

to an entirely new level. George Stevenson credits both Watson and Bunting with this service, stating that these leaders inaugurated a new era in Methodist preaching and literature. The Bookroom was swept of many of its stale materials, and the Magazine assumed a more literary style. Yet some of this literary style needed further editing and revision that reflected more of Watson’s own thought and expression.

Regardless of his extensive use of quoted material, Watson’s strong personality dominates the overall character of the Institutes and gives them a unity of purpose—to defend Scriptural Christianity and raise the level of Methodist theological education. Some of his personality appears in the form of tireless, pointed argument in favor of a particular theological position. As Wrench observed in his eulogy, this element of criticism marked his published book reviews. Ferreting out erroneous opinions, Watson set out to establish a true exposition of divine revelation. Through logic he made one side look ridiculous and the other as the “demonstrated as proven” position. Watson’s contemporaries extolled his genius, but his relentless argumentation gave his writing a decided sterility. Watson and Bunting—who served leading roles for setting Methodism on course after the death of John Wesley—strived to bring disciplined conformity to the ministerial ranks and to suppress divergent opinions, especially on major points of doctrine.

This enforcement of doctrinal conformity—the spirit characteristic of the Eternal Sonship Controversy—made the Institutes an intellectual feast and an emotional famine, a repudiation of enthusiasm at the price of creativity. They rallied Methodism around a faith that conformed to the Bible, to the creeds of the church and to human reason—Mr. Watson’s reason. The high-water mark of Middle Methodism, the Theological Institutes demanded conformity and left little room for discussion. They became a system of orthodox belief within themselves—a “Wesleyan scholasticism” that suppressed thought and silenced conversation with a changing world. Within a few years, Methodist minds challenged these boundaries, initiated dialogue with new intellectual currents, and thus opened the way for theology more in Mr. Wesley’s spirit.

64“‘He was polished rather than passionate, ‘stately, not vivid,’ and discursive rather than concise. To him we must not look for fervent emotion.... Passion in him never shoots up unexpectedly and overwhelming as streams of lava from a burning mountain. In addition, it seems to us, that Watson had no happy humour, withering irony, melting tenderness, or piercing wit; and after learning that Mr. Watson ‘was rarely known to laugh aloud,’” the reader would be prepared to hear that he had no pointed sallies; whilst he was also defective in artlessness, vivacity, and pathos.” Wrench, Eminent Divines, 45.
DIVINE OMNISCIENCE:
BOETHIUS OR OPEN THEISM?

by

Laurence W. Wood

Open theism is a new theological movement introduced in 1994 by a group of respected Evangelical scholars, led by Clark H. Pinnock, in a book entitled *The Openness of God*. The intent was to present “a biblical challenge to the traditional understanding of God.” It was judged that if humans are free, without their choices being decreed by God (libertarian freedom), then God does not know the exhaustive future. If God does foreknow the future, then everything is going to be just as God knows it and humans do not have the power of contrary choices. These scholars have assured us that “God has a vast amount of knowledge about the probabilities that free choices will be made in one way rather than another,”¹ although implying that God could be mistaken in assessing those probabilities.

John Sanders provided further explanation of Open Theism in 1998 in a well-argued book entitled *The God Who Risks*. I mention his work in particularly because his defense of libertarian freedom is superb. His explanation of biblical anthropomorphisms with regard to God’s interaction with humans is lucid, even if at times over-literalized. His Trinitarian orthodoxy is unquestionable. The problematic feature is his conclusion that God lacks exhaustive omniscience.²

²John Sanders, “Historical Considerations,” *Openness of God*, 72-76.
There are two questions that I will address to Open Theism: (1) Why has the church not embraced this view previously in her 2000 years—except for a few individuals? I will show that there are some good reasons.\(^3\) (2) Why does Open Theism believe it is incoherent to believe that God knows the future if humans possess libertarian freedom? I will maintain that this historic belief of the church is intelligible. I will also show that the Boethian concept of full divine omniscience offers everything that is needed in order to protect libertarian freedom.

**Why the Church Did Not Adopt Open Theism**

The church never espoused the theology of Open Theism because the church believed the Scriptures taught that God has exhaustive knowledge of the future, and that the Scriptures also teach that humans are free.

**The Two Traditional Versions of Omniscience.** There were two versions of this view. One version is represented by the early Greek Church Fathers, Boethius, and John Wesley. The other version is represented by Augustine and John Calvin.

The first version is found in the writings of Justin Martyr. Justin Martyr wrote a defense of Christian faith in the second century. He argued that God knows the exhaustive future because the Bible teaches that God predicted the future through the prophets. He further argued that the Bible teaches the libertarian freedom of humans.\(^4\)

Augustine in the fourth century developed a new concept of foreknowledge with his introduction of absolute predestination into Christian theology. He believed that predestination was compatible with human freedom. Although God decrees all things, humans freely decide what God foreordains. John Calvin in the sixteenth century further developed this belief. Were they misled by philosophy? No, they believed this was the best way to reconcile these two separate teachings of Scriptures.

In *The God Who Risks*, Sanders has made an exegetically convincing case for libertarian freedom, showing that God actions are influenced

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\(^3\)“Dynamic omniscience” is the preferred term for many advocates of Open Theism because the future does not fall into the category of knowledge because it has not happened. Sanders, *The God Who Risks, A Theology of Divine Providence*, second edition (Downers Grove, ILL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 15.

by human decisions. On the other hand, the church has always believed that the Scriptures affirm that God has foreknowledge of exact details of future events. As Gerhard von Rad has shown, a distinctive belief of the prophet Isaiah is that “the Lord of history is he who can allow the future to be told in advance” and that “last things can be known; indeed, they can be exactly calculated.” Von Rad noted that this claim “almost takes one’s breath away.” Whether one holds to the libertarian freedom of the early Greek Fathers or to the compatibilist view of Augustine and Calvin, the consensus of Christian thought has been that the Scriptures teach that God knows the future exhaustively and also that humans possess free will.

The Early Greek Fathers. Irenaeus, a disciple of Polycarp who was a disciple of the Apostle John, noted that humans exist in the successive moments of time: “A man sometimes is at rest and silent, while at other times he speaks and is active.” Yet God “always exists one and the same [instant]” and “divisions [of time] cannot fittingly be ascribed to Him.”

How is it possible for God to foreknow things? Irenaeus said he believed it is because this is what the Scriptures teach, and yet he recognized that this is one of those issues of logic which humans cannot resolve. He noted that the Scriptures affirm that the Father has foreknowledge of the very day and hour when Jesus will return to the earth, but Jesus said he did not have this knowledge. Consequently, he said: “If, then, the Son was not ashamed to ascribe the knowledge of that day to the Father only . . . neither let us be ashamed to reserve for God those greater questions which may occur to us.” He was not attacking logic, but frankly admitting the limitations of human reason to understand what only God could understand. He wrote: “We are able by the grace of God

6 Ibid., 2:302.
7 Ibid., 2:302.
10 “Irenaeus Against Heresies,” 1:401.
11 “Irenaeus Against Heresies,” 1:401.
to explain some of them, while we must leave others in the hands of God.”

One mystery that we cannot explain is what God was doing before he created time. Irenaeus says that time came into being with creation, but then he noted that “no Scripture reveals to us what God was employed about before this event. The answer therefore to that question remains with God, and it is not proper for us to aim at bringing forward foolish, rash, and blasphemous suppositions.” Our obligation, he says, is to accept the teachings of Scripture because “the Scriptures are indeed perfect, since they were spoken by the Word of God and His Spirit; but we, inasmuch as we are inferior to, and later in existence than, the Word of God and His Spirit, are on that very account destitute of the knowledge of His mysteries.”

Expressing the same view of Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria (who died about 215 A.D.) defined eternity this way: “Eternity . . . presents in an instant the future and the present, also the past of time.” Indicating that he did not think of eternity as endless time, Clement of Alexandria said: “For God is not in darkness or in place, but above both space and time.” He also wrote: “The First Cause is not then in space, but above both space, and time, and name, and conception.” Indicating that he believed in divine foreknowledge, he wrote: “Prophecy is foreknowledge; and knowledge the understanding of prophecy; being the knowledge of those things known before by the Lord who reveals all things.” Clement of Alexandria thus sees a positive relationship of God and time, noting that time is present in God’s eternity. He does not define God as merely timeless, but as limitless duration [aiōn] in contrast to the sequences of chronological time. The past, the present, and the future are separated for us, but with God they occur simultaneously in an instant because God is above time.

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12“Irenaeus Against Heresies,” 1:399.
13“Irenaeus Against Heresies,” 1:399.
15Ibid., 2:348.
16Ibid., 2:46.
17Ibid., 2:360.
Origen (185-232) appealed to Scripture (not philosophy) as a basis for divine foreknowledge and human freedom.\(^\text{19}\) He rejected the view of Celsus who claimed that if an event was “predicted through foreknowledge” then it was predetermined.\(^\text{20}\) He labeled Celsus’ reasoning “an idle argument” and “sophism.”\(^\text{21}\) His reflections on the distinction between time and eternity grew out of his concern to explain the tri-personal relationships of the Trinity and were based on biblical revelation.\(^\text{22}\)

According to Origen, when the Scriptures teach that the Father “generates” the Son and “brings forth a Holy Spirit,” this does not mean the Father did this in time, but rather the generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit were eternal and existed before the sequences of time were created. If this tri-personal relationship was a product of time, it would disrupt “the unity of the Trinity” because the Spirit would have to be thought of as being “brought forth” in time.\(^\text{23}\) Human language has to be “stretched” in its meaning when it speaks about God because God is not limited by time. If God has a future, which becomes a present, and then it fades into the past, Origen says this reduces God to a “finite understanding.”\(^\text{24}\)

This distinction between time and eternity is developed by the Cappadocian Fathers. Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 331—ca. 396), says that the divine preexistent reality has “no reckoning of time.”\(^\text{25}\) He further writes: “The world’s Creator laid time and space as a background to receive what was to be; on this foundation He builds the universe. It is not possible that anything which has come or is now coming into being by way of creation can be independent of space and time. But the existence which is all-sufficient, everlasting, world-enveloping, is not in space, nor in time: it is before these.”\(^\text{26}\) Here space and time are seen as “containers” which constitute the


framework for our finite existence. He further states: “The Divine life is one and continuous in itself, infinite and eternal,” which surrounds time on all sides, and “extensions in time find no admittance in the Eternal Life.” Hence “the Holy Trinity in no way exhibits discord with itself.”

As with Origen, Gregory of Nyssa believed that, if God is restricted to time, this would deny his infinity and it disrupts the unity of the trinitarian life of God because it would confuse the meaning of God as the “Father” of the Son and the source of the Spirit, leading to the notion that the Son and Spirit are subsequent in the sequence of time to the Father. He also insisted that this would mean that God is finite.

**Boethius.** In the sixth century, Boethius codified the definition of eternity: “Eternity is the whole, perfect, and simultaneous possession of endless life.” Eternity is the duration of all things in God in an instant because God is not fragmented into a future, present, and past. The concept of eternity includes the idea of “boundless life” and not mere timelessness because God is not a lifeless abstraction. Time is not the nega-

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27 Sanders says time is not a container (*The God Who Risks*, 332n103, n104), but Einstein showed that space-time is a single entity that is woven together like a single piece of fabric.


31 *The Consolation of Philosophy,* Boethius, *The Theological Tractates*, trans. S. J. Tester (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1990), 422, 423. Richard Sorabji’s classical study, *Time, Creation, and The Continuum* (1983), has shown that there were two senses of eternity prior to Plotinus—it could mean everlasting or it could mean the transcedent present of all finite temporality (Sorabji, *Time, Creation, and the Continuum*, 114f). Under the influence of Plotinus, Sorabji noted that Boethius introduced a distinction into Christian theology between “everlasting” (*sempiternus*) and eternity (*aeternus*) so that it was no longer necessary to distinguish between the two senses of the same word. Everlasting came to refer to duration in time, whereas eternity meant the “now” of the past, present, and future (Sorabji, 115-117).

32 *Boethius*, Bk. 5, 423.

tion of eternity, but is rooted in it. Therefore, eternity transcends and includes time as the larger whole of reality. Boethius did not hold to a block theory of time. Rather, sequences of time are real to God even as they are to humans, but time is more than merely measurement based on the tick of a clock; it is the framework for our human existence. God knows all contingent things as they occur, but God does not literally “foreknow”; rather, God “knows” all things since nothing is earlier or later than eternity. Boethius argued well before the emergence of Open Theism that simple foreknowledge entails determinism, makes God the author if sin, and renders prayer meaningless.\textsuperscript{34} God does not have “foreknowledge as it were of the future but knowledge of a never-passing instant.”\textsuperscript{35}

Augustine, on the other hand, reverted back to the Platonic notion of time as measurement of the mind based on the motion of the heavenly bodies, and he defined eternity as sheer timelessness.\textsuperscript{36} For Augustine, God is totally unaffected by time, and what transpires temporally is decreed by God.\textsuperscript{37} Boethius was not Augustinian in his view of eternity. His sources were liturgical,\textsuperscript{38} and reflect the view of the early Greek Fathers. In spite of the clarifications offered by Barth, Pannenberg, Brian Leftow, Christine Mohmann, Helen M. Barrett, and others,\textsuperscript{39} many schol-

\textsuperscript{34}Boethius, Bk. 5, 401.
\textsuperscript{35}Boethius, Bk. 5, 427.
ars have ignored these two different versions of eternity. As Richard Sorabji puts it, Boethius had “a superior view over Augustine.” 40

**John Wesley.** John Wesley cited the view of Boethius 41 as the way to explain how God’s exhaustive knowledge does not lead to absolute predestination. Like Boethius, Wesley said there is neither “foreknowledge or after-knowledge in God.” These terms are figures of speech because God just “knows.” Time is present to God as a single whole. Wesley explains that God “sees at once whatever was, is, or will be to the end of time. But observe: we must not think they are because he knows them. No; he knows them because they are. Just as I . . . now know the sun shines. Yet the sun does not shine because I know it: but I know it because it shines.” 42 Wesley was concerned primarily about the antinomian implications of absolute predestination.

**The Perspective of Modern Science**

Is this historic view of the church incoherent? If so, then the majority of theologians in the history of Christian thought since the early Greek Fathers have been muddled thinkers—except for a few isolated instances. 43 I propose that we now have good reasons derived from contemporary science to think that this traditional distinction between time and eternity makes good sense, and we have good reasons for seeing space and time as a container-like creation of God where we have been placed as persons made in the image of God.

**The Need for Speaking Figuratively.** Many things we derive from the Scriptures are counterintuitive, including the incarnation and the trinity. Even the concept of the cosmologically transcendent God of the Bible is counterintuitive. As Origen put it, we have to stretch human language which is embedded in our experience of time to speak of things

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41 Wesley published an article in *The Arminian Magazine*, 8 (1785): 336, by “a late author” which was entitled “On the Eternity of God.” The article was a defense of Boethius’s concept of eternity as boundless duration.


that transcend time. It is obvious that we have to use the language of time to speak of eternity. So we talk about what existed “before” time, and “before” is a word for time. The same is true when we speak about God being “above” the world. “Above” is a word for space. So we must use figures of speech taken from our human experience of space and time to talk about the transcendent world.

If theology has always had to use figures of speech to talk about God as Creator of the world of space and time, contemporary physics is now doing so as well. According to the Big Bang theory, space-time came into existence with the fireball expansion of an infinitely dense soup of energy. Every atom in our physical bodies and all the galaxies in the universe were once densely compacted in that original singularity. So science now also has to talk about what existed “before” space-time. Physics also tells us that space-time is expanding, but into what is space-time expanding? The answer is—nothingness. Space-time is not expanding its borders into more space, but rather space-time is expanding into sheer nothing. Keep in mind that nothing is not a thing. This concept of nothing is a concept we have to think without being able to picture it. Likewise, God cannot be pictured, and we are even forbidden to do so by the first of the Ten Commandments. So there are truths we have to think which cannot be imaged.

This human limitation to picture some things literally applies to the tension between divine omniscience and libertarian freedom. Boethius


45George Smoot and Keay Davidson, *Wrinkles in Time* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1993), 180. Scientists tell us that they can reconstruct the beginnings of the universe back to “a ten-millionth of a trillionth of a trillionth of a trillionth” of a second ($10^{-42}$) after the Big Bang, but they cannot take us back to the original instant of creation. Smoot and Davidson, 166.

explained that God’s knowledge is like “looking forth” (*providentia*) rather than “looking forward” (*praevidentia*) because it is as if God sees everything as from “the highest peak of the world.” 47 God does not see things before they happen, but, as the transcendent Creator of space-time, all things, including the future, are present to God instantly and God sees “present to him just such as in time they will at some future point come to be. . . . So then the divine perception looking down on all things does not disturb at all the quality of things that are present indeed to him but future with reference to imposed conditions of time.” 48

In his classical study on time, Richard Sorabji noticed the stunning similarity of Boethius’s view of time and eternity with contemporary physics. 49 One of the most dramatic paradigm shifts in the history of physics was the discovery that space and time came into existence with a big bang and that space-time are not two independent things, but are inseparably woven together like a single piece of fabric. 50

Isaac Newton interpreted time as being the same everywhere in the universe. The tick of the clock was the same for any part of the universe whether in London or in another galaxy. Just as atoms were thought to be evenly spread throughout absolute space without change, so time was absolute throughout the universe without any variation. This Newtonian view that space and time are two separate entities is no longer good science, and it has been replaced by Einstein’s space-time relativity theory. 51 Einstein showed that, while space is three dimensions (one can move up, down, and back and forth), time is the fourth dimension. Special relativity explains that time beats at different rates, depending on how fast one (or something) moves through space. So the universe has no single clock.

General relativity shows that space is also relative. Unlike Newton’s view of absolute space, Einstein showed that, when dense matter comes into contact with the fabric of space-time, the weight pressing down on it warps and curves the space around it, which is otherwise flat. Newton defined gravity as attraction between masses. As opposed to this, Einstein showed that gravity was not a force, but acceleration caused by dense,

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47 Boethius, Bk. 5, 427.
48 Boethius, Bk. 5, 427-429.
49 Richard Sorabji, 3, 254.
50 *A Brief History of Time*, 50.
51 *A Brief History of Time*, 21-23.
heavy matter warping the fabric of space so that objects fall down and accelerate toward the heavy material that is pushing down on space-time. Imagine four people stretching out a bed sheet and another person placing a heavy rock in the center of the bed sheet forcing it to curve downward. That’s a picture of space and gravity.  

Another truly amazing fact of the universe is that the same event will not happen at the same time for two persons traveling at different rates of high speed. This would be especially noticeable for a Earth traveler and a hypothetical space traveler moving at excessive rates of speed. Time is uniform for us who occupy the same space and time on the earth. Earth time is our inertial frame of reference. An inertial frame of reference refers to those who share the same space and time by moving in a straight line at a constant speed. Earth time is the measure of our clocks as we spin on the earth’s axis and orbit about the sun. But if we got into a rocket and travelled at speeds close to the speed of light, this would put us in a different inertial frame of reference and time would slow down. When we returned to the earth, we would be younger than those whom we left behind.

This discrepancy is known as the breakdown of simultaneity, or time dilation. Einstein introduced “the paradox of the twins” to illustrate travel into the future. He argued that if one twin took a long trip on a spaceship going at nearly the speed of light, upon returning this twin would be much younger than the other twin who remained on the earth. If the virtual atemporal space-traveler could have observed her twin brother as he transitioned through the sequences of time, those events would have occurred in a virtual instant moment for her without at all negating the real temporal distinctions taking place in his life. There is no absolute time and no absolute space; however, the speed of light is absolute. No matter what inertial frame of reference one might be located in, the speed of light is the same. It is the speed limit of the universe. If one could technologically move at near the speed of light, one could

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54 Some scientists at first maintained that the time lapse would catch up with the space-traveler once he returned to the earth, but it has been shown that the twin’s younger age would remain because of the “turn around” as explained by General Relativity. Cf. Sartori, *Understanding Relativity*, 195ff.
move into the future. We cannot, however, move into the past. The only way that could be done is if we could go faster than the speed of light.\textsuperscript{55}

This concept of time dilation is reminiscent of the Psalmist observation about God being everlasting: “For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night” (Psalms 90:4). God has simultaneous knowledge of all time. However, this does not negate the real, unfolding developments that take place in our Earth time. God transcends all inertial frames of reference because God transcends the world as its Creator.

Not only is time relativistic, but so is space. Einstein’s space-traveler would measure a stick to be one inch in length, and the earth-bound twin would measure the same stick as one foot in length and both would be accurate measurements. This difference is “not an optical illusion,” but is “as ‘real’ as any physical effect that can be measured.”\textsuperscript{56}

Open Theism’s Misunderstanding of the Relativistic Nature of Time

Open Theism does not accept the twin-paradox because it does not accept the space-time relativity of Einstein, although it has been repeatedly confirmed experimentally and represents the consensus of the scientific community. Open Theism relies on a Newtonian interpretation that goes back behind Einstein to a transitional figure in science by the name of Lorentz\textsuperscript{57} and it is misinformed to claim that this alternative view is an “empirically valid interpretation.”\textsuperscript{58}

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\item \textsuperscript{55}Gott, \textit{Time Travel}, 59.
\item \textsuperscript{56}Shadowtiz, \textit{Understanding Relativity}, 78f.
\item \textsuperscript{57}John Sanders and William Hasker accept the Lorentzian relativity theory as opposed to Einstein’s relativity theory. Cf. Sanders, \textit{The God Who Risks}, 332 (n105, n106).
\item \textsuperscript{58}Sanders, \textit{The God Who Risks}, specifically appeals to William Lane Craig and William Hasker as a basis for maintaining a neo-Lorentzian, non-Einsteinian relativity theory (202). In \textit{God and Time}, ed. Gregory E. Ganssle (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), proponents of God’s temporality embrace Newton’s view of time and space. William Lane Craig asserts that time can exist independently of space (144) in direct contradiction to relativity theory. Alan Padgett confuses Boethius’ view with Augustine’s notion of timelessness (110). Padgett misinterprets “time dilation.” The relativity of simultaneity means that events in one inertial frame will not be simultaneous in another inertial frame. Padgett, however, misinterprets relativity of simultaneity to mean only that the measurement of simultaneity is relative, not simultaneity. Cf. Padgett, “The Special Theory of Relativity and Theories of Divine Eternity,” \textit{International Philosophical} — 52 —
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A misunderstanding of Einstein’s special relativity theory is contained in a highly respected textbook entitled *Reason and Religious Belief*, which argues for Open Theism. It embraces the Lorentzian interpretation and erroneously calls it “Albert Einstein’s Special Theory of Relativity.” Using the illustration of a comet colliding with a planet and a supernova explosion, the author of this section of the textbook rightly notes that the sequence of the collision and the explosion would be viewed differently between an earth observer and a space-traveler. Whose view would be right regarding the time and sequence? he asks. He incorrectly replies that there is no answer to this question from the standpoint of Einstein’s relativity theory. The proper answer that he should have given is--both views are correct because each observer is in a different inertial frame of reference. This discrepancy is not an illusion, but real.

The author then argues against Boethius’ concept of eternity on the basis of Lorentzian interpretation of relativity. The author states that the Boethian view is “flawed” because “if the observers in our example could obtain information instantaneously about the comet impact and the supernova explosion, they would know absolutely which of the two precedes the other.” The author is also mistaken about the interpretation of the two points of view. The correct answer is—the space traveler and earth observer would be able to see the truth of each other’s observations if they were able to observe both inertial frames of reference. The author concludes that God does not have to wait “billions of years to learn what is going on in remote parts of the universe” because God knows the correct time the explosion took place and because God has “an absolute reference-frame” and knows the “absolute order of events.”

This is also a mistaken way to explain the discrepancy in the two perceptions. God would not see them any differently than the way they really happened in the two inertial frames of reference, as observed by the earth-bound observer and the space-traveler. According to a Boethian interpretation, God knows that the earth-bound observer and the space-traveler were both right because God knows instantly what is true in both frames of reference. Time dilation illustrates that time is not the same uniformly throughout the universe. The author mistakenly thinks there is

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only right answer because he thinks there is only one time for God and humans. The author concludes his argument by saying that special relativity poses no problem for his concept of a temporal God, not recognizing that he had confused Einstein special theory of relativity with Lorentzian relativity. Einstein’s view is that contraction is a property of space-time, but Lorentz retained the hypothesis of a jelly-like substance that fills up space called ether, which allegedly accounts for the mere appearance of space and time contracting at high speeds. Heisenberg noted “in a conclusive way that the concept of the ether . . . had to be abandoned” because the Michelson-Morley experiments offered “definite proof” that it did not exist. The author of the textbook failed to see the radical distinction between mere perception (the Lorentzian view) and relativistic nature of space-time (Einstein). He also failed to acknowledge that Einstein’s relativistic view is the only accepted one in contemporary physics.

American proponents of divine temporality do not accept the notion that the speed of light is absolute. They do not accept the idea of real time dilation. They are unwilling to accept the fact that space and time are inseparably connected like a single piece of fabric. Eternity is defined as everlasting time. Unfortunately, its view of science puts Open Theism in the category of being reactionaries. Instead of seeing time as a finite and a relativistic category, they universalize it to include God and the universe as existing together in the same time frame. Open Theism says the three “Persons” of the Trinity are temporally aware of their tri-personal relationship, but it claims that there was no “before” and “after” in God’s time until creation. Does not the phrase “before creation” suggests some

62 Sanders retains the notion of Newton that space and time are “fundamentally different” and that time can exist without space. Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 201.
kind of measurement? And was God not aware that God would eventually create? If so, then time in God would carry with it the tenses of time even before creation. For a Boethian interpretation, there is a before and after within God’s eternal duration, even though God’s eternal being is the instant moment of all time. Father Norris Clarke notes that questions about divine foreknowledge create a false problem because God’s eternal being transcends all time: “It is impossible for us ever to say in our language when God knows anything. Any translation from the all-inclusive Now of God into any of our exclusive ‘nows’ or ‘whens’ is irremediably equivocal. God simply knows—period!”65

Open Theism places God’s everlasting time and earth-time in the same category because it is believed that “God’s time-strand belongs within the same temporal array as that which contains our time-strands.” We are told by Open Theism that all notions of a “picture of time as bounded, with the created order on this side of the boundary and God on the other . . . must be discarded. Temporality embraces us along with God.”66 As Father Clarke has noticed in his critique of process theology, this also creates enormous difficulties for Open Theism based on Einstein’s relativity theory of time. There is no single time-strand for the universe. In which time frame does God then exist?67

Sanders says that it is nonsense to affirm that an atemporal God could include time.68 If so, the Early Greek Fathers who gave us the great

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66Nicholas Wolterstorff, “God Is Everlasting,” Philosophy of Religion, Selected Readings, ed. Michael Peterson, William Hasker, Bruce Reichenbach, and David Basinger (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 133. Sanders believes that if God transcends time, this entails a block theory. Cf. Sanders, The God Who Risks, 204. The Boethian view accepts the sequences in time as real without subscribing to the block view. Things really do unfold and happen in earth time, and these are real to God. God as infinite does not exclude the finite, as if the infinite and finite existed in two separate boxes.

67W. Norris Clarke, “Christian Theism and Whiteheadian Process Philosophy: Are They Compatible?” Process Theology, 241-242. Ironically, Open Theism claims that Father Clarke embraces limited omniscience (The God Who Risks, 168), but his views on this topic, as a neo-Thomist, assume a Boethian interpretation which accommodates both libertarian freedom and omniscience. Because he affirms the real openness of the future as Boethius did apparently led to the idea that he was an “open theist.”

68The God Who Risks, 204.
confessions of the church and which have guided the church down through the centuries engaged in nonsense. One might call this God-world relationship counterintuitive, but surely not contradictory—unless one adheres to Aristotle’s unmoved Mover.

The view of absolute time existing before spatial objects raises the problem that Leibniz noted in his conversations with Newton and Clarke, namely, that this makes God finite because it makes God dependent upon time.69 On the other hand, if contemporary physics is right that space-time is a single entity, there is no escaping the conclusion that God transcends time if God also transcends space because they are inseparably connected. Open Theism rejects the view that humans are contained within the space-time continuum. We are allegedly only contained within space, but not time.70 God supposedly is the true observer of all time and gets the right time of whatever exists, but with Einstein’s relativity theory, this view would have to be corrected to say that God stands above the temporal world because God is the One Observer of all the different times in the universe since there is no universal time.71 Further, the fabric of space-time is inseparable, and as Leftow has put it, “Only spatial objects are temporal.”72

Father Clarke points out that there is no single “now” for the universe, but rather there are multiple “nows” depending upon the inertial frame of reference. Unless God transcends these many “nows” as the Eternal Now, then God is not the unity of the world,73 and God becomes finitely contained within creation.74 Open Theism clearly does not believe God is finite, but it tries to get out of this logical dilemma by maintaining that the different experiences of time are only related to the problem of the flow of information not being passed along fast enough. Hence God

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73 Clarke, 241.

74 Clarke, 243-246.
supposedly is the only observer who knows the correct time. If Einstein’s relativistic interpretation of time is accepted, this is a mistaken view of time. Rather, there is no uniform time throughout the universe. If Open Theism acknowledges Einstein’s relativity theory, then Open Theism will have to allow that God stands above time if God is to be the cosmic observer of all the relativistic frames of time. With this concession comes divine exhaustive omniscience.

**Infinite Duration.** As noted above, Origen admitted that we have to stretch out the meaning of tensed words of time to speak of God’s eternal existence before creation. So does contemporary physics speak of the original singularity existing before space-time. As Barth has shown, time is limited duration, spread out over a period of successive moments, but eternity is infinite and instant duration. Representative of the early Greek Fathers, Clement of Alexandria maintained that eternity includes the “instant” moment of future, present, and past because it is limitless duration. This concept of infinite duration includes “before” and “after” in God without reducing God to a creature of time. So God is not merely a timeless or tense-less being, but the living, tri-personal God of the Bible. Open Theism assumes what has been called “the bad infinite of the understanding” because it operates with a mathematical concept of the infinite as unending time, whereas the early Greek Fathers defined the infinite as transcending as well as including (“surrounds”) the finite.

The word *aiōn* (everlasting) was apparently first used by Plato to designate the idea of eternity as timelessness and to distinguish between God and time (“time is the moving image of eternity,” *Timaeus* 4d). Plato also used this word to entail a limited period of time. So the meaning of

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the word depended on how it was used in a particular context. This word in the New Testament was also used to denote a limited period of time, or it could denote a qualitative difference between time and the everlasting nature of God. James Barr says “there is a considerable likelihood that the early Christian understood the Genesis creation story to imply that the beginning of time was simultaneous with the beginning of the creation of the world, especially since the chronological scheme takes its departure from this date.” In those instances where \( \text{aiōn} \) was used in reference to God, it does not include the idea of unending time.

On the other hand, time is not merely the negation of eternity as if eternity was sheer timelessness (Augustine). Rather, as Boethius argued, eternity entails duration, not lifeless abstraction. John Wesley published an essay by “a late author” to show that “the idea of infinite time” should not be confused “with that of God’s eternity.” Wesley argued that time and eternity belong together and should not be divorced as though one was the opposite of the other. He asked: “And what is eternity? It is boundless duration.” He further observed that eternity means “duration which had no beginning” and “which will have no end.” Wesley asked,

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80 Barr, *Biblical Words for Time*, 75.
81 Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann show that Boethius conceived of eternity as “fully realized duration” as compared to finite duration where things persist through time. As analytical philosophers, they argue that just because the idea of infinite duration contradicts ordinary usage does not disqualify it as a valid term. Cf. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, “Eternity,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 78.8 (August 1981): 444-447, 433.
82 Wesley extracted an explanation from “a late author” to show that the notion of infinite duration was a coherent idea: “Boethius had far more noble notions, when he said that eternal duration in God is the full, actual, permanent possession of all reality and perfection; whereas infinite time in the creature is the successive augmentation, or variation, of its modes, realities, or perfections, without end. . . . We cannot form any adequate ideas of this simultaneous duration in God: because, being bounded, we conceive only by parcels, by succession, and by progression. All the attributes of absolute infinite, though demonstrable, yet must be incomprehensible to finite minds.” Extracted from a late author, “On the Eternity of God,” *The Arminian Magazine* 8 (December 1785): 634-635.
“But what is time?” Although recognizing the human limitation to define time, Wesley gave this definition: “Is it not in some sense a fragment of eternity, broken off at both ends—that portion of duration which commenced when the world began, which will continue as long as this world endures, and then expire for ever?”

The concept of duration has been used in the history of theology to show that eternity entails the duration of life in its perfection. It would not be a very inviting concept of eternity for us if we imagined our lives being lived in a monotonous routine of timelessness, or if we imagined that the future before us was uncertain and could negatively impact us. However, if eternity is thought of as the eternal duration of the perfection and full enjoyment of life without fragmentation, then the happy expectation of Rev. 21 has great meaning. Because time and eternity are positively related to each other, there is no theological reason why God could not become permanently temporal in the incarnation, while also transcending the temporal.

Further, there is no logical reason why the temporal could not become a permanent feature within the divine life. The belief in human participation in the Triune life of God is one of the great legacies of the Early Greek Fathers. If one wants to call this duration within the life of God “time,” it clearly must be radically distinguished from the finite sequences of time which, together with space and matter/energy, make up our world. Eternity is the word traditionally linked with time, not as its opposite, but as Wesley put it, “time is a fragment of eternity.”

Open Theism’s Ongoing Battle with Einstein

Although relativity theory illustrates the coherence of divine omniscience, Einstein’s relativity theory does not prove the traditional doctrine of eternity. Einstein held to a pantheistic view of the world. His God did

86Barth rejected the term “immutability” because it suggested a static notion of divine changelessness, as if God could not embrace the temporal world within God’s life. Barth, Church Dogmatics, 2.1:329. Father N. Norris Clarke has argued as a neo-Thomist that the idea of unchangeableness in God refers to God’s intrinsic nature. On the other hand, he argues that “God’s relational consciousness” does change because “God is affected positively by what we do, that He receives love from us and experiences joy precisely because of our responses.” Cf. W. Norris Clarke, “Christian Theism and Whiteheadian Process Philosophy: Are They Compatible?” Process Theology, 2007, 237.
not transcend space-time, but everything was merged into the divine essence. He interpreted space-time philosophically as a trick of the imagination. He espoused a block theory of time. Everything was already predetermined and fixed in the mind of God, which is a typical assumption of pantheism.\(^87\) If Einstein had received the biblical revelation, he could have seen that God is the Creator of space-time and thus transcends it, and he would not have confused the Creator with the creature (cf. Romans 1:20).

Some proponents of divine temporality have complained that I should allow for interpretations of relativity theory other than Einstein’s.\(^88\) They think that Bell’s Theorem in particular shows that Einstein was wrong, although Roger Penrose has shown it has been demonstrated that Bell’s Theorem does not violate the principle of Einstein’s theory.\(^89\)

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\(^{89}\) William Lane Craig claims that “on the cutting edge of science today” Bell’s theorem is reinstating Lorentzian relativity over Einstein’s theory of space-time (*Time and Eternity*, 54-56). Craig argues for the existence of ether as the way to discredit the counter-intuitive space-time relativity theory of Einstein. He believes Bell’s Theorem supports the concept of ether. Bell’s Theorem entails what Einstein referred to as “spooky action at a distance.” Allegedly separated particles of energy at the quantum level can influence each other at extreme distances apart. Cf. Roger Penrose, *Shadows of the Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 294. When an electron is split in half and both halves spin off in entirely different directions, they remain entangled with each other and are in immediate contact even though they may be miles apart. Physicists have proved this to be the case by altering the spin of one part of the electron and have observed that the other half immediately responds in the same way. This seems to be in conflict with relativity theory that says nothing travels faster than the speed of light. How does this happen? Craig says the concept of the ether is needed to account for this. Cf. Craig, *Time and Eternity*, 54-56. However, Roger Penrose has shown that the embedded electrons are not communicating information. This is known because it is not possible for technology to use the separated parts of the particle for sending information. Hence the strange behavior of the separated parts of an embedded particle do not violate special relativity theory that the speed of light is absolute. By being embedded, the two halves still function as one particle. Penrose, *Shadows of the Mind*, 246-9, 294. Penrose shows that although quantum physics deals with things with a very small size like molecules, atoms,
Although relativity theory does not provide a complete account of time and its significance for human experience as disclosed in the history of salvation, there is no reason to reject the physical interpretation of time as experimentally established in contemporary science. Whatever nuances of meaning one gives to time, one must at least presuppose this basic finite component of space-time as containing the location and time of human life. Otherwise, discussions on time in contemporary philosophy and theology take on a gnostic connotation. A. N. Whitehead noted over seventy years ago the “obvious commonsense notion [of time] has been entirely destroyed” by Einstein’s relativity theory, though it “still reigns supreme in the work-a-day life of mankind.” Whitehead notes: “One by one, every item [of the Newtonian scientific worldview] has been de-throned.” Likewise Milič Čapek noted that a “Newtonian-Euclidean form of understanding” still prevails even though physicists “explicitly reject the authority of Euclid and Newton.” He also points out that even some scientific and philosophical “interpreters failed to draw all the consequences” of contemporary physics.

I have the highest admiration for the proponents of Open Theism and appreciate their commitment to Trinitarian orthodoxy and libertarian freedom, but I am perplexed by their unrelenting espousal of bad science. Almost in desperation, some in Open Theism hope that Einstein’s space-time relativity theory will unravel. This dismissive attitude is reminiscent of the Scopes Monkey Trial, where well-meaning Christians were trying to overthrow modern science and replace it with ad hoc explanations sup-

and subatomic particles, “quantum-level effects can occur across vast separations.” The behavior of these very small things cannot be understood on the basis of space-time relativity, but this does not mean that space-time relativity has been violated. Penrose, *Shadows of the Mind*, 256; Penrose, *The Emperor’s New Mind. Concerning Computers, Minds, and The Laws of Physics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 282ff, 286f.

William Lane Craig is worried that if one embraces Einstein’s relativity theory one will succumb to positivism, but the issue is whether or not one will accept the reality of space-time as created by a transcendent God. If so, that is not positivism.


*Modes of Thought*, 177.

posedly based on the Bible. A Boethius view provides everything Open Theism wants, and with reasonable consistency.

**The British Version of Open Theism**

A group of British theologians espouse Einstein’s space-time relativity and yet they violate its core meaning. Independent of Open Theism in North America, these British scholars were persuaded by the argument of Nelson Pike’s book on *God and Timelessness*\(^94\) that it is logically impossible to embrace both divine foreknowledge and freedom—without noticing its equivocation of the meaning of time. This British movement includes well-known names as Richard Swineburne and John Polkinghorne.\(^95\) Both physicists-turned-theologians affirm Trinitarian orthodoxy. It has been shown, however, that their concept of time contradicts spacetime relativity theory.\(^96\) Astonishingly, Swineburne thinks Newton was right on time and Einstein was wrong,\(^97\) and Polkinghorne slides back into a Newtonian view of time when he assumes that space-time is two separate entities, as if God transcends space but not time. Perhaps Polkinghorne does this because he allows common sense experience “at least equal status with” space-time relativity and quantum physics.\(^98\) This allows him to select from science what is theologically preferred, but if

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\(^{94}\) Nelson Pike, *God and Timelessness* in 1970. See his “Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action,” *Philosophical Review* (January 1965), 74(1):27-46. As Pannenberg has made clear in his critique of Nelson Pike’s views on this subject, if God does not transcend the sequences of time but observes everything disappearing into the past, God is finite and not the transcendent unity of all time. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann have also shown that Pike misrepresents Boethius and that his arguments are “confused,” particularly with his claim that the idea of a being who transcends time cannot also include time. Cf. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, “Eternity,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 78.8 (August 1981):448-458.


common sense has an equal place, it would have to reject the counterintuitive findings of Einstein’s relativity theory, as Open Theism does. Because God is a temporal being, Polkinghorne reasons from the standpoint of common sense that God does not know the future because it does not yet exist and so there is nothing for God to know. Polkinghorne argues more consistently when he allows “that atemporal knowledge, not being foreknowledge, does not of itself settle matters of causality or prejudice human freedom.” Ironically, Polkinghorne allows that God created time and it did not exist before creation, but now that God created time God is temporal. Kierkegaard once remarked that it would surely be quite embarrassing for God to become dependent upon the world that God created.

The difference between Polkinghorne and Boethius is that Boethius affirms that God includes all that is contingently true of the temporal pole from the beginning of time to the end of time and that it is instantly known by God who stands above time. As Wilhelm Drees notes, a problem for Polkinghorne is that he thinks God knows all things temporally, but this could only be the case if there was a single universal clock-time. If God observes all that is going on with the innumerable events in space-time at the same time, God must stand above space-time to know it because there is no global clock for the universe; there are as many clocks as there are inertial frames of reference. Surprisingly, Polkinghorne frankly claims that there is a universal clock time. He explains that “God would know directly every event as and when it happened” because God occupies “a natural cosmic frame (the one cosmologists use in defining the age of the universe).” Polkinghorne clearly has become Newtonian in his view of time at this point.

Equivocation in Open Theism about Time

We experience the commonsense notion of space and time as separated from each other because of the relative flatness of the earth’s inertial

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frame of reference, but God is not an earth-bound creature. It is fair enough to say that God does not know things in advance of them happening, as Boethius maintained, but that is only half of the story because that is speaking from the standpoint of our earth time. The rest of the story is that God also transcends time as the Eternal One who knows all things instantly. This is not temporal simultaneity, but a simultaneity in the eternal duration of God who stands above time.

This notion will appear incoherent to someone who only reflects on this issue on the basis of our earthly inertial frame of reference, but the problem with this reasoning is that the logic of our earthly time-bound commonsense experience is incomplete. An example of this logical equivocation on the meaning of time is Nelson Pike’s argument that if God knows today what I will do tomorrow, then it is necessary that I will do tomorrow what God knows today, as if God’s today was the same any other earth-bound creature.

John Sanders engages in equivocation when he criticizes some “free will” theists as imagining that God looks ahead and sees what is going to happen. This may describe Molinism, but not the early Church Fathers and Boethius. The idea of God looking ahead entails an equivocation of words. God does not look ahead; God simply “looks” simultaneously at the whole of everything. Hence it is appropriate for Brian Leftow to say in reference to Boethius that “one and the same event is


105 Sanders, The God Who Risks, 199.

106 Prior to its resurgence in recent days, E. L. Mascall referred to Molinism as “one of the most elaborate and unnecessary discussions in the history of philosophy” (He Who Is (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1970), 119. Mascall’s point is that Molinism misunderstands the question about divine omniscience because it assumes that God literally foreknows things in advance of them happening, as if God were located in time.

107 Sanders does not allow that our future could actually exist for God “because the future is not real.” The God Who Risks, 206. Cf also 166 where he says “the ‘future’ is not a reality that God now knows as definite.” He thus leaves no room for a Boethian view. He writes: “The future does not exist, period.” The God Who Risks, 208. We should be careful about dictating to God what kind of world is possible. That would be an extreme form of anthropomorphic thinking in reference to God.
present and actual in eternity though it is not yet or no longer present or actual in time.”

As E. L. Mascall has noted: “If God’s existence is outside time, it is strictly meaningless to talk about what God knows to-day, since God’s ‘to-day’ is eternity. It is true to-day that God knows what I shall do tomorrow, but it is not true that God knows it to-day. Of course, if time were uniform between God and humans, then Open Theism would be right that God does not have foreknowledge of tomorrow’s actions. Boethius also argued that literal foreknowledge entailed determinism. However, the Newtonian conceptuality of time as uniform is discarded today in science, and it ought to be discarded in theology as well, whereas the conceptuality of our tomorrow as God’s present is an intelligible notion. To be sure, there is still a tension between God’s eternal knowledge of all things and libertarian freedom, and in the final analysis this “is a mystery beyond our power to unravel.”

The widespread appeal of Open Theism is its simplicity. The church has never let the illusion of simplicity over-ride the complex teachings of Scripture, and it has always been willing to use categories from extra-biblical sources to explain the mysteries of faith. Theology relies upon the facts of revelation as the basis of its thinking about God, not merely common-sense. Sartori has noted that “relativity is a challenge, but the challenge is in the ideas, not in the mathematics.” Admittedly, the language of theology cannot be put into mathematical equations; nor does the language of theology allow itself to be analyzed with absolute rational clarity. Leibniz’s principle of sufficient rational clarity is a more realistic goal. To be sure, outright logical contradictions cannot be affirmed without committing theological suicide, but just because doctrinal ideas are counterintuitive is not a basis for claiming they are logical contradictions. I would like to challenge the proponents of Open Theism to re-consider that possibly Boethius offers a better way in Book V of The Consolation of Philosophy.

As a vigorous supporter of Boethius and a severe critic of Augustine, Karl Barth argued that the real issue of exhaustive omniscience is whether

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109 Boethius, Bk. 5, 395ff.
110 Mascall, He Who Is, 119-120.
111 Sartori, xi.
or not God can be trusted. The weakened capacity of God to know the future only with “probability,” as in the theology of Open Theism, may weaken one’s capacity to trust in the Lord. This has serious pastoral implications. Isaiah declared that God can be trusted because God “knows the end from the beginning” and God knows “things not yet done” (Isa. 46:11). If God can be mistaken, why should one altogether trust in divine wisdom? Is God like a big sister whose superior wisdom will help guide us? If we rely on the guidance of the Holy Spirit who is the “Spirit of Truth” (John 14:17), how can we be sure of the unfailing and perfect wisdom of God and the leadership of the Holy Spirit if God can be mistaken about the future? And what if God is mistaken and leads us wrongly, are we expected to forgive God? And who will atone for God?

Sanders discusses this issue at some length in order to defend God against any possibility of being mistaken in divine leadership. A more frank acknowledgement comes from Richard Swineburne, who espouses the same view of omniscience as Sanders and whom Sanders has great respect for. Swineburne states frankly God does not know the future, and if God should predict the future God could be mistaken. But Barth is right—the issue is one of trust. The psalmist prays to the Lord, trusting implicitly in God because God knows his present and future: “O Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my every thought when far away. You chart the path ahead of me and tell me where to stop and rest. Every moment you know where I am. You know what I am going to say even before I say it, Lord. You precede and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to know!” (Psalm 139:1-6, NLT).

112 Barth, Church Dogmatics, 2.2.609. Barth has shown God exists in “pure duration” and we “exist from one time to another.” Because God’s duration is not limited by time, “He can be and will be true to Himself, and we can and may put our trust in Him.”

113 Sanders attempts to soften this statement that God knows the “end from the beginning” in Isaiah by saying that it refers to the deliverance from exile, but this is a highly problematic interpretation. Notice that Isaiah follows this up with the unqualified statement that God is able to know things “not yet done.” Cf. Sanders, God Who Risks, 79.

114 The God Who Risks, 284-88.


THE ETERNAL NOW AND THEOLOGICAL SUICIDE: A REPLY TO LAURENCE WOOD

by

John Sanders

Although it may not seem so from his article, Laurence Wood’s position has many points of agreement with open theism. Both views are part of what I call the free-will Christian family of theology. Hence, both agree on matters such as: God loves creatures and seeks their highest good; God grants humans libertarian freedom; God does not exercise meticulous providence; and thus, God takes some risks since not everything goes the way God would like it to go. Both positions agree that the watershed divide between free-will Christianity and theological determinism is whether or not any of God’s decisions are responses to what creatures do. Free-will Christians believe that God enters into genuine give-and-receive relations with us, our prayers can affect some of God’s decisions, and, in many areas of life, God takes risks. Hence, God is open to what creatures do.

Additionally, open theism affirms a second element of openness: history is open in that it contains multiple possible futures rather than just one actual future. These two senses of openness motivate open theists to diverge from traditional free-will Christianity on two issues, God’s relationship to time and whether God has exhaustive-definite knowledge of future contingent events.¹ Though some traditional Wesleyans have held

¹For a detailed examination of these similarities and differences, see my “Is Open Theism a Radical Revision or Miniscule Modification of Arminianism?” Wesleyan Theological Journal 38.2 (Fall 2003): 69-102.
that God is temporal, the majority have affirmed that God is atemporal. The lightning rod issue surrounding open theism has been the claim that God does not know with certainty what creatures with libertarian freedom will do in the future. In his article, Wood links these two issues in order to argue, as many Wesleyans have done in the past, that, if God experiences all time at once (the “eternal now”), then God has knowledge, not merely beliefs, of what we will do in the future.

For open theism, God has dynamic omniscience. God has definite knowledge of all the past and present and God knows the future as partly definite (closed) and partly indefinite (open). God’s knowledge of the future contains knowledge of those events that are determined to occur (e.g., natural events and anything God has decreed), as well as knowledge of what may possibly happen, and which of those possibilities are most probable. Though the future is partly open, God is not caught off-guard since divine foresight anticipates what we will do.

Wood implies that open theists affirm a limited omniscience when he repeatedly says that we reject “full omniscience” or “exhaustive omniscience.” This makes it sound as though there are things that God could know that open theists deny that God knows. Wood’s rhetoric suggests that 100-proof omniscience includes exhaustive-definite knowledge of the future, with any view which denies this being a watered-down omniscience. This would be like claiming that only transubstantiation is 100-proof Eucharist—any other view is watered-down communion. However, both Wood and open theists agree that God is omniscient. The debate is about the content of omniscience (e.g., does omniscience include middle knowledge?). The real focus of Wood’s article is not whether God is omniscient but whether God has definite knowledge of future contingents. In ordinary parlance, the disagreement is about divine foreknowledge.

Traditionally, free-will Christians have affirmed that God knows what we will do in the future. Two different theories have been used to explain how God has such knowledge. Perhaps the most common view has been “simple foreknowledge” in which God “looks ahead” and “sees” what we will do in the future. The second option uses divine atemporality (whether thought of as timelessness or the experience of all time at once) to say that God “sees” all of history at once (the eternal now). This is often accompanied by the illustration of God standing on a mountain which allows God to see everything in the valley of history below. In the
second view, God does not have “fore” knowledge since there is no past or future for God.²

Wood accuses me of “equivocation” when I say that God “looks ahead” because a being with an eternal now does not “look ahead.” Open theists are quite well aware that that, according to divine atemporality, God has knowledge, not “fore” knowledge.³ Perhaps I should have been clearer about the reason why “looks ahead” and “sees” are in quotation marks in my book, even when discussing simple foreknowledge. The language of God knowing and deciding things in succession concerns the “logical” or “explanatory order” of events, not a temporal order. For example, God’s decision to liberate the Hebrews from Egypt is logically subsequent to the divine knowledge that they are in bondage. Reversing the explanatory order leads to the nonsensical: God knew they were in bondage because of his decision to liberate them.

Wood goes with the second option of divine atemporality (understood as the possession of all time at once). He uses the notion of an eternal now/present to explain how God knows what we call our “future” actions. It seems to me that Wood’s key claim is that a Boethian account of divine atemporality gives free-will Christians everything they believe is important for the God-human relationship, libertarian freedom and divine responsiveness to creatures, while also affirming exhaustive-definite knowledge of future contingent events. His arguments in support of this claim, though not clearly stated in his paper, seem to be the following:

1. The Bible supports the claim that God has knowledge of our future.
2. Theological tradition affirms that God has knowledge of our future.
3. If relativity theory is correct, then the future is real. Since God knows all of reality, God must know the future.
4. A God with dynamic omniscience is not trustworthy.

²Proponents of both views claim that God’s “seeing” what will happen does not determine what we do.

³Wood correctly undermines Nelson Pike’s argument that “if God knows today what I will do tomorrow then it is determined” by pointing out that an eternal God does not have a “today.” However, Wood fails to address the more recent formulations of the argument which use non-temporal language: if God eternally knows that I will have Cheerios for breakfast tomorrow, then it is not within my power to have eggs (but not because God knows it). See William Hasker, *Metaphysics: Constructing a World View* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 54.
The astute reader will notice that few (if any) of these arguments support the claim that the eternal now supports a responsive God. Rather, the bulk of Wood’s article is spent peppering open theism with criticisms. The strategy seems to be to criticize open theism so that readers will conclude that the eternal now position is correct. Wood repeatedly claims that a “Boethian” conception of eternity allows God to experience before and after, such that God can enter into genuine give-and-receive relations with us, avoiding determinism. However, he never explains how this can occur. He simply repeats the claim over and over in the paper without providing evidence for this claim. Moreover, he fails to address the lengthy discussion in my *The God Who Risks* of the contradictions between the eternal now position and the core doctrines of free-will Christianity.4

In the remainder of this article I will comment on each of the four arguments of Wood in an attempt to show why the eternal now view is problematic for free-will Christians. Also, I want to respond to a number of his criticisms of open theism. Wood’s article contains many factual errors and misrepresentations of what we have said. Therefore, the reader should be cautious about accepting his word as to what particular open theists believe, or what we believe as a group.5 Now to his main arguments.

**First Argument: The Bible affirms that God has knowledge of our future.**

Though he could have given more texts, Wood cites only one text from Isaiah with the authority of Von Rad in support of this claim. He says, “Sanders attempts to soften this statement that God knows the “end from the beginning” in Isaiah by saying that it refers to the deliverance from exile...” Well, it would be softening if it were certain that Wood’s interpretation is the correct one. However, my discussion follows the detailed exegetical work of Fredrik Lindström who notes that Isaiah’s use of light and darkness is connected to the beginning and the end of the exile, such that Isaiah is talking about a specific event and not the entire history of the world.6

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5For example, on the first page he says, we believe “God could be mistaken in assessing those probabilities.” No, God is always correct about the probabilities.

The God Who Risks contains a hundred pages discussing biblical texts in support of dynamic omniscience and that God experiences time. Here I can only highlight the types of texts used in support of open theism. The Bible portrays God as:

1. Authentically responding to petitions (Ex. 4, 32; 2 Kings 20; Mk. 2; Lk. 8:48).
2. Grieving over sin (Gen. 6:6; 1 Sam. 15:11; Mt. 23:37; Jn. 11:35).
3. Expecting something to happen but it does not (Jer. 3:6-7, 19-20; Isaiah 5:1-4; Mk. 6:5-6).
4. Testing individuals and Israel “to find out what they will do” (Gen. 22; Ex. 15:25; Deut. 13:3).
5. Refusing to change his mind (Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29).
6. Changing his mind (Ex. 32:14; 1 Sam. 15:11-35; Jonah 4:2; Joel 2:13-14; Mt. 15:21-28) and reconsidering what God had previously promised (1 Sam. 2:30-31; 13:13).
7. Having knowledge of some future events but not others. There are two types of texts about the future in scripture.
   7.1 Predicting specific events that do come to pass (2 Kings 20:17-18; Jer. 29:10).
   7.2 Predicting specific events that either do not come to pass at all or not in the precise way they were predicted (Ezek. 26:17ff; 29:17-20; Amos 9:11-12 & Acts 15:15-18; Acts 21:11).

Wood correctly says that a God with an eternal now “knows all things instantly.” If so, then how can grief, change of mind, and testing be attributed to such a being? How can God expect something to happen and it not happen? How can a God who knows all events of history simultaneously be said to predict that the city of Tyre will be totally destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar (Ezek. 26) and then later admit that the prediction failed (Ezek. 29:17-20)? How does Wood do with these texts? He claims his eternal now view can handle them, but he never once shows how this can be done. Wood claims to take the biblical portrayal of God seriously, yet he makes no attempt to explain the meaning of these texts if the eternal

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7 All of these problems are discussed in The God Who Risks, 81-84, 200-205.
now is true. Open theists have developed a view which seeks to explain all the types of biblical texts mentioned above.⁸

It is part of the core piety and beliefs of free-will Christians that God is responsive. In the book I explained why it is contradictory to say that a God who experiences an eternal now also experiences changing emotions and changing decisions. On several occasions Wood supports his case with the classic article on eternity by Stump and Kretzmann. They are proponents of the eternal now and acknowledged experts on what the position entails. In this article, they say that an atemporal being “has no past or future, no earlier or later.”⁹ They point out that, if God experiences an eternal now, then “God cannot deliberate, anticipate, remember, or plan ahead.”¹⁰ The experts on divine atemporality admit that grief, expectation, and change of mind cannot be attributed to God. Wood, however, says both that God experiences all time at once and also that God has “before and after.” Stump and Kretzmann say that this is contradictory, but Wood makes both claims without acknowledging that there is a problem here, let alone furnish us with a solution to it.

Nicholas Wolterstorff points out that for the eternal now “none of God’s actions is a response to what we human beings do; indeed, not only is none of God actions a response to what we do, but nothing at all in God’s life is a response to what occurs among God’s creatures.”¹¹ This is precisely the reason why the influential Methodist theologian John Miley rejected divine atemporality.¹² He understood that it undermined essential Wesleyan piety, such as God responding to prayers.

Wood admits that “outright logical contradictions cannot be affirmed without committing theological suicide,” yet it is precisely at this point

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⁸Those who wish to deny that the Old Testament portrays God as temporal and as possessing dynamic omniscience need to rebut the careful work of scholars such as Terence Fretheim and John Goldingay.


¹⁰Stump and Kretzmann, “Eternity,” 446.

¹¹Wolterstorff, “Unqualified Divine Temporality,” Gregory Ganssle ed., *God and Time: Four Views* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 205. Paul Helm tries to claim that there is a highly qualified way that an atemporal God may be said to “respond,” but Wolterstorff shows that Helm’s claim fails (232-3).

that he fails to demonstrate why his own authorities are wrong to claim that it is logically contradictory to affirm both that God is atemporal and also that God grieves. Instead, Wood simply claims that his position contains “tensions” and “mystery.” If there is a contradiction at the heart of his claims, then it is not mystery, but nonsense. If Wood and other Wesleyans do not believe that this position is contradictory, then they need to show why it is not and why the expert proponents of divine temporality are wrong. Wood and I agree that human language is stretched when applied to God, but contradictions do not stretch our language, they snap it in half.

Second Argument: Theological tradition affirms that God has knowledge of our future.

In my own work I have documented that the early church fathers and Wesley affirmed divine atemporality and that God possesses exhaustive-definite knowledge of future contingent events. Also, I have explained the theological work that they intended for this doctrine to accomplish (e.g., how God could elect people for salvation prior to creation based on “foreseen” faith). So, I agree that the dynamic omniscience view is going against the mainstream of theological tradition. However, dynamic omniscience agrees with the free-will tradition that God does not determine the events because it is our actions which cause God to have the knowledge of what we do. That is, God “sees” what we will do in the future but God does not ordain that we do them, as with Calvin.

Though the dynamic omniscience view cannot claim the early church fathers, it has had a few proponents as far back as the fifth century. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the view began to gain a wider following, particularly in Methodist circles. On the contemporary scene, Wood lists Barth and Pannenberg on his side, while proponents of dynamic omniscience include Moltmann, Pinnock, Paul Fiddes, Nicholas

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Third Argument: If relativity theory is correct then the future is real. Since God knows all of reality, God must know the future.

Wood does not actually formulate the argument as I have stated it, but I am trying to be charitable by developing an argument that would support his key claim that an eternal now is the best solution to the problem. It is unfortunate that the bulk of his article does not actually give evidence in support of his claim. Instead, he concentrates on the accusation that divine temporalists reject relativity physics and thus parallel the fundamentalists at the Scopes Monkey Trial. Space limitations permit only three areas of response.

A. Wood’s statements about contemporary physics. Professor Wood is to be commended for his extensive research into relativity theory. He is much more informed on the topic than am I. However, his statements on this subject are not always up-to-date or as settled as he suggests. For example, he castigates me for separating space and time into different categories. Apparently, what Einstein hath joined no one must put asunder. But a recent development has the physics world abuzz about a new theory of gravity which requires that space and time be separated, at least for high energy events. The December, 2009, issue of *Scientific American* has an article titled “Splitting Time From Space” in which the new theory, called Hořava gravity, is discussed. The creator of this theory says, “I’m going back to Newton’s idea that time and space are not equivalent.”

Though it is being widely discussed, the theory has not been established as the correct one. Also, this does not imply that everything in physics is in dispute, but it does show that physicists are not as dogmatic as Wood is that time and space are inseparable.

B. Why divine temporalists cannot accept the dominant interpretation of special relativity theory. It seems that the dominant

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15Three of the four authors in Ganssle ed., *God & Time: Four Views*, reject divine atemporality.

interpretation of the special theory of relativity (STR) entails that all of
time exists because there is no privileged present moment; all times are
on a par ontologically.\textsuperscript{17} Hence, “now” is only a word expressing the
speaker’s own temporal perspective. The idea of the present has no spe-
cial status. This implies the “block theory” of time. Think of time as an
extended block that includes what we call the past, present, and future.
The entire space-time block exists together, and the “future” (from some
temporal perceiver’s point of view) is just as much “fixed” and “there” as
is the past. In other words, the future is real—it exists ontologically. Open
theists agree with the third argument that, if the future exists, then God
must know it. We just deny that the future is real.

Why do open theists have a problem with this majority interpretation
of STR? For two reasons. First, because if the block of time is real then
everything you and I will do in the future already exists on the block,
which means that there are no “alternative possibilities” of the sort that
are required for libertarian free will. Recorded on the block is a fact of the
matter as to what each of us will do tomorrow. There is no possibility that
these facts of the matter can be changed. In other words, the standard
interpretation of STR is deterministic and that is why not only open the-
ists but all libertarians must look for some other interpretation of the
data. Second, as was stated above, the biblical portrait of God and the
piety of free-will Christianity require divine responsiveness—which is
excluded by the eternal now position. If the block theory is correct, then
we do not see how it is possible to maintain these core beliefs.

I and other open theists may indeed be wrong to go with the minor-
ity interpretation of STR, but we do so because we want to affirm libertar-
ian freedom and divine responsiveness. Hence, proponents of libertarian
freedom should reject the block theory in favor of the dynamic theory of
time in which the present has a special status and the future is not onto-
logically real. According to the dynamic theory, time is actually changing
and is not, as Einstein said, a stubborn illusion. There is an interpretation

\textsuperscript{17} One of my colleagues, a physicist who is not religious and well versed in
relativity theory, told me that STR is consistent with either a deterministic or a
probabilistic interpretation and that most contemporary physicists go with the
probabilistic view. He is aware of some physicists who think that the future onto-
logically exists. However, he does not believe most are even interested in such
claims. Interestingly, he does not believe that STR entails that the future is onto-
logically real.

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of STR that is compatible with the dynamic theory.\textsuperscript{18} It is called the neo-Lorentzian interpretation. Though some prominent physicists affirm it, it is not popular among physicists.\textsuperscript{19} It is empirically equivalent to the standard interpretation of STR and \textit{has not been refuted empirically}. Wood is wrong when he claims that we do not accept the empirical confirmation of relativity theory.\textsuperscript{20}

C. Wood has a fundamental problem with four-dimensionalism. Wood affirms that, according to the standard interpretation of STR, four-dimensionalism is correct. It entails that the future is just as ontologically real as the past. Wood also acknowledges that Einstein held to the block theory because of STR. However, Wood rejects the block theory in favor of the dynamic theory.\textsuperscript{21} He does so without even a hint that there is any sort of problem here. The problem is that the block theory is the view that there is no ontological distinction between past, present and future. Four-dimensionalism and the block theory are one and the same thing. The dynamic theory of time is logically incompatible with four-dimensionalism because, according to the dynamic theory, the future is not ontologically real. Hence, Wood’s position is logically contradictory in that he affirms both that the future is ontologically real and that the future is not ontologically real.

Wood does say that God is infinite and transcends time, but such remarks do not address this fundamental contradiction in his position. Also, Wood accuses me of “dictating to God what sort of world is possi-

\textsuperscript{18}One open theist is developing a different path. Dean Zimmerman (at Rutgers) has a forthcoming chapter in which he argues that proponents of the dynamic theory can accept the relativistic space-time manifold, with certain added structure, and need not embrace a neo-Lorentzian theory. This proposal has not yet been thoroughly evaluated, but it stands as a possible way of solving the problem.


\textsuperscript{20}Wood seems to conflate a realist interpretation of Minkowski’s geometry with STR itself but this is not required. A neo-Lorentzian interpretation gives you the results of STR without the realist bent of Minkowski.

ble” because I assert that the future is not ontologically real.22 This is unfair because on the very paragraph of The God Who Risks which Wood uses to justify his claim I say, “God could have created a world in which he knew exactly what we would do in the future if God had decided to create a deterministic world.”23 The point is that, if the block theory is correct and the future is an ontological reality, then God would know it, but then we would not have libertarian freedom. I am not dictating to God, I am only claiming that our theological statements cannot contain logical contradictions. Since Wood affirms this very principle, he must either demonstrate that this is not, in fact, a logical contradiction or he must modify his position. Appeals to divine infinity do not remove the logical contradiction at the heart of Wood’s view.

Finally, Wood’s attempt to combine the dynamic theory of time with the eternal now entails a serious theological problem.24 If God experiences all of time at once in an eternal now, then God knows all events that ever occur as well as the order in which they occur. Since there is no before or after in God’s experience, what is “now” for us is simply a set of events which God knows occur in history. However, if the dynamic theory of time is correct, then the God of an eternal now does not know what is happening in history right now because God’s now does not correspond to our now. In order for God to know what is happening right now, God must change, because a few moments ago these events were not happening but other events were happening instead. But, according to the eternal now theory, God cannot change. This means that Christ’s death, resurrection, and second coming are all simultaneous for God. So, when Jesus died, God did not know the event was happening then. God eternally knows that it happens, but at our moment in history when Jesus rose from the dead God did not know it was happening (a very strange idea and certainly not one the biblical writers endorse). The God of the eternal now does not know that Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

**Fourth Argument: A God with dynamic omniscience is not trustworthy.**

Towards the end of his article, Wood says that a God without exhaustive knowledge of the future “may weaken one’s capacity to trust

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24 This is discussed in *The God Who Risks* (202-203), but Wood fails to address it.
in the Lord.” He suggests that such a God may “lead us wrongly” and thus be in need of atonement. Several responses are in order. According to dynamic omniscience, divine guidance is given on the basis of God’s perfect understanding of all that is possible to happen and perfect understanding of the probabilities of each of those possibilities. God knows what each of us is likely to do but, because we have libertarian freedom, we can, at times, act out of character and do what was unlikely. For example, God says he expected Israel to put away her idols and return to him but they did not (Jer. 3:7). In this case God knew it was more likely that they would repent, but he also knew the lesser possibility that they would not repent. God did not say that they would definitely repent because God will not definitely believe that something will occur unless it is certain to occur. If an event is not certain to occur, then God knows the degree of probability that something will happen in a particular way. But God will not hold that belief as absolutely certain if human freedom is involved because our decisions, though somewhat predictable, are not absolutely so. When God expresses surprise, it is evidence that the less likely event came to pass, but this is not a “mistake.”

Second, let us say that I advise a friend to accept a job offer because I know the supervisor and that this individual is a wonderful boss. However, a couple of months into the job, the supervisor dies in an accident and is replaced by a horrible person. Is it legitimate to say that I sinned in the guidance I gave to my friend? I do not see any need of atonement in such as case. Gregory Boyd tells the story of “Suzanne,” a woman in his congregation, who was very angry with God because she believed God had intentionally guided her into an abusive marriage. From a young age she wanted to be a missionary in Taiwan. When she went to college she met a young man who shared that same goal. For three years they attended church together and prayed together. They consulted with their parents, pastor and friends, all of whom thought they should marry. After college, they married and then attended a missionary training school together. However, at this time her husband had an affair with another student. When confronted, he repented, but then the affair resumed. After a while he became physically abusive to his wife and then divorced her.

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25 Wood cites my discussion of divine guidance in The God Who Risks (284-288), but not my response to the accusation that God could be “mistaken” (134).
26 Gregory Boyd, God of the Possible (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2000), 103-106.
Several of her friends told her what Job’s friends had told him—that God intended this horrible set of events to teach her a lesson.

Open theists give a different interpretation. At the time of their engagement her fiancée was a godly person with a passion for ministry, so the prospects were good that they would have a healthy marriage and ministry. However, because of free will, he gave in to temptation and resisted the promptings of the Spirit, even after he was found out. Through a series of choices he became what he had not been when they were dating. God’s guidance had not been wrong. What was wrong was the husband’s misuse of his free will.

How would Wood explain Suzanne’s story? Perhaps he believes that a God who possessed exhaustive knowledge of future contingent events would guide her away from marrying the fellow because God “eternally saw” that he would abuse her. That is, a God with knowledge of the actual future would be in a position to guide her so that she would not marry him. This is a common belief among free will Christians. It is also a common belief among critics of Christianity who say that a God who eternally knew Hitler would carry out the Holocaust should have prevented Hitler from doing so. Unfortunately, both sides are mistaken because the eternal now is useless for guidance. To understand why this is so, it must be kept in mind that what a God with an eternal now knows is what actually happens in history, not what might happen. If what God eternally knows is that Suzanne marries him and is abused, then it is not within God’s power to bring it about that she not marry him because that would mean that God’s knowledge of what actually occurs is wrong. By definition, God’s eternal knowledge of the actual future is always correct.

A God with an eternal now knows that Suzanne will be abused and thus cannot use that knowledge to either bring about the abuse or to prevent the abuse from occurring. What God knows is not some antecedent events which, unless hindered in some way, will lead to her abuse. Rather, what God knows is the actual abuse. It is contradictory to suppose that God knows an event will occur and also to hold that God prevents that event from occurring. That is, God knows that Suzanne will be abused and God knows that Suzanne will not be abused. It is logically impossible for God to know that an event will actually happen and that God will prevent that event from happening.

In *The God Who Risks* and elsewhere I have explained in detail why both simple foreknowledge and the eternal now positions are useless for
divine providence. It does God no good to have either simple foreknowledge or the eternal now because God cannot change what God knows for a fact will happen. God cannot use knowledge of what we call the future to guide us in the best ways, or to prevent horrible events from happening, or to give predictions about the future to the prophets. Suppose that Tom asks God for guidance about whether or not to accept a job offer. Tom believes that God knows for a fact what will happen to Tom in that job (whether good things or bad), so Tom believes that God is in perfect position to lead him. The problem is that, if God knows only truths about the future and God knows for a fact that Tom accepts the job and endures years of misery while thus employed, then God cannot change that from happening. Once God knows it as a fact that Tom works there, then it is useless for God to give Tom guidance to reject the job offer. It is incoherent to claim that God knows the actual future and on the basis of this knowledge changes it so that it will not be the actual future. A God who eternally knows the actual future cannot answer such prayers.

Philosopher David Hunt, a proponent of the simple foreknowledge view, believes that the “uselessness problem” is one of the most serious objections and needs to be rebutted. If the eternal now and simple foreknowledge views are useless for providence, then they are worthless for our theology. That is why Hunt has attempted to construct a way in which eternal knowledge could be somewhat more useful for providence than if God has dynamic omniscience. To date, I am aware only of the attempts by Hunt and another philosopher to solve the uselessness problem. William Hasker and I have explained in print why these two attempts fail. It is disappointing that Wesleyan theologians, including Wood, do not address the problem of uselessness. Wesleyans have sought to argue


against the claim that, if God knows the future, then the future is determined but they have not taken seriously this new problem (uselessness) which is devastating to the simple foreknowledge and eternal now positions. Wood claims that his eternal now position is useful for providence, but he provides neither any evidence that this is so or any explanation of why it is not a logical contradiction to believe that God eternally knows that an event will occur and yet it is in God’s power to bring it about that it not occur.

Summary and Conclusion

I have argued that Professor Wood’s position entails three significant contradictions. (1) It is logically contradictory to affirm both that God is atemporal and also that God grieves and responds. (2) It is logically contradictory to say that the future is ontologically real and that the dynamic theory of time is correct (the future is not ontologically real). (3) It is contradictory to suppose that God knows an event will occur and also to hold that God prevents that event from occurring.

Wood says that “outright logical contradictions cannot be affirmed without committing theological suicide.” Appeals to “infinity” and “mystery” can be quite legitimate, but they cannot transform a genuine contradiction into an attempted suicide. Perhaps someone will figure out a solution to these problems, but until this happens the only views of omniscience that are useful for providence, and which are not logically contradictory, are theological determinism, middle knowledge, and dynamic omniscience. The only one of these three which affirms the biblical portrayal of divine responsiveness, grief, change of mind, and is compatible with the core tenets of Wesleyan piety and belief, is dynamic omniscience. If Wood and other Wesleyans are to avoid theological suicide then they must either solve these contradictions or accept open theism.30

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30My thanks to William Hasker and David Woodruff for their invaluable
IS “CANONICAL THEISM” A Viable Option for Wesleyans?

by

Kenneth J. Collins

A little over a decade ago, William J. Abraham laid out a agenda for contemporary theology in his *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology*.¹ This work basically proposed, with some detours along the way, that Western Christianity (both Roman Catholicism and Protestantism) take on the understanding of the church and tradition that has basically been developed and preserved in Eastern Orthodoxy.² *Canonical Theism*,³ the most recent tome in this genre, represents a compilation of essays by a number of scholars on this larger theme, although Abraham’s voice once again predominates. Add to this growing collection Abraham’s *Crossing the Threshold of Divine Revelation*⁴ as well as *The Logic of Renewal*⁵ and it can readily be seen that a significant body of literature

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²Some of the material from this present essay is drawn from my earlier work: Kenneth J. Collins, “Review of Canonical Theism,” *The Asbury Journal* 63, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 105-112.


now exists on the theme of canonical theism. Consequently, scholars from the Wesleyan (as well as other) traditions are now in a position to assess this project theologically and raise some important questions as to whether or not canonical theism is a viable option for the twenty-first century.

The Definition of “Canon” in Ancient Sources

Since an understanding of the term “canon” is integral to the project of canonical theism, it is best to begin with a brief survey of the use of this word in ancient secular literature, as well as in the Old and New Testaments. Drawing upon the careful scholarship of Kittel, Bromiley and Friedrich, we observe that the earliest uses of canon indicate its basic meaning is “reed.” In an Old Testament context, Aquila has κανών in “the literal sense of [a] measuring-line” in Job 38:5. Moreover, Philo, a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher, employed the term for “rule,” “statute,” “law,” and in the secular uses of the period it became associated with the idea of a “norm,” a “plumb line” or “the infallible criterion (κριτήριον) by which things are to be measured.” In Greek philosophy, in the work of Epicurus in particular, κανών served as the basis for distinguishing truth from falsehood.

The strong normative force of κανών is continued in a New Testament context. The Apostle Paul employs the term in a twofold way in Galatians 6:16: that is, as the “norm of one’s own action and . . . [as] the standard by which to judge that of others.” The use found in 2 Corinthians

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7 Ibid. Bracketed material is mine.


9 Ibid., 3:596-97.

10 Ibid., 3:597.

11 Ibid., 3:598. Easton indicates that the term canon was eventually applied to the Scriptures “to denote that they contained the authoritative rule of faith and practice, the standard of doctrine and duty.” Cf. M. G. Easton, Easton’s Bible Dictionary (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996, c1897).
ans 10:13-16 is more complicated, although several scholars agree that in this setting it takes on the meaning of a “measuring line.” Beyond this, in the post-apostolic fathers, in the writings of Clement of Rome for example, κανόν refers to the “rule of the tradition,” by which Christian believers should order their lives. Furthermore, given the persecution of the church during the third and fourth centuries, as well as the threat from several heretical movements, the term naturally took on added force and meaning as a binding, regulating norm. Indeed, according to Jülicher, “The canon is the norm by which everything is directed in the Church.”

By the middle of the fourth century κανόν was associated with “the collection of sacred writings of the OT . . . and of the NT which had already taken shape from c. 200.” Once again, the ideas of norm, standard and measuring rod emerged. Not surprisingly, the content of the sacred Scriptures was viewed as the κανόν της άληθείας in the Christian sense.” In fact, those in the Western church came to equate canon and biblia.

Abraham’s Employment of the Term “Canon”

Setting up an antinomy between “canon” and “criterion,” and in a way that goes against the grain of the scholarship detailed above, Abraham reduces the definition of the term “canon” in two key ways. First of all, citing the work of Floyd Filson that “It is not entirely clear whether the first use of the word ‘canon’ to designate the books of the Bible

12Ibid.

13Ibid., 3:600. Smith declares that “The first direct application of the term canon to the Scriptures seems to be in the verses of Amphilochnia (cir. 380 A.D.), where the word indicates the rule by which the contents of the Bible must be determined, and thus secondarily an index of the constituent books.” Cf. William Smith, Smith’s Bible Dictionary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997). Emphasis is mine.

14Ibid.

15Ibid. Though Achtemeier indicts that canon can refer to a list, he nevertheless ties the term to issues of norms and authority, especially when he writes: [Canon is an] “English term derived from a Greek word meaning ‘rule’ or ‘standard.’ Among the meanings it acquired early in Christian history was ‘list of religious writings deemed authoritative.’ ” Cf. Paul J. Achtemeier, Publishers Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature, Harper’s Bible Dictionary, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 153. Bracketed material is mine.

16Ibid., 3:601.

17Ibid.
referred primarily to the *list* of them or to the *rule* or *standard* of faith and life which they contained.” Abraham believes he is justified in neglecting some of the more important normative elements of Scripture simply to focus on the notion that they constitute a catalog. “Canonical theism’s vision of canon,” he contends, “differs from the standard western vision of canon. . . . Here it draws on the original meaning of canon as a ‘list.’” It is not denied that at times κανών = κατάλογος (in the early church, for example, clergy were put on a roster to prove ordination), but such usage is more rare and even here it continues to suggest significant normative elements in terms of authenticity and validation.

Second, once again in contrast to the scholarship above, Abraham plays down, at least to some extent, what normative elements he finds, especially in terms of sacred Scripture, and relocates “the whole idea of canon within the arena of means of grace within the Church.” So understood, the term “canon,” as employed within the project of canonical theism, is essentially a means of grace so that novices might be initiated into the divine life. It is abundantly clear that the Christian Bible as the Word of God constitutes a vital means of grace through which aspirants can be initiated into the wonders of the faith, and seasoned believers can be equipped and strengthened. However, by understanding canon principally, though not exclusively, as a “list” and as a “means of grace,” Abraham is actually engaging in special pleading for his use of terms. Such usage does not reflect the history of Western Christianity which repeatedly affirmed the normative elements of canon in a preeminent way. Moreover, precisely because his presumed audience is made up of Protestants, Wesleyans, and Methodists, great care must be taken with the terms.


19 Abraham, Vickers, and Van Kirk, *Canonical Theism*, 4. Not only does Abraham focus on the secondary meaning of canon (as a list), and thereby makes it primary, but he also removes the authoritative and normative connotations that surround the definition of canon as a list.


22 Ibid., 27. Because Abraham is actually arguing for a specialized and more rare understanding of the word “canon,” we actually considered distinguishing such use from its normal understanding by the term “kanon.” However, since the interplay of the two rhetorics would likely prove troubling for readers, this suggestion was dropped. Nevertheless, readers must recognize throughout that Abraham is calling for a distinct understanding of canon, apart from normal usage.
nology employed lest canonical theists and Western Christians talk past each other.

With this distinct understanding of canon in place, Abraham, again in contrast to Western Christianity, opens up the number of canons so described. “Canonical theism’s vision of canon,” he maintains, “differs from the standard western vision of canon in [that] . . . it extends canon beyond the canon of Scripture or the Bible.” Accordingly, canonical theists argue that “The Church possesses not just a canon of books in its Bible, but also a canon of doctrine, a canon of saints, a canon of Fathers, a canon of theologians, a canon of liturgy, a canon of bishops, a canon of councils, a canon of ecclesial regulations, a canon of icons, and the like.”

Canonical Theism

With his definition of canon principally as a “list” and a “means of grace” in place, Abraham lays out his theological agenda in what he calls canonical theism. He explains:

By canonical theism I mean here very simply the vision of theism adopted publicly, intentionally, and explicitly by the church as it was initially driven to articulate, celebrate, and live out its fundamental convictions on the other side of conversion and the gospel. I refer to this theism as “canonical theism” because it is indeed canonical; it was the theism, the beliefs about God, listed and officially adopted by the church prior to the schism between East and West.

Put another way, canonical theism is embodied in the canonical heritage of the church in which a premium is placed on tradition. As such, canonical theism:

. . . is dispersed in the Scriptures, the Nicene Creed, the iconography, and the liturgy; it is enacted in the lives of the saints; it is summarized and worked through in the work of the canonical teachers of the church prior to the great schism; it is implicitly received in baptism; and it is handed over in ordina-

23 Abraham, Vickers, and Van Kirk, Canonical Theism, 4.
24 Ibid., 2.
tion to the diaconate, priesthood, and episcopate from generation to generation.\textsuperscript{26}

Abraham’s own reference to authority (and therefore to an implicit epistemology as well\textsuperscript{27}) is evident in his appeal to the Holy Spirit to lend legitimization to his very broad understanding of the canon. “The canonical heritage of the church came into existence through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit,”\textsuperscript{28} he argues, an observation that elevates some of the all-too-human elements of church tradition (church fathers, for example) to the virtual status of the Bible itself, since all the canons are apparently equally inspired by the Holy Spirit. Thus, in this conservative “catholic” move, a sacred canopy, to borrow a phrase from Peter Berger, has been placed atop any number of all-too-human traditions that have emerged in the church, and some of them in the context of heated, quite ugly disputes (icons, for example). Consequently, whatever has been elevated to the status of a canon is uncritically accepted because canonical theists are simply bedazzled by their own appeal to the Holy Spirit, an appeal that legitimizes the entirety of the canons.\textsuperscript{29}

As such, canonical theism rejects considering Scripture as the norma normans. It, therefore, repudiates the careful scholarship of United Methodist Bishop Scott J. Jones in his thoughtful essay, “The Rule of Scripture.”\textsuperscript{30} In short, canonical theism is fearful of what Alister McGrath has called “Christianity’s Dangerous Idea.”\textsuperscript{31} Protestants are, therefore,
likely to view canonical theism as an instance of what the great Reformation scholar Heiko Oberman called “Tradition Two,” that is, a dual source view of revelation, in which both Scripture and tradition are deemed revelatory.\(^{32}\)

When the canons themselves are taken as a whole in the form of a discrete canonical tradition or heritage, the subtle (and not so subtle) appeals to authority begin to re-emerge. Thus, after making the claim that the canonical tradition was publicly adopted by the church as a whole,\(^{33}\) Abraham contends that the entire tradition is binding on the whole community.\(^{34}\) Put another way, “The canonical heritage of the church constitutes a bedrock commitment for Christians as a whole.”\(^{35}\) Indeed, the authoritative force here is so powerful and pervasive that it even embraces such things as the various ecclesiastical regulations regarding fasting that had accrued throughout the years. All of these, down to their details, are acknowledged by Abraham as “binding within the life of the Church across the board.”\(^{36}\)

Beyond this, Abraham sets up the entire canonical tradition as an unshakeable ecclesiastical standard, especially when he makes the claim that “we need to approach the various Christian churches and denominations . . . in terms of how far they have owned the various components of the canonical heritage.”\(^{37}\) In fact, he construes the differences between Eastern and Western Christianity in light of a supposed public, canonical unity: “More precisely, division between East and West,” he exclaims, “is


\(^{33}\)Abraham, The Logic of Renewal, 160.

\(^{34}\)Abraham, Canon and Criterion, 29. Canonical theism assumes that the “binding character” of the canons will be enforced from the top down by a hierarchical episcopate.

\(^{35}\)Abraham, Vickers, and Van Kirk, Canonical Theism, 7.

\(^{36}\)Abraham, Canon and Criterion, 40.

\(^{37}\)Abraham, Vickers and Van Kirk, Canonical Theism, 7. Interestingly enough, Abraham changes the lens, so to speak, and describes the canonical tradition with the same rhetoric that he employed with respect to individual canons. That is, the entirety of the canonical heritage is portrayed as “a network of means of grace. . . .” Cf., Abraham, Canon and Criterion, 477. Emphasis is mine.
constituted by irreconcilable readings of the canonical arrangements of the patristic period.”

Implicit in this particular historiography, this distinct reading of the history of the church, is the contention that Roman Christianity supposedly broke the unified canonical traditions of the church by adding the *filioque* clause for a proper understanding of the Nicene Creed. In fact, Abraham cites the claim of the Russian Orthodox polemicist Aleksey Khomiakov that when the Roman Christians added the *filioque* clause, they “were really the first Protestants.” So committed is Abraham to the *entirety* of the canonical tradition as binding upon all Christians that he makes the further claim: “Remove the various components of the canonical heritage of the church [icons and fasting, for example] and you systematically dismantle the life of the Church as a whole.”

Integral to the definition of canonical theism is a focus on the public, unified decisions of the church, “existing in space and time across the first millennium.” However, the claim of unity across the first thousand years of ecclesiastical history may prove to be problematic in light of the Eastern and Western traditions that can be clearly distinguished prior to Nicaea, a council that the East dominated. Such an observation does not deny the unity of the very early church (what we are calling the Ancient Catholic Church), but is offered to suggest that through a different perspective, that is, through a traditions-reading of the history of the church...

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38 Abraham, *Canon and Criterion*, 76.

39 Ibid., 77. Beyond the addition of the *filioque* clause to the Nicene Creed, Abraham points to papal infallibility and a divergent set of approved Fathers and theologians as constituting the Roman difference, the supposed canonical division for which it is responsible (61). Also, observe how Protestantism is defined in this context. It represents not anything positive (in terms of doctrinal articulation and sacramental life) but simply division. However, this is not the heart and substance of Protestantism; therefore, in our judgment, Abraham offers an inaccurate assessment.

40 Abraham, *Canon and Criterion*, 55. Bracketed material is mine.


42 The phrase “The Ancient Catholic Church“ refers to the unity of the early church prior to the emergence of the distinct theological traditions of east and west. Historians debate the time frame, the parameters, of the Ancient Catholic Church, although most agree that these traditions can be clearly distinguished as early as the fourth century—and in some cases even earlier.
(which we term the Ecumenical church\textsuperscript{43}) the diversity of Christian traditions is not only evident early on, but it is publicly manifested well before the end of the millennium, that is, by 589 at a council in Toledo when the West expressed its judgment with respect to the filioque clause.

Moreover, a traditions-reading approach, which is attentive to both unity and diversity, is to be preferred over the historiography of canonical theism since no theological tradition, neither Roman Catholicism nor Eastern Orthodoxy, carries out its ecclesial life in accordance with all the canons, the entirety of the canonical tradition. Beyond the postulation of the filioque clause, the Roman tradition elevated the office of the bishop of Rome to the status of a pope; it focused on the Latin Fathers in its ongoing theological life; and it evidenced a relative neglect of the supposed canon of icons (Rome has employed statues far more often than flat images in her ongoing liturgical life). In terms of the East, this tradition has actually embraced a distinct collection of the putative canon of church Fathers that devolves upon Eastern Fathers. Indeed, Eastern Orthodox theologians even today are hardly known for their knowledge of Augustine.

Given this line of reasoning, it can now be affirmed that in some sense canonical theism fails to take into account the reality of theological differences that mark the diverse traditions that actually make up the Ecumenical church. Postulating a unity that had already evaporated by the sixth century, if not before, canonical theism may prove to be a virtual hegemony and therefore be coercive, especially when it is applied as a theological and ecclesial standard to the many church traditions that exist today, Protestantism in particular. Moreover, canonical theism struggles to recognize that the orthodox Christian faith exists in the diverse traditions of both Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. Indeed, both these traditions, in legitimizing themselves, trace their own origins back to the first-century church. Simply put, traditions are stories that have actually occurred in the history of the church. Canonical theism is a scholarly abstraction.

A related difficulty for canonical theism consists in its failure to recognize that a diversity of traditions (Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Protestantism) poses questions with respect to authority, and

\textsuperscript{43}The phrase “Ecumenical Church” as employed in this essay refers to the one Christian church that is manifested in a diversity of doctrinally orthodox traditions. The Ecumenical church, therefore, embraces Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Protestantism.
hence to epistemology. In other words, given the context of the Ecumenical church today, when heretofore secularists, for example, make their way into the church, they must first of all ask the question about which church body should they join? That is, what communion of faith is most likely to lead to a rich and saving knowledge of Jesus Christ? Such questions, of course, do not emerge in canonical theism, not only because it postulates a unity that is not fleshed out in any one theological tradition, but also because it is largely antiquarian. In other words, canonical theism essentially takes the putative unified view of fifth-century Christianity in which, for instance, the Ancient Catholic church is the only option. Therefore, the annoying problem of a diversity of orthodox traditions (which raises questions in terms of both authority and epistemology) does not arise.

The Alleged Canons

1. Scripture. The consequences of Abraham’s understanding of canon (chiefly as a “list” and a “means of grace”) are nowhere more evident than in his assessment of the Bible. Indeed, canonical theism is an attempt to consider sacred Scripture, in a real sense, as being one among any number of alleged canons in a harmony of Christian formation. In fact, Abraham specifically makes the claim that “the icons can marvelously convey the content of the gospel and the teaching of Scripture.” \(^{44}\) However, can icons really convey the substance of the holiness code as found in the Book of Leviticus? Can they reveal the intricate nature of Pauline theology so evident in the Book of Romans? Can they even offer the moral guidance found in the pastoral epistles? These and other probing questions can only serve to reveal the very troubled nature of such a claim.

Arguing vigorously against limiting the canon to Scripture, Abraham embraces a number of alleged canons which are supposed to cohere with each other. With this broad, “crowded” and over-determined conception of the canon in place, the clear and distinct voice of the Old and New Testaments, as they communicate the kerygma, may at times be distorted and in the worst instances be outright muted (especially in terms of the second commandment). In fact, rather than affirming that the early church gra-

\(^{44}\)Ibid., 3. No attempt is being made here to give an exhaustive treatment of all of the alleged canons. Such a task would require a much more lengthy essay.
ciously and in deep humility *recognized* what writings were inspired, Abraham maintains that the church itself, and in an authoritarian manner, *decided* the canon, a judgment that in a real sense places the church *above* Scripture. “Clearly, it was the church that decided the content and limits of the canon of Scripture,” \(^{45}\) Abraham insists. So construed, the authority of the Bible may be undervalued in this project, at least to some extent, precisely because a broadened canonical tradition has been so greatly amplified.

Moreover, as suggested earlier canonical theism inveighs against viewing the Bible in a normative way *in the sense that Scripture is recognized as the norma normans*, that is, as the authoritative standard that can be appealed to in order to settle doctrinal matters within the church or to critique elements of the tradition that have departed from the simplicity and beauty of the *kerygma*.\(^{46}\) However, the idea of sacred Scripture, that is, a body of literature distinct from profane or secular materials, necessarily raises the issue of authority. As the early church engaged in the process of recognizing what writings were indeed sacred, a clear line of authority arose: Jesus Christ, himself, was placed in the first rank; next in line were those who knew Christ (the Apostles), then those who knew the Apostles (apostolic fathers), etc. Put another way, the Bible was revered in the early church and held to be authoritative precisely because it was believed to communicate nothing less than the distinct voice of Jesus Christ and that of his disciples.

Canonical theism, then, may actually argue against this understanding of the early church in its fear of viewing Scripture as normative and authoritative in a way that is *without parallel*. Put another way, though canonical theism clearly postulates a normative role for Scripture, it nevertheless falls short of acknowledging the full normative value of the Bible as articulated by Wesley and the subsequent Methodist tradition. Beyond this, canonical theism not only criticizes the kind of thinking found in the official documents of the United Methodist Church (specifically expressed in the General Conference of 1988) that affirmed the primacy of Scripture, but it also repudiates many of the *Disciplines* of the


\(^{46}\) Abraham, *Canonical Theism*, 7.
holiness churches that contain similar language with respect to the Bible. For example, the 2008 UM Book of Discipline clearly states that “Scripture is the primary source and criterion for Christian doctrine.”\(^{47}\) Accordingly, it is one thing to reject sola Scriptura (as most Wesleyans and Methodists would rightly do) as canonical theism does, but it is quite another thing to reject the preeminent normative power of Scripture in terms of source and criterion. Scripture itself (in concert with tradition, reason and experience) is the very touchstone of the faith.

Bracketing out questions that pertain to authority (and hence epistemology as well), canonical theism fails to see that the language of the Bible, viewed as sacred Scripture, evidences a category difference in terms of all other literature. This difference, which points to the uniqueness of the Bible, is washed out in the leveling process of canonical theism in which the words of the church fathers, for example, are considered equally as a means of grace. However, a distinction must be made between the language of the Apostle Paul and that of Augustine, for the two corresponding bodies of literature are not of the same nature.

Simply put, the writings of the church fathers are valuable insofar as they faithfully exegete sacred Scripture. One is a primary source, the other a secondary one. Indeed, the holiness of Scripture, its uncanny power to transform lives in a way that no other literature can or does, points to its very authority. As N. T. Wright has reminded us, the authority of the Bible is really a shorthand way of stating, “God’s authority exercised through Scripture.”\(^{48}\) That is, God and not human beings (or human products) remains the very fount of authority. Scripture was revered in the early church precisely because it was so intimately connected to God; it communicated nothing less than the voice of Jesus Christ. It is, therefore, no surprise that when John Wesley approached the Bible he gave evidence of its distinctiveness and unsurpassed authority:

I want to know one thing,—the way to heaven; how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to teach the way: For this very end he came from heaven. He


hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God! I have it: Here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be homo unius libri.⁴⁹

One of the strengths of Abraham’s proposal consists in its rightly pointing out that some forms of Western Christianity have bet the store, so to speak, on a particular epistemology in order to address the ongoing issue of the authority of Scripture—inerrancy for Protestant Fundamentalists and some evangelicals and infallibility for Roman Catholics. By tying the genius of the Christian faith to a particular way of knowing (often a form of rationalism), the church “sidelines its own best resources”⁵⁰ for spiritual formation. Indeed, the life of the Christian community in its fullness of worship and service will naturally exceed the limitations of what can be suitably expressed in a single, often de-limiting and at times reductionistic epistemology.

At this point, we are clearly in agreement with Abraham’s critique. However, once the epistemological stage is settled, so to speak, questions pertaining to authority yet remain, for the church must not only do things decently and in order, but she must give appropriate guidance to those who seek to become serious disciples of Jesus Christ. In other words, though like Abraham we reject the privileging of a particular epistemology (the propositional rationalism of the fundamentalists, for example), nevertheless, we affirm in a way distinct from Abraham that some questions pertaining to knowledge and epistemology must remain if Scripture is to offer suitable moral and spiritual guidance to the church, especially in terms of knowing the will of God. In short, the “epistemological sweep” called for by Abraham may strip Scripture of some of its more important functions.

2. The Councils of the Church. Canonical theism attempts to legitimize a whole host of traditions by maintaining that “The formal reception of these...took place in charismatic events in the life of the church, that is, in conferences and councils.”⁵¹ The problem here is that,

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with the exception of some church historians, few people have actually read the material related to the councils of the church. Beyond a vague summary of their doctrinal teaching, not many Christians are actually acquainted with the various decrees and the anathemas (some of which are very troubling) of the councils. Nevertheless, according to Abraham all of these are binding.

Take the Second Council of Constantinople in 553. It issued an anathema against all those who failed to affirm the perpetual virginity of Mary. This teaching is not only undermined by the Bible (Mark 6:3 and Matt. 13:55), but it has also led to a troubled understanding of human sexuality. In this setting, the God of redemption seems at odds with the God of creation, at least on some level, because the goodness of the created order, in this case human sexuality, is not fully acknowledged. In this particular tradition, holiness, especially in terms of the holy family, entails the absence of all sexual relations forever, that is, well beyond what is necessary to affirm the orthodox teaching of the virgin birth. Interestingly enough, even John Wesley was caught up in this dubious heritage, and the strained exegesis entailed, as it was mediated to him by Roman Catholicism’s influence on the Anglican Church.

Moreover, the Second Council of Nicaea, held in 787, contended that a particular church (a building, not the people) is defective if it has not been consecrated with the installation of holy relics. To be sure, if any bishop was found to be consecrating a church without the appropriate relics, “Let him be deposed as someone who has flouted the ecclesiastical tradition.” Aware of the trafficking in hair, teeth and bones that had occurred in the Middle Ages, and of what pernicious use relics had been put to by the papacy, Martin Luther specifically cautioned against this practice that had the potential of harming the graciousness and liberty of the Christian faith. However, unless canonical theism is going to choose

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54 Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 1:145.
55 Luther expressed concern about the use of relics in his observations on Genesis 36:39 and in his commentary on Galatians 3:6, in which he argued that nothing less than the doctrine of justification by faith, the very heart of the gospel, was at stake.
in a restrictive manner what decrees of the councils are to be brought forward, then it would necessarily follow that all Protestant churches are defective given their absence of relics.

Beyond this, the Second Council of Nicaea decreed that any books containing writings against the holy icons are to be considered heretical and therefore should be confiscated (and presumably burned). It declared:

All those childish baubles and bacchic rantings, the false writings composed against the venerable icons, should be given in at the episcopal building in Constantinople, so that they can be put away along with other heretical books. If someone is discovered to be hiding such books, if he is a bishop, priest or deacon, let him be suspended, and if he is a lay person or a monk, let him be excommunicated.56

Just how do canonical theists propose that this decree is to be executed? And who will be authorized to do this?

3. The Church Fathers. We are in agreement with canonical theists that the Church Fathers constitute an enormous resource for the ongoing life of the church. Indeed, these early writings, for the most part, may be read with great profit in any age. However, since Abraham has cast into doubt the perspicuity of Scripture, that it may be readily understood by simple folk,57 this interpretive problem can only be compounded given the sheer size of the patristic corpus. Indeed, the Church Fathers as a body of literature is many times the size of the Bible. This fact was clearly recognized by Abelard in the twelfth century in his work *Sic et Non*.58

56 Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 1:146. And observe the incipient clericalism that had already emerged in the eighth century church as reflected in the different penalties for clergy and laity.

57 Cf., Abraham, *Canon and Criterion*, 342, in which he writes: “However, that revelation is technically confined to Scripture does not mean that the truths of revelation can be read in a simple-minded manner from the content of Scripture. The truth of Scripture does not lie on the surface of Scripture; this is the error of classical Protestantism and its successors in Evangelicalism.”

58 In the prologue of this work, Abelard writes: “... with the exception of the apostles, whatever else is said later may be cut off, and does not possess authority. Therefore, although someone who lived after the apostles may be holy and articulate, he has no authority.” Cf. Peter Abelard, *Yes and No: The Complete English Translation of Peter Abelard's Sic Et Non*, trans. Priscilla Throop (Charlotte, Vermont: MedievalMS, 2008), 24.
Depending upon the social location of the interpreter (a genuine weak spot for canonical theists), the Fathers can be read in all sorts of ways. Who decides what interpretation is correct?

Though the writings of the church fathers are a genuine means of grace, some of this material may prove to be troubling to some believers, especially to women. Reflective of the cultural environment of their time, with its diminished view of females, various writings from the fathers may actually communicate a message of un-grace and diminishment to contemporary women. Clement of Alexandria, for instance, once observed that “a woman should properly be shamed when she thinks ‘of what nature she is.’”\(^{59}\) Augustine, who was sexually dissolute before becoming a Christian, exclaimed that “the good Christian likes what is human, loathes what is feminine.”\(^{60}\)

In a similar way, Jerome viewed women more often than not as temptations to male lust and he therefore advised his brothers to associate principally with one another and only with those women who had lost the seductive, female form and therefore looked more like men through rigorous fasting. “Let your companions,” this Latin father cautions, “be women pale and thin with fasting, and approved by their years of conduct.”\(^{61}\) Beyond this, Jerome reveals his estimation of women as he champions the cause of “continent” marriage in his observation: “You have with you one who was once your partner in the flesh but is now your partner in the spirit; once your wife but now your sister; once a woman but now a man; once an inferior but now an equal.”\(^{62}\) It is by now readily apparent that several key early church fathers, reflecting the prejudices of the day, held a very distorted view of women, distortions that helped to foster and then keep in place a far more limited role for women in the

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60 Ibid. For a detailed study of a local Roman Catholic congregation that protests against Rome’s diminishment of women which follows the patristic heritage, see Jim Naughton, *Catholics in Crisis: The Rift between American Catholics and Their Church* (New York: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1996).


church than they had enjoyed in charity and grace during the first century.

4. Icons. Many western Christians will, no doubt, be surprised to learn that icons are also a canon on par with the Bible, and that they can communicate the gospel in images as equally well as the Scripture does this in words—or so it is claimed.63 According to Abraham, “The iconography displays in a visual manner the same content laid out elsewhere in verbal form.”64 However, one does not have to make the iconoclastic argument to realize that the use of icons in the history of the church has been fraught with superstition and in the worst instances outright idolatry. Though Eastern Orthodox theologians and their canonical theist devotees take great comfort in the theological distinction between latria (worship that pertains to God alone) and douleia (the veneration that can be offered to what is less than God), this subtle distinction is often lost on common people who at times commit outright idolatry.65 Nor is the repeated call for the veneration of icons any more sophisticated when authors of Canonical Theism express the desire that they “would celebrate if some Protestant traditions were to rediscover the ways in the Holy Spirit can be and is present in images. . .”66

For their part, Protestants may be willing to admit that the Spirit can be revealed through images, but not that the Spirit is in images. So, when one of the contributors of the edited book Canonical Theism expresses her enthusiasm for how images can carry their own “charge” and that, more important, if this “charge” is “of sufficient power”67 it can be

63 See my earlier piece, “A Review of Canonical Theism,” from which some of this material is taken—in The Asbury Journal 63, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 105-112.
64 Abraham, Canon and Criterion, 58.
65 The Fourth Council of Constantinople (869-870) condemned all of those future church traditions that would fail to venerate the icons. It declared: “If anyone then does not venerate the icon of Christ, the savior, let him not see his face when he comes in his Father’s glory . . . but let him be cut off from his communion and splendor. . . .” Cf., Tanner, Decrees of the Councils, 1:168.
expected to change the viewer, such claims are likely to be cast aside by many Protestants, especially evangelicals who are more oriented to the Word of God in its power and efficacy than to images. To be sure, John Wesley in his own day rightly cautioned the Methodists against an improper use of images in his essay “The Origin of Image Worship Among Christians.” Mindful of the difficult task of evangelizing both Jews and Muslims (who were ever on guard against idolatry), he wrote: “Our religious worship must be governed by the power of faith, not by the power of imagination.”

5. Episcopacy. Abraham’s contention that episcopacy is a canon of the church (in other words, that a particular polity has been inspired and legitimized by the Holy Spirit), indicates that canonical theism does not focus on the primitive, first-century church in a normative way since during that century the terms “presbyter” and “bishop” were used interchangeably. To be sure, it was not until the second century that a monarchical bishop (the kind the canonical theists want) began to appear. Consequently, in this view, congregational and presbyterian forms of polity can only be considered equally aberrant, a departure from the canonical tradition that supposedly emerged. But has the proper form of church government been revealed in the same way as the gospel has been revealed? Such polity matters are best left open, allowing for differences in theological traditions, though canonical theism wants the whole matter closed.

The postulation of the episcopacy as a canon of the church may prove to be problematic in yet another way. During the first millennium, when the church elevated the office of the bishop as a defensive move against heresy, it was only men, and not women, who functioned in this role. Here the canonical theists face a dilemma. On the one hand, they may argue for an all male episcopacy (and priesthood as well) for the sake of consistency since this is what arose during the first thousand years. Even today neither Eastern Orthodoxy nor Roman Catholicism permit women to serve the church as either bishops or priests largely on the basis of an appeal to this same tradition. Such a view, however, is hardly satisfactory to Protestants, both liberal and evangelical, given the significant theological work that has been done in the twentieth century in terms of filling out the implications of what it means for women to be created in nothing less than the image and likeness of God.

On the other hand, canonical theists may affirm the appropriateness of women being ordained as both priests (ministers) and bishops, but such a view would lack consistency in terms of their own principles. It would fly in the face of the received tradition (and the supposed canons associated with it), the privileged and revelatory period of the first thousand years. Not surprisingly, the book, *Canonical Theism*, is dominated by male voices (there’s only one female author) and the whole question of the status of women in the church is politely ignored.

Another problem that canonical theism faces as it legitimizes the ministry of the first millennium church is that it must bring forward the notion of a priest (and all that this term entails) and not the Protestant notion of “a minister of Word and Table.” These supposed ministerial canons of the early hierarchical church, coupled with the alleged canonical liturgies that are also deemed binding on the whole community, issue in an understanding of ministry that is sacerdotal in its workings and detracts from the unique mediation of Jesus Christ.

**Canonical Theism and Theology**

When a particular period of the rich and complicated history of the church is privileged, the succeeding ages and social locations may virtually lose their voice. It then becomes difficult to maintain the organic and dynamic unity of the church across time as well as the possibility of reform. This phenomenon is nowhere more evident than in canonical theism’s estimate of the task of theology that largely devolves upon bringing forward the theological products of Christians of an earlier age. So understood, systematic theology becomes the “rational articulation and self-critical appropriation of the canonical doctrines of the church as related to the ongoing spiritual and intellectual formation of Christians in the church.”

Put another way, canonical theism actually operates with two definitions or ways of doing theology. Theologians of the first millennium, such as Augustine or Gregory Nazianzus, are permitted to freely undertake the task of constructive theology, interacting with and being influenced by their own broader (Latin and Hellenistic) cultures. But this is precisely what is denied twenty-first century theologians. Instead, the latter are restricted to the “tradition-ing” task of simply bringing forward

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the finished theological reflections of others, as if the genius of the gospel were exhausted in the first thousand years of reflection.

Here the hope and promise of genuine constructive theology, so necessary for a contemporary setting, has been reduced to the prospect of catechesis, as is evident in Abraham’s further claim that “at its core, systematic theology is a robust, rigorous form of university-level catechesis.”

One of the blind spots of canonical theism is that its advocates actually believe that theology, understood as catechesis, with an emphasis on receptiveness and docility, would actually be in accordance with the methodological rigor of the disciplines at the university level. Such an observation is not to suggest, however, that serious theological reflection does not belong at the university level—it clearly does, but only that catechesis is perhaps by no means the best approach.

**Canonical Theism and Church History**

Apart from theology, one of the most problematic aspects of canonical theism is undoubtedly its reading of church history. Well ensconced in a “catholic paradigm,” canonical theists view the first thousand years, not in a descriptive way, taking into account the diverse Western and Eastern traditions, but in a way (focusing on the alleged canons) that only sees unity, even if that unity is not clearly present. Accordingly, this backward-looking approach is actually an invitation to Western churches to retreat to the accumulated wisdom of the tenth or eleventh century as if this theological move would somehow resolve the current problems of mainline denominations, “doctrinal amnesia” among them.

The basic and enduring difficulty is that canonical theism never once acknowledges the all-too-human nature of its canons, including the writings of church fathers, informed by sinful, diminished views of women and ecumenical church councils, some of which (the seventh, for instance) were informed by the ugliest of politics. Even John Wesley in his own day, conservative though he was, freely acknowledged in grace and humility that church traditions may not always be the best guide to real Christianity. Abraham and his followers appear impervious to any calls for reform since the canons they champion constitute as a class the unquestionable standard by which various denominations are judged. In short, human tradition in canonical theism is virtually on par with the divine revelation of Holy Scripture itself.

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70 Ibid., 300.
Canonical Theism and Western Christianity

Canonical theism, in one respect, constitutes a decidedly anti-Western reading of the history of the church. Abraham admits that he “came to see that the life of the church was the reverse of what it had become in the West.”⁷¹ However, it is difficult to take the judgments of Abraham at face value, especially when Western Christianity in the form of Roman Catholicism or Protestantism is considered. Indeed, in an assertion that would no doubt surprise the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic church today, Abraham contends that “Christians in the West are woefully weak in their thinking about ecclesiology.”⁷² And his assessment of the Reformation and its leaders is also not without its problems. To illustrate, Abraham argues that, in terms of the vision of the Reformers, “All the past traditions of the Church must be set aside, for they are liable to error and corruption.”⁷³ However, such a judgment hardly characterizes the thought of Martin Luther who, in his assessment of church tradition, made a careful distinction between diaphora and adiaphora (what is essential and what is not). To be sure, many early church traditions were retained in the Lutheran communion so long as they did not contradict the clear teaching of the Bible.

Although Abraham not only confesses that “canonical theism arose out of a deep, even searing, dissatisfaction with current forms of liberal and conservative Protestantism,”⁷⁴ but also maintains that “Perhaps canonical theism is essentially post-Protestant at its core and cannot be absorbed within Protestantism,”⁷⁵ he nevertheless argues that “Canonical theism emerges as an option within Protestantism.”⁷⁶ However, in our judgment canonical theism is not actually post-Protestant but pre-Protestant given its static reading of the history of the church (whatever is, is


⁷² Abraham, The Logic of Renewal, 3.

⁷³ Abraham, Canon and Criterion, 178. Emphasis is mine.


⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.
right), one that sees little need for reform whether in the sixteenth century or in the twenty-first. Again, given the presuppositions of canonical theism, that is, its preference for institutional, formal, establishment religion, the Protestant Reformation in its Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican and Anabaptist forms can only be viewed, in several key respects, as a regrettable mistake.

Critical of the Reformation basis that informs many Protestant traditions, canonical theism then turns its attention to Pentecostalism and evangelicalism and develops a distorted view of these vibrant traditions. In charting the future of the church as he sees it, Abraham claims that “Pentecostalism and evangelicalism will dissolve into forms of ecclesial mutiny. . . .”77 Moreover, evangelicals (which include Pentecostals and Holiness folk) are supposedly “unable to sustain the dogma”78 which has been bequeathed to them. For one thing, they are “constantly breaking out into squabbles about eschatology, the nature of biblical tradition, and their doctrine of God.”79 And they have a tendency “to spawn forms of liberal and radical Protestantism that constantly erode precious components of the Christian faith. . . .”80 Evangelicals supposedly have an “endemic tendency . . . to collapse into an anthropomorphic vision of the Christian faith . . . staring at themselves staring at God.”81

Abraham’s method, in part, consists in seeing the weaknesses of evangelicalism, not its strengths, and the strengths of canonical theism (actually, the Eastern Orthodox tradition) and not its weaknesses. And yet, after this stereotypical litany of ills (which caricatures some genuine problems of evangelicalism), Abraham then welcomes the help of evangelicals in furthering the canonical theism agenda.82 He then claims that

77 Abraham, et al., Canonical Theism, xv. This regrettable course of events will happen “if they do not find a bigger horizon in which to operate.”
78 Abraham, Canon and Criterion, 336-337.
79 Abraham, The Logic of Renewal, 155-56.
80 Abraham, Canonical Theism, 256.
81 Ibid., 266. One of the many complaints of canonical theists directed against John Wesley is that his standard sermons are “too anthropocentric,” a judgment that indicates perhaps a failure to comprehend the nature and purpose of this body of literature. For one thing, Wesley’s sermons focus not on second-order theological reflection (the details of the doctrine of the Trinity, for example) but on practical divinity, the elements that make up the vibrant and engaging actualization of grace along the way of salvation.
82 Ibid., 270.
canonical theism “might well be described as a new and surprising version of evangelicalism.” However, canonical theism undercuts the very Reformation basis upon which so much of Evangelicalism rests. How then is canonical theism a new version of evangelicalism?

If there is no need for the Reformation, then there is little need for Methodism because Methodism is both Protestant and Catholic at its core, representing a true via media. Simply put, remove the reforming impulse from Methodism and you no longer have Methodism. Moreover, from the observation that diverse interpretations of Wesley’s life and thought are possible, Abraham jumps to the conclusion that Wesleyan theology is dead. “Half a century of splendid historical investigation,” he exclaims, “has unwittingly become a worthy obituary notice for the death of the Wesleyan theological tradition.” Abraham lays the blame on John Wesley himself who “let loose a tradition that from the beginning was unstable . . . that fostered a latitudinarianism that he, himself, vehemently rejected.” And with the death of Wesleyan theology comes the demise of Methodism: “John Wesley was a brilliant leader and an able thinker,” Abraham admits, “yet the movement he reluctantly founded in the eighteenth century failed as a church to sustain its best insights and practices beyond a century and a half or so in North America.” Indeed, “Methodism as a determinate experiment . . . is over and gone.”

It is equally difficult to take seriously an additional claim made by Abraham. He contends that the Methodist tradition has “enormous difficulty securing a sufficiency of content and practice to nourish one’s spiritual life over time.” On the contrary, United Methodism today has all of

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83Ibid.
85 Ibid., 15.
86 Abraham, The Logic of Renewal, 2.
87 Abraham, “The End of Wesleyan Theology,” 17. It is an error to think that Methodism as a theological tradition rises or falls in the wake of a broad and inclusive discussion of the contributions of its founder. Methodism, historically understood, is not fully encompassed in a particular theology but also represents a number of practices, disciplines, liturgical suggestions, as well as a way of living that cannot be neatly reduced to specific theological formulations.
the following elements which are more than sufficient to keep it on a proper course: Sacred Scripture, a Wesleyan interpretative tradition (which is so very precious for the life of the universal church), bishops, creeds, articles of religion (based on the Anglican Reformation’s Thirty-Nine Articles), sacraments, saints (John, Charles, Samuel and Susanna Wesley, among others), councils, conferences, and ecclesiastical law (Book of Discipline).

**Canonical Theism and Eastern Orthodoxy**

Although no one theological tradition carries out the full agenda of canonical theism, Eastern Orthodoxy does approach the ideal. In fact, Abraham contends that “canonical theism is clearly compatible with Eastern Orthodoxy . . . .” 88 He invites Western Christians to consider this alternative tradition as the way forward. From icons to an exclusive male episcopacy, from constructive theology that ceased somewhere in the tenth century to liturgies that suggest priestcraft and sacerdotalism, Eastern Orthodoxy has virtually all that canonical theists desire. The problem, of course, is that canonical theism (as well as Eastern Orthodoxy) is well ensconced in a particular paradigm of the church that can hardly be mistaken for its universality.

Helpful in this regard is the careful historical work of Hans Küng who has distinguished six paradigms in the life of the church: (1) Early Christian Apocalyptic, (2) Early Church Hellenistic, (3) Mediaeval Roman Catholic, (4) Reformation Protestant, (5) Enlightenment Modern, and (6) Contemporary Ecumenical. 89 As such, canonical theism and Eastern Orthodoxy typify paradigm two which is then universalized and offered as an answer to the alleged faults of the remaining paradigms. Canonical theists will likely take issue with such a designation and bring forth arguments that employ their own specialized understanding of “canon,” falling back on the distinction between “canon” and “criterion.”

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88 Abraham, et al., *Canonical Theism*, 4. In another form of an *ad hominem* argument, Abraham accuses me of “animus against Eastern Orthodoxy.” Nothing could be farther from the truth. I fully recognize my Christian brothers and sisters in this communion of faith and welcome them to the Lord’s table where we can conjointly celebrate one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. Cf. Abraham, *A Response*, 71.

This move, however, would just be a way of evading the ongoing historiographical problem of arguing within a particular paradigm of the church and not beyond it, of failing to recognize, once again, the diversity of traditions of the ecumenical church.

Moreover, canonical theism fails to recognize how the canonical tradition is understood within Eastern Orthodoxy itself. A distinction must be made between a programmatic use of the canonical tradition (as lived throughout the centuries in Eastern Orthodoxy) and an instrumental use (as embraced, for instance, by contemporary Protestant traditions for the sake of renewal). To illustrate, episcopacy as a canon is understood by the Eastern Orthodox in a programmatic sense, not in an instrumental one. In other words, this church office, putatively guaranteed by the Holy Spirit, must not be conceived apart from the apostolic succession which gives it both expression and legitimacy. The bishops of whatever Wesleyan denomination are not and have never been a part of the apostolic succession in the eyes of Eastern Orthodoxy (and Rome), therefore, their orders are viewed as invalid and so is the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper they administer. In other words, from the Orthodox perspective, Jesus Christ established a sacred community in history and the canons cannot be understood apart from that same community whose very integrity is guaranteed by apostolic succession. Consequently, the instrumental use of the canons by Protestants can only be deemed as invalid by the Orthodox precisely because it is in some sense a-historical. It removes the canons from their proper context, from the sacred community (i.e., Eastern Orthodoxy).

Conclusion

What then is the status on canonical theism? It is little more than an intellectual and spiritual project. It is the creation of scholars critical of Protestantism in all its forms, scholars who fail to appreciate the ongoing promise and the necessity of the Reformation. Canonical theism lacks the careful balance, the intricate nuance of John Wesley’s theology, a theology that, because of its careful handling of both Catholic and Protestant elements, is able to offer a more satisfying and sophisticated answer to the contemporary ecclesiastical and theological malaise. Consequently, the life of canonical theism at this point is chiefly limited to universities, scholarly conferences, publication houses, and a few dissertations. This narrow influence is not likely to broaden in the days ahead since this movement is neither rooted in any particular ecclesiastical tradition nor
does it represent the next logical step, the outworking, of any western tradition.

Herein lies a dilemma. If, on the one hand, canonical theism represents anything new, then such recently discovered insights do not belong in the life of the church according to canonical theism’s own antiquarian presuppositions. If, on the other hand, canonical theism simply brings forward a mass of canons and traditions in an uncritical way, never factoring in distortion, sinfulness, and humanly made tradition, then it is best perhaps to direct its devotees to the Eastern Orthodox communion that is well represented here.

Even if canonical theism were successful, if church tradition (even in terms of canon law) were given a predominating, binding, and unquestionable role, then this would likely result in the unintended consequences that the “catholic paradigm” has ever been reluctant to acknowledge throughout the history of the church. That is, tradition, so elevated, would detract from the clarity of the kerygma and thereby help to render the gospel opaque. It also would leave much nominal Christianity in its wake. In time, evangelical leaders (just like Wesley in his own day) would be called forth to address this overly institutionalized and tradition-laden church. This is the larger historical cycle playing throughout the history of the church, especially from the time of the Reformation, of which canonical theism appears hardly aware. Indeed, canonical theism has more in common with eighteenth-century Anglicanism than it does with the Methodism that called it to repentance. How, then, does such a project represent “renewal”?

In short, if canonical theism respects the integrity of the Wesleyan Protestant traditions and encourages these communions to pay more attention to their own well-established means of grace, then this encouragement will likely prove to be helpful. If, however, canonical theism actually undermines these Western traditions in its celebration of what in reality is an Eastern paradigm, then no amount of emphasis on the means of grace could ever make such a move a viable option.
No historian has significantly examined how the issues of segregation, home missions, and black autonomy impacted African-American participation and faith in the mid-twentieth century Church of the Nazarene. Roger Bowman, a minister in the denomination, wrote a popular mission study book over 30 years ago on Nazarene evangelical mission among blacks. He briefly detailed how black Nazarenes cooperated with denominational leaders to organize churches, Sunday schools, and other ministries. He also outlined how black Nazarenes in the South ministered within the Gulf Central District, a segregated jurisdiction formed in 1953 to govern and oversee the activities of black churches in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

Bowman’s basic thesis was that the Gulf Central District “was not organized as an instrument of segregation but as an instrument of evangelism” to provide for “closer supervision and greater support” of black churches. Because of this focus, he did not examine other organizational, theological, racial, and ministerial issues that shaped black participation in the Church of the Nazarene in the late 1950s and 1960s. Other denom-

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national historians, including Mendell Taylor and W. T. Purkiser, agreed that the Gulf Central District’s main purpose was to “give closer supervision and assistance to the [black] churches.” But no in-depth study exists of how black ministerial practices and beliefs strengthened the district’s churches and ministries. This article addresses that issue by showing that the evangelistic commitment of district superintendent Warren Rogers and other district leaders helped African Americans in the South strengthen their churches and ministries to achieve organizational stability and decision-making power.

Evangelization and Black Autonomy

Before 1958, white leaders and pastors exercised executive, ministerial, and financial sway over the Gulf Central District. Leon Chambers, one of these, was appointed as the first district superintendent in 1953. Alpin P. Bowes, another white leader, was a staff member of the denomination’s Department of Home Missions and its liaison with the district. In this period, white leaders struggled to start new black churches and recruit more black pastors. The district had only three ordained elders in 1955—Lula Williams, pastor of Fitkin Memorial Church of the Nazarene in Meridian, Mississippi; Joe Edwards at Alice Street Church of the Nazarene in Oklahoma City; and D. A. Murray. Three licensed ministers were also pastors—Leslie Casmere at West End Church of the Nazarene in San Antonio, Texas; C. C. Johnson at Columbus Church of the Nazarene in Columbus, Mississippi; and E. W. Wilson, pastor of Bethel Church of the Nazarene in Shawmut, Alabama, near Lanett.3

This situation had changed very little by 1957, though the number of churches had increased to thirteen. New congregations were now organized in: Brookhaven, Mississippi; Calvert, Alabama; Columbus, Texas; Memphis, Tennessee; Miami, Florida; Nashville, Tennessee; and Richmond, Virginia. Other missions and Sunday schools were established in Chattanooga, Tennessee; Concord, North Carolina; Mashulaville, Missis-


3*Gulf Central District Church of the Nazarene, Third Annual Assembly Journal* (Feb. 28-Mar 2, 1955): 14-15. All annual journals of the Gulf Central District can be accessed at the Nazarene Archives, Lenexa, Kansas.
sippi; and Newport News, Virginia. But Rev. C. C. Johnson was the only newly ordained elder during this period, and the list of licensed ministers had increased only to seven with the addition of Roland Chopfield at Chattanooga mission station; R. S. Green at San Antonio’s West End Church of the Nazarene; David C. Moore, not placed; Boyd L. Proctor at Mt. Zion in Richmond; Lawrence Reddick at Overcoming Church of the Nazarene in Miami; and Henry Terry at the Friendship Church in Memphis.4

This pattern of limited growth began changing after Warren Rogers followed Chambers as superintendent shortly before the district’s Sixth Annual Assembly, at which Chambers introduced Rogers as the new district leader. The minutes note that Rogers “brought a stirring message from Acts 1:8” after he was presented to the assembly. When he was finished, the altar rail was “filled with seekers.” The denomination’s Board of General Superintendents had appointed Rogers to this position several weeks earlier.5 Born and raised in the Deep South, Rogers had a reputation as an effective minister.6 He was formerly pastor of churches in Indianapolis and Detroit. In Indianapolis, Rogers helped his congregation acquire property and attain a small but well-established membership. In Detroit, the Jubilee Church of the Nazarene became a healthy and vibrant congregation under his leadership.7

Rogers took immediate steps to strengthen the Gulf Central District. He established a district paper, *The Gulf Central Informer*, to improve communication across the jurisdiction and keep pastors and laity abreast of district affairs. In his first year, Rogers conducted revivals at churches in Memphis, San Antonio, Chattanooga, and Orlando. He believed that revivals would improve the people’s spiritual condition and empower

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5 This appointment was made after Chambers tendered his resignation in early 1958.
6 Rogers was born in Winnsboro, Louisiana, in 1917. After four years, the family moved to the Mississippi Delta and worked on a variety of cotton plantations in and around Alligator and Clarksville, Mississippi. Sometime before 1941, Rogers moved to Akron, Ohio, where he became a member of the Kenmore Church of the Nazarene. See Warren Rogers, “Letter Written to R. W. Hurn” (September 9, 1972): 1-3, Nazarene Archives; and Bowman, 43.
them to develop new congregations. His revival in Chattanooga helped the congregation there increase its membership, while the meetings in Orlando laid the foundation for a new congregation that was planted there before the end of the year.\(^8\)

Through revivals and visitation, Rogers also helped to organize two other churches and increase district membership, bringing the total district membership to 218. His efforts encouraged people to join the Nazarene Young People’s Society (NYPS) and the Nazarene Foreign Missionary Society. Rogers advanced district interests in his first year by helping start new churches and evangelizing in various black communities of the South.

Other black pastors and laity contributed. In February 1958, Rev. Joe Edwards, pastor of Providence Church of the Nazarene in Oklahoma City, appealed to all Nazarenes through the denominational paper, *Herald of Holiness*, asking them to pray for (1) more black churches to be established, (2) more funds to improve church structures, and (3) additional African-American preachers. Edwards emphasized the importance of prayer:

> When people pray they will see the urgent need of more churches and Sunday schools in our district among our people. When people pray, they will want to enter into that co-laboring with God to bring into existence the things we pray for. This is my prayer for 1958. We need more churches, better church buildings, and more preachers of our race; but most of all we need more people of my race who are willing to suffer and die for this great cause. . . . For it is the will of God that black men and women, too, be saved and sanctified in our Southland, where more than ten million of the seventeen million Negroes live.\(^9\)

Edwards’ statements reveal the importance placed on the continuing need to develop racial autonomy within the district. He believed this could be attained by training black laity to take a more active role in their congrefs-


gations and by developing African-American pastors who could effectively evangelize southern blacks.

Many heeded Edwards’ call in the early 1960s. By 1961, Arthur Jackson (a woman) headed the district’s Nazarene Foreign Missionary Society, while Archie Williams\(^{10}\) chaired the district’s Church School Board, and Roland Chopfield led the Nazarene Young People’s Society. Likewise, Rogers, along with Edwards, Jackson, Chopfield, and R. W. Cunningham oversaw and led the District Advisory Board and the Orders and Relations and Ministerial Studies Board.\(^{11}\) Cunningham pulled double duty: he was a church pastor in Charleston, West Virginia, and simultaneously president of Nazarene Bible Institute, which trained African-American ministers. Black leadership growth also occurred on other district committees. By the third year of Rogers’ administration, seven more assembly committees operated—for a total of twelve.\(^{12}\) All but one was chaired by an African American.

These boards and committees expanded in the early and mid-1960s and remained dominated by black pastors and laity. By 1962 the District Advisory Board had no white ministers on its committee and the Board of Orders and Relations and Ministerial Studies had a single white member—Alpin P. Bowes, representing the Department of Home Missions. Black ministers or laity headed all twelve district committees. These chairmen/women included Archie Williams, Roy L. Fralin, Joe Edwards, Charles Johnson, “Mrs.” Roy L. Fralin, Roland Chopfield, Eddie Burnett, Edward Greene, Boyd Proctor, and Warren Rogers.\(^{13}\) The District NFMS added five more officers that year, including Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, Secretary of Study, and Secretary of Publicity and Star Society. By the following year, the NYPS had followed the lead of the NFMS and

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\(^{10}\)Williams was the newly licensed minister who pastored the three-year-old congregation in Orlando.

\(^{11}\)Gulf Central District Church of the Nazarene, Ninth Annual Assembly Journal (August 3, 1961): 5.

\(^{12}\)Those committees were: Church Schools, Education, Evangelism, NFMS, Home Missions, Memoirs, NYPS, Nominations, Public Morals, Publishing Interests, Resolutions, and Ways and Means. Ibid., 23-26.

\(^{13}\)In 1962, Rogers headed up the Nominations Committee, the Ways and Means Committee, the District Advisory Board, and the Orders and Relations and Ministerial Studies Board. See, Gulf Central District Church of the Nazarene, Tenth Annual Assembly Journal (July 13-14, 1962): 24-30.
elected a Vice-President (Charles Johnson), a Secretary (Roy L. Fralin), and a Director of Junior Fellowship (“Mrs.” Archie Williams).

These groups began asking local churches to develop their own missionary and youth societies. At the 1962 District Assembly, the NYPS challenged churches and ministers to develop ministries that would help more young people develop their knowledge of the Bible so their energies could be “channeled to God.” They emphasized two points:

1. We encourage each pastor to properly organize an NYPS. If you have a sizable group of young people, you are by the constitution of the NYPS to divide them into three classes: junior (ages 4-11), teen (ages 12-19), young adult (ages 20-40). . . . We sincerely feel our youth should get together annually, or once every two years. . . . This we feel is a must to have fellowship with our youth. We commend that you meet together once per week, but keep your meeting where God can approve, and please give them an active part in your regular service. The tireless energy of youth must be channeled to God.

2. The pastor and local church president must be responsible. Bible study should remain supreme in our NYPS. If what you are doing is not a problem, you are either not doing your best or it is not worth doing. Remember our goal—300 by 1963.14

Similar requests to enlarge the constituency of local chapters, increase financial budgets, and evangelize southern blacks were made by the NFMS in the early to mid 1960s. At the 1961 District Assembly, they made a series of recommendations. Three years later, Arthur Jackson and the Nazarene World Missionary Society (NWMS) (formerly NFMS) challenged each congregation to increase its membership, purchase missionary books, hold at least one missionary meeting per month, pray for missionaries, and increase world mission giving. The committee also recommended that by 1965 there be at least 20 societies, 450 members, 250 prayer and fasting members, 200 Other Sheep15 subscriptions, 50 junior readers, and $200 in Alabaster offerings.16

14Ibid., 27.
15The Other Sheep was a monthly missionary journal that was started in 1911. For further reference, see Purkiser, 41-42.
These calls for greater participation were bolstered by the fact that committees like the NWMS had experienced financial and membership growth in the first half of the decade. In 1959, total giving for the NWMS stood at $68. By 1962, when the district held its first NWMS convention, that total had jumped to $588—more than the combined sum of the Sunday school department and the NYPS. The NWMS had 13 local societies and 166 members that year, and by 1964 there were 16 societies and overall membership stood at 337. Jackson attributed this growth to God, but acknowledged that the NWMS had to continue growing and improving if they were going to “save” more people for Christ.17

Total membership in the district missionary society remained steady despite the transfer of five Florida churches from the Gulf Central District’s jurisdiction.18 In their report to the Fifteenth Annual District Assembly, Jackson and her committee stated that there were 226 district NWMS members. At the following assembly, district NWMS membership had increased to 266 and 13 societies were supporting the Nazarene mission enterprise around the globe.19 Jackson encouraged this growth. In reports and writings, she urged NWMS members to pray and fast if their work was going to expand and if they were going to have an impact on spreading the message of Christ’s love among southern blacks. In an article in July, 1966, she expressed her theological convictions on these topics. Two years later, she challenged NWMS members to remember that Christ had called them to spread “the good news” among African Americans with zeal and fervor:

A ministry has been entrusted to us, namely, to communicate the good news that man can be reconciled to God. As Christians we want to see people saved. How do we go about it?

17 Gulf Central District Church of the Nazarene, Seventh Annual Assembly Journal, 31; Gulf Central District Church of the Nazarene, 35, and Gulf Central District Church of the Nazarene, Twelfth Annual Assembly Journal, 25-26.

18 After being removed, the churches were governed by the district in which they were located. The decision to integrate the Florida churches will be discussed later on in the paper.

This is a person-to-person ministry. God is looking to the church through world missions to be a bright light shining in a world of darkness. We are responsible to God and man. God demands our best. The time has come that we must be courageous leaders, and point our people back to God.\(^{20}\)

Like the missionary society, the district Nazarene Young Peoples Society also contributed to the Gulf Central District’s evangelistic thrust, organizational strength, and racial autonomy in the mid to late 1960s. It challenged churches to evangelize youth so that more young people could be “saved” and incorporated into southern black church life. Roland Chopfield, the NYPS president, emphasized this urgent need in 1965:

> We are especially emphasizing NYPS work in our district. We must organize our society by gathering together the saved from 4 to 40. The way to start is to start, it is as simple as that. The time is now. . . . All of this requires work, but work brings sums not subtraction, or division, and sums bring joy and good reports at our meetings.\(^{21}\)

Similarly, Edward Husband, a recent graduate of Nazarene Bible Institute, became district NYPS president in 1966 and challenged each church to organize a local NYPS so that young people could receive salvation.\(^{22}\) Like the NWMS and other interests of the Gulf Central District, the NYPS’s overarching goal was to evangelize “souls.” This was stressed in reports to the district and in annual conventions. At the 1968 annual NYPS convention, Chopfield delivered a message entitled “They Turned the World Upside,” which encouraged and inspired the convention to carry on its work with zeal and fervor.\(^{23}\) As these voices and challenges were uttered, more local youth societies were being formed and more young people were joining them. Of the nineteen district churches operat-


\(^{22}\)Gulf Central District Church of the Nazarene, Fourteenth Annual Assembly Journal, 25.

\(^{23}\)Ibid., 28, and Gulf Central District Church of the Nazarene, Sixteenth Annual Assembly Journal, 29-30.
ing in 1967, twelve had NYPS societies with a total of 298 members. That number increased to 374 within two years.\textsuperscript{24}

As NYPS membership increased, district superintendent Warren Rogers was able to recruit more black students to prepare for Christian ministry at Nazarene Bible Institute. Rogers believed that the school was the “life line” for developing black leadership on the Gulf Central District.\textsuperscript{25} Thus, he traveled extensively and encouraged more young people to attend NBI. After finishing his annual college tour in 1966, he reported that 215 young people had expressed interest in attending NBI with the explicit purpose of training for Christian ministry, and NBI’s student enrollment grew to 42 by 1968.\textsuperscript{26}

The financial and membership growth in the youth and missionary societies and at Nazarene Bible Institute were occurring at the same time that Rogers was laboring to recruit more pastors and helping start more churches. While few pastors were recruited to the district in its first five years, Rogers made ministerial recruitment one of his primary district goals. He believed that the district would not survive unless it had stable leadership from its clergy. The challenge was to bring enough clergy into district ranks so that its churches could become more autonomous and self-sustaining.

Because of this need, Rogers recommended in his second year as district superintendent that the district (1) create two new churches, (2) establish two self-sustaining congregations, and (3) enroll ten students at NBI by the following district assembly. In the previous year, only one congregation, Providence Church of the Nazarene in Oklahoma City, was added to the list of self-supporting churches that provided the pastor a full-time salary.\textsuperscript{27} Most congregations were small and had bi-vocational

\textsuperscript{24}Gulf Central District Church of the Nazarene, Fifteenth Annual Assembly Journal, 20 and Gulf Central District Church of the Nazarene, Seventeenth Annual Assembly Journal (July 25, 1969): 15.


\textsuperscript{26}Warren Rogers, “Nazarene Training College,” The Gulf Central Informer 10, no. 6 (May 1968): 1.

\textsuperscript{27}Gulf Central District Church of the Nazarene, Eighth Annual Assembly Journal, 22.
ministers. Rogers understood these difficulties and made it a point to commend the church in Oklahoma City when its people called Joe Edwards as their full-time pastor. Likewise, Rogers praised the San Antonio West End Church of the Nazarene when they had generated sufficient funds to build a new church.

Such experiences were increasingly common in subsequent years as more black pastors joined the district and more churches became self-sustaining. In 1961, twelve of nineteen churches paid their budgets, while Gorman Memorial (Orlando, Florida) and Woodville (Richmond, Virginia) acquired their own church buildings. Two more pastors—Roland Chopfield and Ruben Davis—were ordained elders, and there were new licensed ministers: Roger Bowman, Frank Bryant, Eddie Burnett, Roy Fralin, and Charles P. Johnson. The Gulf Central District now had twelve licensed ministers who were pastors on the district.29

By 1964, there were twenty-two churches. Three were organized after 1961: New Prospect Church of the Nazarene (Memphis, Tennessee), Taft Church of the Nazarene (Taft, Florida), and Praise Temple (Orlando, Florida). Church finances grew and all but eight congregations paid their budgets in full.30 By the following year, district church membership stood at 501, representing over half of all “Negro” Nazarene members in the continental United States.31 There were nine ordained elders on the dis-

28 Each church also was required to pay their district budgets, which added an extra burden to their financial difficulties. In fact, of the seventeen churches in existence in 1960, only eight paid their budgets in full. Of those eight, only the church in Oklahoma City had to pay $25.00 to both the general and district budgets. The rest of the congregations did not have to pay more than $20.00 to either budget. These figures alone seem to reveal that most of the churches on the GCD did not have enough members or enough income to support a full time pastor at the start of the 1960s. Ibid., 26.

29 Gulf Central District Church of the Nazarene, Ninth Annual Assembly Journal, 5-30.

30 Gulf Central District Church of the Nazarene, Twelfth Annual Assembly Journal, 19, 22.

31 Gulf Central District Church of the Nazarene, Thirteenth Annual Assembly Journal, 21.
trict, while thirteen licensed pastors oversaw the work of other churches and ministries on the Gulf Central District.32

There were changes on the district after the decision was made to transfer all five African-American churches in Florida and integrate them into the predominantly white Florida District. Rogers and the Gulf Central District Advisory Board made this decision in May, 1966.33 This cut into the Gulf Central District’s overall strength, but Rogers and the district still organized two new churches that year—Johnson Chapel in Prentiss, Mississippi, and Rogers Chapel in Nashville, Tennessee—bringing the district total back to nineteen. All but one paid their budgets in full, and total giving equaled $27,972—about one fourth of all money given by “black” (i.e., West Indian, Cape Verdean, and African American) churches in the United States.34

These numbers remained relatively stable until the Gulf Central District was dissolved in 1969. The year after the Florida decision, the district still had nine ordained elders actively ministering and a total membership of 455. Total giving for the year reached almost $37,000 and every congregation paid its general and district budgets in full.35 Likewise, by 1969, nineteen congregations operated with an overall member-

32 That list of ordained elders included Winston Best, Eddie Burnett, Roland Chopfield, Ruben Davis, Joe Edwards, Charles Johnson, Warren Rogers, Archie Williams, and “Mrs.” Lula Williams. Those recorded on the licensed minister roll were Leonard Adams, Leslie Casmere, “Mrs.” Cora Dials, Raymond Harvey, Edward Husband, Mrs. Janie Johnson, Charles Jones, Christopher Joseph, Mrs. Norvell Lewis, Miss Joe Ann Marshall, Elonza Pugh, Earl Joe Walker, and Eddie Lee Walker. For further reference, see Gulf Central District Church of the Nazarene, Thirteenth Annual Assembly Journal, 6-10.

33 Gulf Central District Church of the Nazarene, Fourteenth Annual Assembly Journal, 17, and Warren Rogers, “Florida Churches Transfer to Florida District,” The Gulf Central Informer 8, no. 1 (July, 1966): 1-2. At this time the Methodist Church was trying to dismantle the Central Jurisdiction, the segregated conference that governed all the black churches in the UMC. After several years of debate, the denomination decided, on August 20, 1967, to gradually transition African American churches into their geographical conferences. For further reference on how certain events and persons impacted this decision, see Thomas, 137-147.

34 Gulf Central District Church of the Nazarene, Fourteenth Annual Assembly Journal, 15-21.

35 Gulf Central District Church of the Nazarene, Fifteenth Annual Assembly Journal, 20, 35.
ship of 532, representing nearly one third of all black Nazarenes in North America. In this, its last year of operation, the district raised almost $50,000 for local and global missions.36

**Emphasis on Evangelism, Not Racism**

By the late 1960s, the Gulf Central District had attained a certain degree of autonomy within the denomination, though it was segregated from other southern churches. Black pastors and laity controlled their own district. They made ministerial and financial decisions that impacted the life and direction of black southern congregations, and they sent their own voting delegates to the denomination’s General Assemblies. These actions enabled Black leaders and lay people to exercise decision-making power over their jurisdiction, which enabled district boards, committees, pastors, and parishioners to strengthen and develop their own ministries and contribute more effectively to Nazarene home missions.

African Americans on the Gulf Central District attained these ends because of their commitment to “holiness evangelism” and their willingness often to publicly overlook how racism impacted their life within the denomination. This commitment was exemplified in Rogers’ address at the 1960 District Assembly. He noted that a main objective of his ministry was to evangelize African Americans:

> To present my second report as district superintendent of the Gulf Central District in this eighth assembly brings me face to face, not only with the submitting of my report, but also with the fresh awareness of the challenge, which has been the driving power in my very being, for the evangelization of my people.37

Roger’s desire was not to merely “save” southern blacks but to see them become “sanctified” Nazarenes. One way that he implemented his objectives was through committees that recommended how to carry out evangelism and indoctrinate pastors and laity. The Education Committee, the Evangelism Committee, the Home Missions Committee, and the Public Morals Committee were among the entities created to meet these ends. In

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36*Gulf Central District Church of the Nazarene, Seventeenth Annual Assembly Journal*, 15, 26.

37*Gulf Central District Church of the Nazarene, Eighth Annual Assembly Journal*, 20.
their yearly reports, the committees stressed to churches the importance of evangelizing and developing sanctified Nazarenes. In 1961, the Evangelism Committee made the following recommendations, which were approved by the District Assembly:

1. That each church endeavor to have at least two revivals per year.
2. That if the church is not able financially to support an evangelist, then the pastor should conduct his own revival.
3. That each church promote a personal evangelism program for witnessing for Christ.
4. That our worship should be with joy and blessing and freedom in the Lord.38

On top of holding evangelistic services, the Public Morals Committee suggested:

1. That each church in the Gulf Central District read and exhort at least once per month in a regular service from the church Manual concerning the moral standards of the church.
2. That each church should impress upon the minds of all Christians, and especially our youth, the importance of simplicity in hair dress and other manner of dress.
3. That each pastor should stress the danger and possible results of intemperate living.
4. That each church should warn the people about the danger of close relationship with unconverted people of low morals.39

Four years later, after the Civil Rights Bill had been passed and after civil rights groups like the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee had achieved some successes in desegregating public facilities in Alabama and in establishing voting centers in small Mississippi towns, the district, along with these committees, remained committed to evangelizing, holding revivals, and developing the personal morality of black Nazarenes without addressing issues related to civil rights or racism at the district level. In fact, the Edu-

38 Gulf Central District Church of the Nazarene, Ninth Annual Assembly Journal, 24.
39 Ibid., 26.
cation Committee and the Public Morals Committee made no recommendations about how to evangelize or express one’s faith publicly during this time of social unrest. The Education Committee continued stressing the importance of revivals, while the Public Morals Committee suggested that:

1. Our pastors should read our *Manual* to our people each month, especially to our young people in the days in which we now live.
2. In all of our young people’s meetings, we should not fail to warn them against immoral television programs and to read good material.
3. We should all stress to our young people about the kind of company they keep, and about their dress.40

Likewise, in the 1965 and 1966 issues of *The Gulf Central Informer*, Rogers did not state how southern blacks were to engage civil rights or other issues related to racism in society or in the church. Instead, Rogers stressed the importance of creating new congregations, new church buildings, and “winning souls” for Christ.41 Later he explained the importance of shunning “worldly styles” and living holy lives:

The theory of salvation and sanctification is not enough, Gulf Central Nazarenes; but rather true holiness is required by God. It must be demonstrated in a spirit of forgiveness, meekness, love, long-suffering, compassion, seeking the salvation of others, suffering for righteousness’ sake, the wearing of apparel as becoming to holiness, and taking on the whole likeness of Christ. More should be said from our Nazarene pulpits concerning Nazarenes who endeavor to keep up with the styles, fashions, and tempo of the world today. . . . There is a middle-of-the-road position which we as holiness people must take, and the Word of God gives support. . . . Talking holiness is not enough, but rather it is a life to be lived day by day.42

These examples show that Rogers and the majority of those on the district were committed, in practice and theory, to spreading “scriptural

40Gulf Central District Church of the Nazarene, Thirteenth Annual Assembly Journal, 25-29.
41See, for instance, *The Gulf Central Informer* 7, no. 2 (June, 1965) and *The Gulf Central Informer* 8, no. 1 (July, 1966).
42Ibid., 16.
holiness” among southern blacks without publicly challenging social or denominational racism. This is interesting to note considering that the Sixteenth General Assembly in 1964 adopted an official resolution against racism. The statement read as follows:

We, the members of the Sixteenth General Assembly of the Church of the Nazarene, wish to reiterate our historic stand of Christian compassion for men of all races. We believe that God is the Creator of all men and that of one blood are all men created. We believe that all races should have equality before law, including the right to vote, the right to equal educational opportunities, the right to earn a living according to one’s ability without discrimination, and the right to public facilities supported by taxation.

43 Rev. Charles Johnson was an exception to this general pattern. Johnson was the pastor of the Fitkin Memorial Church of the Nazarene in Meridian, Mississippi. Like other black pastors, Johnson arrived in Meridian to build up the small congregation and increase its income, ministries, and membership. However, after returning from the General Assembly in 1964, Johnson learned that one of his parishioners’ grandsons, James Chaney, had been killed along with two Jewish civil rights workers—Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman—in Philadelphia, Mississippi. The incident garnered widespread coverage in the media and prompted Johnson to become involved in the struggle for civil rights in and around Meridian. Soon, he organized the Meridian Action Committee (MAC), whose main function was to secure employment for African Americans throughout the city. Johnson also put together the Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC), which taught life and job skills to young blacks seeking employment. Over the next few years, Johnson was elected to city and county offices and headed one of the most influential committees in the county. The governor appointed him to one of his personal committees, and on three occasions during the presidencies of Lyndon Johnson and Jimmy Carter, Johnson was invited to the White House to attend banquets and meet with other governmental committees. See, Polly Abbleby, What Color is God’s Skin?: Stories of Ethnic Leaders in America (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1984), 28-42; and Kathy Trapp, “Another Title for Charles Johnson—Black Consultant,” Herald of Holiness, 1 August, 1983, 5-6.

44 W. T. Purkiser, “The Church Speaks on Current Issues,” Herald of Holiness, 5 August 1964, 12. In the same year, the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana), another predominantly white holiness body, also rendered a statement in support of civil rights legislation. See James Earl Massey, African Americans and the Church of God (Anderson University Press, 2005), 118-119, for further details.
Other Nazarenes wrote similarly to the *Herald of Holiness* in support of overcoming racism within the denomination. A pastor in New York stated that racism often kept white Nazarenes from fulfilling the Christian commandment to “love they neighbor as thyself.” A laywoman, “Mrs.” John Scott, expressed her desire to see the church take a stronger stand on civil rights and stated that the church’s relative silence was not compatible with the “gospel of holiness.”

Despite such claims, the majority of Nazarenes focused on evangelizing the world with the message of holiness. Even those who wrote articles about racism often focused on how it impeded evangelism. E. E. Barrett of Kankakee, Illinois, expressed this sentiment:

> We can safely be as socially minded and as revolutionary as our spiritual forefathers, who “turned the world upside down” or right side up. Guidelines for this are furnished by the fundamental principles of holiness, including the wholeness of love, righteousness, and justice. . . . Would not concern for people and social holiness both promote and aid evangelism?

A laywoman from Illinois followed a similar line of thinking:

> As Christians, we must take care that our testimony, our daily lives, are not marred by a misguided belief that any one race is inferior. . . . This is a situation for Christians nationwide—of all denominations—to give serious attention to in prayer, lest a principle be undermined, a nation destroyed, or a soul lost for eternity because racism, or whatever other name is used, blinds us to our central goal in life—winning souls to Christ.

Warren Rogers and other Gulf Central District leaders chose not to address issues related to civil rights at the district level because they believed, like many other Nazarenes, that their primary goals were to spread “scriptural holiness,” start new churches, recruit more pastors, and strengthen the district’s infrastructure. This does not mean that ministers

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on the Gulf Central District were complicit with segregation.48 Rather, it suggests that they worked to gain autonomy and decision-making authority within their congregations and over their jurisdiction. To actively attack denominational racism or to urge churches to get involved with civil rights could have deterred them from strengthening the infrastructure they had labored to build since the late 1950s.

Conclusion

One question still remains. What is learned from reconstructing the evangelistic and ministerial practices of southern black Nazarenes in the mid-20th century? First, blacks were primary contributors to the Church of the Nazarene’s evangelistic mission in the southern United States in the late 1950s and 1960s. This challenges popular notions that African Americans, because of their segregated status, were at the periphery of denominational development in the middle twentieth century. In fact, blacks were important in Nazarene expansion within a territory stretching from the wooded hills of Virginia to the western plains of Texas. African American churches and pastors exhibited diligence, fortitude, and self-determination—despite their secondary status within the denomination—as they systematically strengthened the Gulf Central District and the wider Church of the Nazarene in the South.

Also, in light of the recent Nazarene Centennial, the Gulf Central District’s story reminds us that contemporary issues of race and church organization will impact the future stories of Africans Americans and other American minorities who are committed to the church’s missional thrust. Will current or preceding denominational and ecclesiastical leaders provide just juridical space without diminishing or limiting the autonomy and empowerment of non-Anglo churches now governed by geographical districts? How and in what ways should American districts with predominantly white and non-white churches encourage shared leadership at the highest levels of governance? These and other questions remain to be answered.

48 Neither Rogers nor any other leader on the Gulf Central District encouraged blacks to accept second-class citizenship. When Charles Johnson became deeply involved in the civil rights struggle in Mississippi, he remained active on district boards and was never publicly criticized for his actions.
The Church of the Nazarene has expressed a renewed interest in returning to the writings and teaching of John Wesley. Many Nazarene educators believe it is essential to regain their theological identity in a pluralistic and postmodern culture. For example, Kent Hill, former president of Eastern Nazarene College in his address to Nazarene educators at the “Faith, Learning, and Living Conference” stated: “The critical, far-reaching issue facing Nazarene higher education in the twenty-first century is our identity” (1996, 7). He went on to say:

We will have the best opportunity to succeed in our mission if we recognize the importance of the extraordinary Wesleyan heritage that gave birth to our colleges . . . informing ourselves of the treasures of the Wesleyan tradition, and allowing its convictions to permeate our lives and our institutions, both inside and outside the classroom (Hill 1996, 7).

Hill’s address characterizes the concern of Nazarene educators about the need for a Wesleyan theology to inform Nazarene higher education.

The “Evangelical” Invasion

An array of educators and leaders in the Church of the Nazarene are also concerned that the influence of American evangelicalism has threatened the denomination’s Wesleyan-Holiness identity (Benefiel 1996;
Hoskins 1997; Drury 1995; Blevins 1998). For example, in 1995 the Church of the Nazarene placed its denominational emphasis on the recovery of its Wesleyan-Holiness identity as the center focus of a series of national meetings for pastors and other church leaders hosted at seven regional sites across North America (Blevins 1999).

Both Steve Hoskins (1997) and Keith Drury (1995) suggest that the identity crisis in the Church of the Nazarene is indicative of problems in the larger Wesleyan-Holiness movement. Drury’s address at the Wesley Center for Applied Theology at Northwest Nazarene University, entitled “What Happened to the Holiness Movement,” announced that the holiness movement is dead. One of the primary reasons for the apparent death of the movement is that we have “plunged into the evangelical mainstream” (1995, 2). He stated:

Over time we quit calling ourselves “holiness people” or “holiness churches” or “holiness colleges” or “holiness denominations.” We began to introduce ourselves as “Evangelicals.” We started becoming at home with NAE and CHA. Local churches repositioned themselves as “evangelicals” in their communities . . . we gradually were assimilated into the evangelical mainstream. . . . The influence on our pastors are Evangelical, not holiness leaders. Gradually the theology among our people became the same generic evangelical soup served at any other evangelical church (Drury 1995, 2).

Drury’s statement echoes the concern about the distinctiveness of the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition and the concern regarding losing its theological identity within the broader Evangelicalism.

Historically, the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition viewed itself as “evangelical” until evangelicalism’s collapse into fundamentalism in the twentieth century. Evangelicalism has been variously defined, but, according to American religious historian George Marsden, it refers to “a broad grouping of Christians who believe the same doctrines,” or “a self-conscious inter-denominational movement, with leaders, publications, and institutions with which many subgroups identify” (1991, 5).

The pertinent question here is whether the denomination that seeks to be Wesleyan-Holiness has become more generally “evangelical” (fundamentalist) to the neglect of its own distinctive theological heritage. Douglas Sweeney notes that American Evangelicalism, in spite of its emphasis on revivalism, draws primarily from the Reformed church tradi-
tion and Calvinistic presuppositions, which often contradict Wesleyan-Holiness theology (1991, 70-85). The issue at stake here is whether or not American Evangelicalism has encompassed the Church of the Nazarene to the extent that the Church has lost its theological identity, entering into a state of new identity formation. Dean Blevins states:

Church of the Nazarene may be entering a new phase of ecclesial development. If this phase understands adolescence, along with the developmental psychologist Erik Erikson, as a search for identity versus identity diffusion, then the denomination is showing signs of the “storm and stress” of this period (Blevins 1998, 111).

The greatest challenge now being faced by Nazarene Christian higher education is to differentiate between the implicit theology within the American Evangelicalism subculture and a theology that is more consistent with the Wesleyan-Holiness perspective. The result will depend on the ability of current leadership in curriculum development, pastoral ministries in congregations, and professors and administrators in Nazarene institutions of higher education to uphold a Wesleyan-Holiness ethos.

Not only is the desire to be more Wesleyan being faced by the Church of the Nazarene, but by other Wesleyan-Holiness denominations as well. For example, David McKenna (1999), of the Free-Methodist Church, provides a link between the message of John Wesley in his day and its relevancy in our rapid, fluid, postmodern culture. Theodore Runyon, a United Methodist, provides a sound theological description of John Wesley’s theology as he formulated it in the eighteenth century and how it applies today to such issues as human rights, the problems of poverty and economic rights, and the right of women (1998, 168). These current world issues were concerns during Wesley’s time that have significance for today.

Henry Knight has offered key comparisons between the emerging postmodern Christian consciousness and Wesleyan theology. He writes, “Wesleyans should support this new movement because the purposes and values that emerging churches seek to embody—their vision of discipleship, church, and mission—are highly congruent with those of the Wesleyan tradition” (Knight, 2007, 34).

As a result of the emerging concerns of the lessening influence of Wesleyan theology in broader evangelicalism, including in its colleges and universities, this article attempts to assist Wesleyan-based college and
university professors in better understanding and incorporating the under-
lying foundations of Wesleyan theology. The article also focuses on how 
these foundations inform a distinctively Wesleyan philosophy of educa-
tion.

**Wesleyan Theological Foundations**

The following theological statements will show how Wesleyan the-
ology affirms the doctrines of the church universal and stands in the 
broader “Evangelical” ethos; it will also highlight distinctives that form a 
particular Wesleyan paradigm in the context of higher education.

1. **The Nature of God.** Wesleyan theology affirms that the primary 
characteristic of God is holy love. God is the Creator of all that is, and 
remains lovingly related to it. God offers a particular love for humanity 
and desires communion with us. God is revealed most definitively in the 
person of Jesus Christ, and thus Wesleyan theology is thoroughly Christ-
centric. It is also most deeply concerned about the redemption of all per-
sons, which comes through the humble, self-giving love of Jesus Christ 
expressed on the cross. It also emphasizes, perhaps to a different degree 
than many other traditions, the work of the Holy Spirit in the world, in the 
life of the church, and in individual lives.

   *Educational Implications:* The work of Wesleyan education will 
always have a “relational” focus. The emphasis will be upon “knowing 
God” in Christ rather than simply “knowing about God.” It will also rec-
ognize the work of the Holy Spirit in the activities of teaching and learn-
ing.

2. **Anthropology.** The Wesleyan tradition believes that humanity is 
uniquely created in the image of God, and that this image was not entirely 
obliterated by the Fall, but only distorted. This implies that there is good-
ness in all of humanity because of this remaining image, and particularly 
because of the omnipresent prevenient grace of God in the world. One of 
the primary goals of salvation, and particularly sanctification, is the full 
renewal of the image of God and the actualization of Christlikeness. This 
implies that God’s purpose for us is to be fully human through the power 
of the Holy Spirit. This is possible in this life through the grace of God. In 
sum, Wesleyan theology views humanity in a more positive light than 
many other traditions. It specifically affirms human free-will and the role 
of humanity in being “co-creators” with God.
Educational Implications: The work of Wesleyan education will find ways to help students experience God at work in the world, as well as in the church. We will help students engage the culture in ways that discover God’s “fingerprints” in places that might otherwise be overlooked in culture, art, science, and the humanities. It will emphasize the co-creative nature of human participation in the ongoing creative and sustaining work of God in the world.

3. Sin. Wesleyan theology affirms a strong doctrine of sin, and affirms that sin is inherited from our first human parents. But again, unlike many other traditions, there is optimism regarding living a victorious life in God and overcoming the power of sin through grace. For Wesleyans, sin is a willful act (or the omission of good acts). Human limitations (e.g., a lack of wisdom, or emotional or mental disabilities), however, are not seen as sins, but as “infirmities” for which we are not (eternally) responsible. This again leads Wesleyanism to a very hopeful stance toward God’s transforming grace in the human life here on earth. When sin is emphasized, it is expressed in relational terms. Sin negatively affects a person’s relationships with God, with others, with oneself, and with the earth. Similarly, holiness is “perfect love” (1 John 4) expressed in the context of these same relationships. Holiness expressed in love is sin’s “cure.”

Educational Implications: The work of Wesleyan education will emphasize the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of ordinary people. We will teach an understanding of life that views obedience to the Spirit as normative for the growing Christian, not the necessity for continuing depravity and moral brokenness.

4. Soteriology. Wesleyan theology affirms that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life, and that all grace—saving and sanctifying—is available because of his death and resurrection. This grace includes prevenient grace. This is the grace that draws us, even before we recognize it, into choosing a relationship with God and into our new birth. It is also the grace that covers those who are “irresponsible,” i.e., children, those with mental or emotional infirmities, and, according to Wesley, those who have not had the opportunity to hear the good news of the Gospel (see Romans 2: 12-16). It is also the grace that gives us access to general knowledge. Wesleyan theology affirms that all truth is God’s truth. It believes that Jesus Christ reconciles sinful humanity to God and that we are saved by grace through faith in Christ alone. It believes that Jesus’ life of willful
obedience and love, compassionate death, and bodily resurrection are the means of salvation for all who accept him.

**Educational Implications:** The work of Wesleyan education will seek to provide opportunities whereby students can both encounter the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as being “for them” and where they can proclaim it as being “for others” as well. It seeks to give every student the opportunity to accept Jesus Christ as their savior and to share that opportunity with others, particularly with those in other cultural (or ideological) contexts.

5. **Holiness.** Wesleyan theology affirms that the purpose of humanity as God created us is to live holy lives and to fulfill the two greatest commandments. Indeed, all the points above are directed toward the message of holiness. Wesleyan-Holiness theology is firmly committed to the doctrine of entire sanctification and spiritual growth in Christlikeness through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. Yet, the essence of the Wesleyan message of holiness is not a “holiness for holiness” sake, or “sinlessness for sinlessness” sake, but a grace-enabled holiness which empowers us to love God and others, especially those who need Christ. Thus, the great commandments are closely connected to the Great Commission as the church’s mission.

**Educational Implications:** The work of Wesleyan education will focus on the development of an ethics of gratitude which sees Christian character as the goal of the Christian life. Character expresses itself in every activity, whether “secular” or “sacred.” A Wesleyan education will be one of personal and communal integrity.

6. **Means of Grace.** In recent years, there has been a revived interest in Wesley’s understanding of the day-by-day walk of the Christian journey. This has come both from a renewed emphasis on the “means of grace” in the Wesleyan tradition, as well as a great interest in the topic of “spiritual formation” more generally. Grace can be equated with the activity of the Holy Spirit; as such we should see the “means of grace” as the means to experience and be nurtured by the very presence of God. It is this presence that spiritually *forms* us; it is the presence of God that spiritually *transforms* us into the holy likeness of Christ.

Wesley writes: “By ‘means of grace’ I understand outward signs, words, or actions, ordained by God, to be ordinary channels whereby he
might convey to persons prevenient, justifying, or sanctifying grace.” Further, “All who desire the grace of God are to wait for it in the means that he has given” (Wesley, 1872). The “means” are the ways in which we open ourselves to experience God’s love and grace in our lives. Wesley is clear that nothing but the blood of Christ atones for sin. But participating in the means is the way that were “ordained” if we are to grow in our relationship God. The means are separated into “works of piety” such as prayer and searching the Scriptures, and “works of mercy” such as ministering to those in need. It is appropriate to see teaching and learning as means of grace.

**Educational Implications:** The work of Wesleyan education will provide significant opportunities for students to be trained and to develop habits of engagement in those spiritual practices which facilitate our receiving God’s transforming grace.

**Educational Methodologies**

The Wesleyan perspective not only holds to particular understandings of theological doctrines, it also represents a certain methodology of theological inquiry, and by implication, some educational methodological insights as well. The following includes a list of educational methodologies that are informed by a Wesleyan theological perspective.

1. **Seeking Truth.** The word “truth” in today’s secular and religious vernacular has taken on very weighty, yet diverse meanings. In the secular realm, “truth” has become relative and purely contextual in the postmodern era. In response, the religious world has sometimes pressed truth into a box, so to speak, and has viewed it as something not to be explored, but only defended. Truth is thus reduced to religious presuppositions that can be considered absolute. Wesleyan theology tends to transcend these extreme positions. Truth, for Wesley, is primarily embodied and not abstract. Specifically, truth is the person of Jesus Christ whom we encounter. Thus, when reference is made to seeking truth, in reality it means nothing more and nothing less than seeking personal engagement with God through Christ as enabled by the Spirit. This does not mean that there are not “truths” to which we hold. But it does imply, in a Wesleyan paradigm, that genuine relationship takes precedence over religious statements or propositions.
As Wesley himself says, one can intellectually affirm belief statements without truly being Christian in the world. When John Wesley explores being Christian, he focuses on “faith filled with the energy of love” being lived out. Christian education is best viewed as the joining of knowledge and vital piety. It seeks knowledge and affirms excellence in intellectual pursuits. It also seeks to integrate faith and learning. What makes it Christian is that seeks not only to be informative, but to be formative and transformative through engagement with the living God.

**Educational Implications:** Wesleyan education integrates knowledge, living faith, and practice for the purpose of personal and communal formation which will be emphasized particularly by faculty.

2. **Induction and Knowledge.** One aspect of a Wesleyan “philosophy of education” is the fact that the Wesleyan approach is not an “indoctrination” of deductive presuppositions, but rather creative engagement and inductive thinking regarding real life situations and contexts that allow students to engage materials on deeper levels than simple memorization of facts. With that said, the Wesleyan approach, particularly in a liberal arts context, does pursue knowledge through all of the academic disciplines of the university and in all parts of God’s creation, whether religious or secular. It is the responsibility of teachers to continue to learn and seek excellence in their own discipline even while seeking inter-discipline communication and community. But again, the transmission of facts is but one aspect of a broader Christian education.

**Educational Implications:** Wesleyan education strives for excellence in teaching and learning, both seen as expressions of faithfulness to God. A focus on transformation into Christ-like character by students and faculty alike is a primary goal of the transmission of knowledge. The faculty embodies this purpose even in the act of teaching itself. The faculty thus teaches with Christian integrity and transformational intent.

3. **Catholic Spirit.** The founders of the Church of the Nazarene crafted its Articles of Faith in such a way that they focus attention on those things essential to our salvation. On “non-essentials” we are to give liberty of thinking in areas not addressed in Scripture or in the Articles. For example, the denomination has refused to bind its people to particular beliefs about the beginning or the end of the world. As denominational founder, Phineas Bresee himself articulated: “In essentials unity; in non-essentials
liberty; and love over all.” Wesley penned a sermon, “The Catholic Spirit,” that expresses this same theme. Thus, when referencing a catholic spirit, we show an openness to hear other perspectives with respect and love. This ethos should enter every classroom and meeting. This does not imply that persons are not allowed to have strong opinions. But an agreement to disagree with love is paramount in a healthy learning community.

**Educational Implications:** Wesleyan education affirms the optimism regarding persons’ ability to engage and change the world in active service and professional vocation which will motivate the faculty’s attitude in and outside the classroom. This will be demonstrated through the faculty member’s commitment to the development of a community that expresses the love to which God calls us, a love that seeks to inspire and enable others, including the mentoring of students and an investment in peer relationships.

4. **Quadrilateral.** While Wesley did affirm the Reformation idea of *sola scriptura* and placed the authority of Scripture above all else, he did not follow all the implications of this doctrine without modification. When Wesley read “scripture alone,” he believed that the Bible is the primary source of authority, but not necessarily the only religious authority. As Donald Thorsen states, “John Wesley’s most enduring contribution to theological method stems from his . . . [inclusion] of experience along with Scripture, tradition, and reason as genuine sources of religious authority. While maintaining the primacy of Scripture, Wesley functioned with a dynamic interplay of sources in interpreting, illuminating, enriching, and communicating biblical truths” (Thorsen, 2004, 81). This is not to imply that tradition, reason, or experience can stand alone as authorities. The Bible stands above these three handmaids. Tradition, particularly the patristic period, should be given serious consideration.

How has the church interpreted the Bible, particularly in the development of orthodox beliefs such as the nature of the Trinity and the nature of Jesus Christ as both human and divine? How the Bible has been interpreted through the centuries is of great import. Also, it is only through the exercise of reason that the biblical message is discerned, formulated, and communicated. Wesley did not suggest that we can reason our way to God. Experience serves in confirming the truth of Scripture. If the Scriptural message is not experienced by Christians, then we should question our interpretation of the message. Wesley is known for re-examining and
subsequently re-interpreting Scripture in light of some of the experiences of his Methodist people.

**Educational Implications:** Wesleyan faculty who teach in disciplines other than the Bible, are seen as integral to a liberal arts education as they instruct in areas that highlight tradition, reason, or experience. This implies the faculty’s ongoing awareness of the need to remain contextually and existentially relevant, as biblical truth is correlated to every new generation and cultural context.

**Conclusions**

With the theological and methodological foundations laid, college and university faculty have the opportunity to creatively build didactic practices for the classroom and vital relationships with students. The faculty member’s particular area of expertise will determine the types of didactic practices to be applied in the classroom.

A Wesleyan approach to education provides faculty and administrators important theological and methodological “hallmarks” to ensure that John Wesley’s theology is being reflected in their teaching and curriculum. With the increased influence of generic Evangelicalism and fundamentalism, and with the increase of the cultural changes of postmodernity, it is important for Wesleyan educators and administrators to continue to be informed about how a Wesleyan education differs from these emerging influences.

**REFERENCE LIST**


Paul, in his concluding prayer in the first letter to the Thessalonians, says: “May the very God of peace sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (5:23). What aspect of the human person is he addressing? A simple answer is all of that person, “spirit, soul and body.” Yet the doctrine of “entire sanctification” has had a narrower focus in the typical expectation of the holiness movement at the end of the nineteenth century. In the doctrinal statements made at the beginning of the movement, the soul alone was the object of entire sanctification. For example, the formative leader of the Church of God movement (Anderson, Indiana), Daniel Warner (1842-1895), wrote:

Upon the preaching and testimony of entire sanctification as a distinct experience subsequent to justification, more than upon all else besides, depends the salvation of immortal souls. . . . Perfection as applied to redeemed souls denotes the complete moral restoration of man from the effects of the Fall. Not physical or mental restoration, for that will not be until the Resurrection. And as the fall of man effaced the image of God from the soul and sent a current of depravity down through the entire race, the perfect restoration of the soul must, necessarily, reinstate its former purity and divine likeness. . . . But the Bible teaches a perfection in this life that can never be
improved upon. . . . While our physical and mental defects remain until the Resurrection, our moral nature alone is susceptible of perfection now, and that only in quality, leaving all the powers of the soul free to enlarge in magnitude. Being made free from sin and renewed in the Image of God, as first created, the soul cannot become more pure, and is therefore perfected forever.¹

A. M. Hills and H. Orton Wiley, theological leaders in the Church of the Nazarene at its beginning, concurred. Hills in his Christian Theology testifies, “Wonderful salvation! Which so sanctifies the soul, that it is ‘crucified to the world,’ and ‘freed from’ the tendency to sin, and dead to all the solicitations of evil!”² Wiley wrote: “Now this holiness already begun is to be perfected by the cleansing at a single stroke from inbred sin, and brings the soul to a constantly existing state of perfected holiness.”³ Wiley, though using the language of “soul,” does so with an awareness of the ambiguity of the term.⁴ Yet he still affirms the concept that man’s nature is essentially dichotomous and the soul is that which is being entirely sanctified.

An examination of the early “Articles of Faith” and rituals of the Church of the Nazarene demonstrates a similar attachment to the language of soul and its sanctification. Yet the term disappeared from its Manual by the end of the twentieth century. The only usage of “soul” in the statements on entire sanctification appeared in 1898 and 1903, when the Church of the Nazarene was largely a west coast movement. In 1898 and 1903, the fifth “Article of Faith” stated: “a soul is entirely sanctified subsequent to justification through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁵ The reference to the soul was then dropped, although in 1908 it appeared once again under “Regeneration,” which was defined as “the new birth of the

²Ibid, 2:227
⁵Manual of the Church of the Nazarene (Los Angeles, California: Committee of Publication, 1898), 14 (Los Angeles, California: Nazarene Publishing House, 1903), 9.
soul, through the gracious work of God.” 6 In 1928 this statement was also dropped. Reference to the soul was retained in the ritual for “The Funeral Service” until 1968. 7 The dropping of references to the soul in 1972 reflects sensitivity to twentieth-century research in biblical theology. Reference to the soul, as one would expect, continues in traditional hymns.

In Warner, Hills, and Wiley the soul is treated as a metaphysical entity, which is distinct from the entire person, a continuation of the writings of the Christian church from the second century until the middle of the twentieth. It is present in the Christian tradition which informed John and Charles Wesley and is present both in their writings and in the writings of Methodism in the nineteenth century. This tradition influenced the exegesis of the 1 Thess. 5:23, which is central to the hermeneutic of the doctrine of “entire sanctification.”

From the early church to the present, Christian thinkers have operated with a sense of congeniality between the Christian world-view and the Platonic. This Platonic thought has had the opportunity to distort the Christian message away from a careful examination of key biblical texts and from a biblical worldview. Platonism has been wedded to Christian thought for so long that the synthesis has been accepted as genuinely Christian.

Platonic Influence on Christian Thought Before Wesley

The Early Church Fathers. In Platonic 8 philosophy the soul was a pre-existent entity which had emanated from God and will return to God, a concept foreign to the biblical perspective. Jarislov Pelikan in The Christian Tradition observes, “Two Christian doctrines are perhaps the most reliable indications of the continuing hold of Greek philosophy on Christian theology: the doctrine of the immortality of the soul and the doctrine of the absoluteness of God.” 9 In Eastern Christianity the latter influenced the ideal of deification, which in some ways is like the western doctrine of sanctification, although different in that the ideal is not Christ-

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6Ibid, 28.
8By Platonic I am referring to that synthesis of Hellenistic thought both before and subsequent to New Testament times, known as Middle Platonism, which also evolved into Neo-Platonism.
9Ibid, 1:51.
likeness, i.e., in his incarnation, but likeness to the Absolute.\(^\text{10}\) The Eastern theologian Michael Psellus (c. 1019-1078) and his associates “repeated the standard Eastern formula: the divine Logos had become man so that man might become divine.”\(^\text{11}\)

Pelikan describes the influence of Hellenistic philosophy on Clement of Alexandria (c.150-c.215), Origen (c.185-254), Gregory of Nyssa (c.330-c.395), and even on Tertullian (c.160-c.225), famous for his opposition to philosophy. Clement’s perspective is that “it was the task of the Christian ‘philosopher Gnostic’ to cultivate the liberation of the soul from the chains of the body, in preparation for the ultimate liberation, which was death.”\(^\text{12}\) Though later theologians carefully differentiate between the pre-existence of the soul and its immortality subsequent to God’s creative act, Clement did not give a clear distinction.\(^\text{13}\) The church harmonized the Platonic concept of the immortality of the soul with the biblical doctrine of the resurrection. The idea of the immortal and rational soul is part of the Greek inheritance in Christian doctrine.

Augustine, a Neo-Platonic philosopher before he became a Christian, advanced the concept of the soul in theological anthropology. He described the ascent of the soul through seven steps toward the beatific vision. The fifth is that of purification. The sixth is the maintenance of this purified state toward the vision. The seventh is the beatific vision itself. Augustine did not hold to “the natural divinity of the soul.”\(^\text{14}\) Nevertheless, both he and Gregory of Nyssa “give very Platonian-sounding accounts of the journey of the soul; and for both that journey, as it is for Plotinus, is a return to man’s proper and original state and his own true country and Father.”\(^\text{15}\)

**The Reformers and their Successors.** Reference to the soul is common among the Reformers and their successors in their descriptions of the nature of man. For Luther and Calvin, humans are composed of

\(^{11}\)Ibid, 247.
\(^{12}\)Ibid, 1:48.
\(^{13}\)Ibid, 1:96.
\(^{15}\)Ibid, 6.
body and soul. As Calvin asserts, “That man consists of soul and body, 
ought not to be controverted.” He describes it as “an immortal, yet created 
essence, which is the nobler part of him. . .concealed within man some-
thing distinct from the body.” That the concept is rooted in the specula-
tions of Augustine is expressed in one argument that Calvin gives for the
existence of the soul: “the many noble faculties with which the human 
mind is adorned, and which loudly proclaim that something Divine is 
inscribed on it, are so many testimonies of its immortal essence.”

Luther affirms a “twofold nature, a spiritual and a bodily,” that 
functions as a trichotomy: “the spirit is the highest, deepest and noblest 
part of man. . .the soul, is this same spirit. . .viewed as performing a dif-
ferent function, namely, giving life to the body and working through the 
body.” Jarislov Pelikan observes the extensive theorizing about the soul
during the Middle Ages and the time of the Reformation, noting that
“Thomas Aquinas and Philip Melanchthon are only two of the many the-
ologians to compose treatises with the title On the Soul, whose content 
was determined more by philosophical than by biblical language about 
the soul.” Arminius, writing about the sanctification of “man, a sinner, 
and yet a believer,” states that “The subject is, properly, the soul of man. 
. . . The body . . . is an instrument united to the soul. . . .” Arminius is 
evidence both of the cultural dominance of the terminology of the soul 
and also its application to the doctrine of sanctification before Wesley.

The Cambridge Platonists. The Cambridge Platonists were a
more direct influence on Wesley. They, like Wesley, were both Platonic in
their understanding of spiritual realities and deeply interested in the sci-

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ences. John Wesley bore in himself both a commitment to Lockian empiricism and Christian Platonism. The latter had been infused in him from childhood. Albert Outler describes Wesley’s conflict of thought:

Wesley found himself in an interesting dilemma. He was an avowed empiricist in an age of empiricism; yet he was also an unembarrassed intuitionist who openly claimed his heritage in Christian Platonism. . . . More directly, however, he had been instructed by his father’s friend, John Norris, and also by Richard Lukas. Norris [one of the Cambridge Platonists] was the chief English disciple of the French Cartesian Nicholas Malebranche.22

The Platonic concept of the soul is evident in the following from Benjamin Whitchcoat, the first Cambridge Platonist:

[Truth] is so near the soul, so much the very image and form of it, that it may be said of truth, that as the soul is by derivation from God, so truth is by communication. No sooner doth the truth of God come into the soul’s sight but the soul knows her to be her first and old acquaintance. Though they have been by some accident unhappily parted a great while, yet having now through the divine Providence happily met, they greet one another and renew their acquaintance as those that were first and ancient friends. . . . Nothing is more natural to man’s soul than to receive truth.23

About holiness Whitchcote observed, “Holiness in angels and men . . . is their dei-formity: likeness to God in goodness, righteousness and truth. Such real holiness sanctifies the subject by its presence; and where that is, the person is made pure, good and righteous.”24

The Cambridge Platonists also influenced the Wesleys and George Whitfield by way of Henry Scougal’s The Life of God in the Soul of Man,

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24 Whitchcote, Aphorisms, No. 262, as cited by Cragg, Cambridge Platonists, 20.
a work that was instrumental in their conversion. As Cragg observes, “its most characteristic phrases were constantly on the lips of Whitfield and the Wesleys. For anyone who compares their works, the indebtedness of Scougal to John Smith can hardly be doubted.”

John Smith, one of the Cambridge Platonists, wrote “A Discourse Demonstrating the Immortality of the Soul”

Scougal’s work is saturated with the vocabulary of the soul. As in the Platonic and Augustinian tradition, salvation is not expressed primarily in terms of God’s grace that descends toward us or of love toward neighbor. Instead, the whole concern is in the upward movement toward God, love toward God, union with God and imitation of God who is the Absolute, the Unmoved Mover. The soul is “a divine spark” which rises upward, while the body is “a dull and lumpish companion” which clogs the soul. The soul, on the other hand “can subsist without the body.” All of this contributes to a perspective that defines sanctification in terms of the soul rather than all that a person is as a person. Instead of the fundamental principle being incarnational, it is transcendental. The image is deification and separation from the common herd.

Wesley’s Use of Platonic Writers

In John Wesley the ancient and medieval are confronted by modern thought. He is a bridge between the Medieval Western and early Eastern Christian traditions. He is at once a Christian Platonist and a Lockian empiricist. He was at home both in the speculative stratospheres of Mysticism and in the careful exegesis of the biblical text. The following analysis does not deny Wesley’s empiricism. Instead, it seeks to understand the influence of Platonism on his teaching about the doctrine of entire sanctification.

William Law. John Wesley was a publisher of spiritual works to aid the Methodists in their spiritual development. He sought to remove things he thought destructive, and also excessive words and ostentatious language. His *A Christian Library* is his most extensive collection. Out of this voluminous editorial and publishing enterprise, Frank Baker has reproduced what he considers to be, as his title indicates, *Wesley’s Own*
Choice: The Heart of True Spirituality. These are from Wesley’s abbreviated publications of William Law, Thomas à Kempis, and three French Catholic devotional writers: Pierre Poiret, Jean Duvergier de Hauranne, and Jacques Joseph Duguet. From these Baker produced those passages that Wesley, as identified by asterisks, thought to be of special value. As Baker states, “These highlighted documents . . . isolate what [Wesley] considered in his late sixties to be the more important and spiritually helpful passages . . . in his revised editions of the writings of others.” Also included are passages by Hauranne (Saint Cyron), which Wesley included in his “Plain Account of Christian Perfection.” These passages reveal Wesley’s openness to Platonic thought.

The editorial reductions of William Law’s “A Practical Treatise on Christian Perfection” and “A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life” contain extensive use of the term soul and other Platonisms. In “A Serious Call,” the platonic metaphysic is present in such expressions as “the dull and heavy soul” and “private devotion . . . carry the soul more powerfully to God,” alluding to the Platonic doctrine of the emanation and return of the soul. God is the Absolute, the Unmoved Mover. Rather than God descending to us, we must ascend to him—works are emphasized instead of grace. Anthropological dualism is also emphasized in “A Serious Call”: “The union of soul and body is not a mixture of their substances, as we see bodies united and mixed together, but consists solely in the mutual power that they have of acting on one another.”

Jansenist Roman Catholic Writings. Near the end of the “Plain Account of Christian Perfection,” Wesley introduces a lengthy quotation from Jean Duvergier de Hauranne, Abbe St. Cyrian (1581-1643), a Jansenist Roman Catholic, with the following evaluation: “Most of the preceding advices are strongly enforced in the following reflections;

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28 These platonic writings were collected 16 years later than his Notes on the New Testament (1754).
30 “A Serious Call,” Par. 74; 1:75.
31 Ibid, par. 107; 1:82.
33 See Baker, John Wesley’s Own Choice: The Heart Of True Spirituality, 2:51.
which I recommend to your deep and frequent consideration, next to the holy Scriptures.”

Though Wesley introduces the Apostolic Fathers with a similar hyperbole, it does indicate Wesley’s strong identification with the content.

Christian Platonism is present throughout this work. The influence of the Platonic doctrine of emanation and return is expressed both in the above from “The Plain Account” and in the collection edited by Baker. The same analogy of good works returning to God is repeated in Baker’s edition. This Christian Platonism of the Jansenist movement has the body as well as the soul returning to God. The soul is treated both as an objective entity distinct from the person and as part of the psychological nature of a person. Sanctification of the soul is present in the form of nurture of the soul. Grace is needed “to preserve the life of God in our soul.”

The goal of Christlikeness is implied in the statement “Christ has always reserved in his church some ministers who bear in their souls the character of his divinity.” Yet, the further implication is that Christlikeness is not expected to be the usual, even among the clergy.

Jacques Joseph Duguet. The last selection in Baker’s edition of Wesley’s choice of spiritual readings is from Jacques Joseph Duguet (1649-1733), another French Catholic Jansenist. In the selection a Platonic metaphysic of the soul is described. For example, “all that gratifies the senses . . . weakens the soul and makes it bend earthward.” He also refers to “all that strengthens the chains which attach the soul to the body.” Both figures express the Platonic concept of emanation in which the fall is a fall into the world and into the body. The soul is treated as an objective entity. Duguet cautions against those things which enfeeble and “slacken the soul.” The psychological dimensions of human inwardness are also described in terms of the soul.

Platonism in John Wesley’s Own Writings

The Sermons and the Plain Account of Christian Perfection. John Wesley is a Christian Platonist, an experimental empiricist and a careful Biblical exegete, but not always at the same time or in the same

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34 “Plain Account;” Works, 11:435.
35 “Christian Instructions,” Par. 58; Baker, 2:63.
writing. In his sermons, letters and treatises he is primarily the Platonist. In his journals, his empirical side is evident, and in his Notes on the New Testament his exegetical awareness is evident.

The soul is one of Wesley’s religious postulates, even as is the existence of God. Thus, he asks, “But by which of your senses do you perceive your soul? Surely you do not deny either the existence or the presence of this! And yet it is not the object of your sight, or of any of your other senses. Suffice it then to consider that God is a spirit, as is your soul also.”

So common is the language of the soul to him that he is persuaded that it can be discerned by faith: “Faith is an evidence to me of the existence of that unseen thing, my own soul. . . . By faith I know it is an immortal spirit, made in the image of God, in his natural and moral image, ‘an incorruptible picture of the God of glory.’”

Wesley also provides souls with the faculty of seeing: “For does not the soul see, in the clearest manner, when the eye is of no use, namely in dreams.”

Nor is Wesley’s Platonism limited to one period in his life. It is evident in his early pre-Aldersgate sermons and in his middle and late sermons. In 1726, in his sermon “On Guardian Angels,” he identified the soul with the nature of angels. Similarly, in 1768 in his sermon “The Good Steward,” he described “our soul [as] an immortal spirit made in the image of God” and “our souls” which are “incorruptible and immortal, of a nature ‘little lower than the angels.’” Also in Platonic idiom, he asks, “Did the whole stream of the affections flow back to the ocean from whence they came?” The soul is a “heavenly flame” united to “an earthly clod.” This “corruptible body” presses down the soul. This Platonism permeates his second sermon, entitled “What is Man?” This sermon, written in 1788, is described by Outler as expressing “radical body-soul dualism” representing another development in philosophical idealism, “third generation Cartesianism.”

“The Plain Account of Christian Perfection” records Wesley’s developing understanding of Christian perfection in the years 1725-1777. In his use of the term soul, a subtle change is evident. In the early years the terminology was largely that of Christian Platonism, with its primary, almost

37 Sermon, “On the Omnipresence of God” (1788), 2:8; Works, bic. ed. 4:45.
38 Sermon, “The Discoveries of faith” (1788), 5; Ibid, 4:30.
40 “An introductory Comment” to Wesley’s sermon, “What is Man;” 4:19.
exclusive emphasis on love for God as expressive of Christian perfection. After Aldersgate he developed a strong emphasis on love for neighbor as an essential of Christian perfection.

**In Wesley’s *Notes on the New Testament***. John Wesley, in his *Notes On the New Testament*, translates *psuche* with awareness of all the nuances of this term. He translates it by “soul” (47 times), life (29 times), mind (3 times) and person (once). In Acts 15:24, where the King James has “subverting your souls,” Wesley has “unsettling your Minds” (see Acts 14:2 and Hebrews 12:3). The adjective *psuchikos* is translated as “natural” (1 Cor. 2:14), “animal” (1 Cor. 15:44-46), and “sensual” (Jude 19). Wesley’s translation of the New Testament evidences influence from John Albert Bengal, the Pietist biblical exegete and textual critic. Compare Wesley’s translation with Bengal’s at 1 Cor. 15:44-46. Both refer to what is sown as an “animal body.” Wesley’s sensitivity to the nuances of the original is evident when “soul” is one of a series, such as, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul (*psuche*), and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind” (Luke 10:27). Wesley comments, “That is, thou shalt unite all the faculties of the soul,” referring to the totality of the rational self. Then subsumed under this is soul as one of the series—heart, soul, strength and mind. He interprets “With all thy soul” as “with the warmest affections.”

In his *Notes on the New Testament* and throughout his writings, Wesley presumes that human nature is dichotomous. He reasons at 1 Thessalonians 5:23 “That man cannot consist of three parts, appears hence: The soul is either matter or not matter: there is no medium. But if it is matter, it is part of the body: if not matter, it coincides with the spirit.” The spirit, he states, “is adventitious, and the supernatural gift of God, to be found only in Christians.”41 At that time (1754) he was a creationist in the origin of the soul. Commenting on Hebrews 12:9, he states, “perhaps these expressions *fathers of our flesh* and *Father of spirits*, intimate that our earthly fathers are only the parents of our bodies, our souls not being originally derived from them, but all created by the immediate power of God; perhaps, at the beginning of the world.”42 He was subsequently con-

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vinced of traducianism, “that all the souls of his [Adam’s] posterity, as well as their bodies, were in our first parent.”

Bengal also sees the natural state as soul and body, with spirit being an addition by grace.

In his comments on 1 Peter 1:22, Wesley equates purity of soul with purity of heart: “Having purified [hegnikotes] your souls [psuchas] by obeying the truth through the Spirit, who bestows upon you freely, both obedience and purity of heart. . . . Pure from any spot of unholy desire or inordinate passion.”

On Rev. 12:11 he comments, “By the blood of the Lamb—Which cleanses the soul from all sin, and so leaves no room for accusing.”

**Platonism in Wesley’s Addresses to Children.** The language of the soul is very prominent in writings used by John Wesley for the nurturing of children in piety. The following is from Wesley’s translation of the *Principes* of Pierre Poiret”(1646-1709), a French Protestant:

> Do you know what your soul is?
> You have in you (though you cannot see it) a soul that will never die, made thus that he might come and dwell in it.
> If God lives and dwells in your soul, then he makes it like himself.
> He makes the soul in which he dwells good, wise, just, true, full of love, and of power to do well.
> He makes it happy. For it is his will that your soul should rejoice in him forever. He made it for this very thing.
> When a soul desires God, and knows and enjoys him, then it is truly happy.
> But when a soul does not desire God, not know and enjoy him, then it is truly miserable.

Another direction to children is, “Desire is to the soul what the mouth and stomach are to the body.” Notice how the language of the soul, influenced by Christian Platonism, was enculturated into the minds of little children. Self-consciousness and self-examination became soul-con-
sciousness and examination. In his “Prayers For Children,” Wesley wrote, “My dear child, A Lover of your soul has here drawn up a few prayers in order to assist you in that duty.”47 The “School of Prayer” is also a school for learning the language of the soul.

**Wesley’s Successors**

**John Fletcher (1729-1785).** Although in his youth John Fletcher was not nurtured by Wesley, the above passages from the French Protestant, Pierre Poiret indicate that his nurturing in the French-speaking Protestant Canton’s of Switzerland would not have been markedly different from that which Wesley would have given in his instruction to children. He shows consistency with the Christian Platonic tradition and its description of the soul:

> How excellent is that noble, that neglected being, in itself! Spiritual, immortal, endued with the most glorious faculties, made after the very image of God! . . . Suffer me then to entreat you, brethren, to bestow on your souls pains and care, in some measure proportionate to their worth; at least, be not offended with us ministers, for not showing some concern for the salvation of your precious, immortal souls.”48

**Nineteenth Century Methodism.** Methodism’s early nineteenth-century representatives: Richard Watson of England (1836), Thomas Ralston, of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (1847), and late nineteenth-century representatives: William Burton Pope of England (1880), and John Miley (1892) of the Methodist Episcopal Church (1892) in America, all use the category of the soul in a manner which is consistent with Christian Platonism. The soul is that which is cleansed.

In the early nineteenth century, theologian Richard Watson of English Methodism provided a typical description of the soul and its need of sanctification: “For as it is an axiom of Christian Doctrine, that ‘without holiness no man shall see the Lord;’ . . . so it must be concluded . . . that the entire sanctification of the soul, and its complete renewal in holiness, must take place in this world.”49 Thomas Ralston of the Methodist Epis-

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copal Church, South demonstrates an emphasis on the soul as that which continues beyond death. He states that “God created the soul out of nothing” and that “we, as conscious beings [are] to survive the ravages of death” because of “the ardent desire of the human soul for an immortal existence.”

In the late nineteenth century, Alexander Pope identified the origins of Methodism in Christian Platonism. He described the English Platonists as those “who in the exposition of Christian Perfection paved the way for the Methodism of another century.” In the same paragraph he described the soul as the proper subject of sanctification. The soul includes “the mind, first, and then the affections of the will.” The soul “is delivered from the dominion of indwelling sin.” Pope was also conscious of the potential distorting influence of the Platonic tradition on Christian thought. He criticized the trichotomous analysis of man’s nature because it is akin to Gnosticism, Neo-Platonism, and Plato. At the same time, he affirmed the dichotomy of man’s nature between soul and body. Today, biblical scholarship judges both of these positions as being non-biblical, derived instead from the Platonic tradition.

For Pope, perfection is primarily love for God: “The central idea of Mysticism in all its varieties has been the entire consecration of the spirit of man to God, in absolute detachment from the creature and union with the Creator.” The platonic implications of this are evident, if the word “soul” is substituted for spirit. He also affirms the mystical stages toward union with God and derives biblical support from 1 John. Pope chooses scriptures which he can identify with these stages, making the following equivalences: (1) “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1:7): “This is the mystical purgation.” (2) “Ye have an unction from the Holy One” (2:20): “This is the mystical illumination;” and (3) “He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him” (4:16):

50 Thomas N. Ralston, Elements of Divinity: or a Course of Lectures Comprising a Clear and Concise View of Theology as Taught in the Holy Scriptures (Louisville, Kentucky: Published by E. Stevenson for the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1851), 69, 445.

51 3:86-87.

52 Wiley uses the same argument. Both overlook the fact that their view is based on 19th-century German idealism which also has its roots in Christian Platonism.
“this is the perfect union.”53 His choice of scripture in 1 John differs from Wesley, for whom the preferred biblical passage refers to “babes, young men and fathers (1 John 2:12-14), a developmental model.

Although consciously rejecting Neo-Platonism because of its relationship to Gnosticism and “false or impure mysticism, which came from the East,” Pope does not recognize its Platonic origins. The soul as a metaphysical category is present in his writings. He does not describe the soul as emanating from God, but as created by him. Nevertheless, he is beginning to think of the total person. As he observes regarding 1 Thessalonians 5:23, “sanctification . . . is of the whole man viewed in all the constituents of his nature.”54 It also describes “the gradual perfecting of body, soul and spirit. . . . We are Preserved blameless; though the spirit is beclouded by ignorance and weakness, the soul is under the influence of sensible things, and the body is on the way to dissolution.”55 Although rejecting pentecostal and “second blessing” categories for stages of the Christian life, Pope is vigorous in his advancement of the idea of perfection and the expectation that a Christian should expect the superlative promises of the Scripture to be fulfilled within this life.

In John Miley’s Systematic Theology (1892), although reference to the soul is frequent in his discussion of sanctification, it has lost its metaphysical implications. Miley’s concern is for the sanctification of human nature.56 Nevertheless, he refers to the “cleansing and purification of the soul,” “the moral state of the soul,” “the work of the Spirit within the soul,” “a sinful state of the soul,” and “sanctification . . . within the soul.” His chief concern is whether entire sanctification is instantaneous or gradual. He concludes that it is both. He describes its completeness as follows: “It is entire when through his presence and power the evil tendencies are subdued and the dominance of the spiritual life is complete.”57 A distinct perspective is that he relates the need for entire sanctification to the incompleteness of regeneration. He argues for the possibility of either eradication or suppression.

A Biblical Analysis

**The Biblical Vocabulary.** The term soul is one of several possible translations of the Greek word *psuche*. Its New Testament usage reflects the Old Testament *nephesh*, as well as the Greek common usage. As such it is in dialogical encounter with Hellenistic religious philosophy. The common Greek usage and the Old Testament *nephesh* are not radically different. It does not mean the immortal soul, but is essentially the life principle, or the living being, or the self as the subject of appetite, emotion, and volition. In the New Testament “*psuche* continues the old Greek usage (characteristic of Homer) by which it means “vitality, life.” *Nephesh* as the life of humans remains at the disposition of Yahweh and is subject to his power of deliverance. Edmond Jacob affirms the unity of the human being: “The unity of human nature is not expressed by the antithetical concepts of body and soul but by the complementary and inseparable concepts of body and life.”

When we turn to the New Testament we find a similar breadth of meaning in the use of *psuche*. In the Synoptic Gospels it is often the psychological self in its insecurity and anxiety (Matt. 11:29). In the time of persecution, according to Luke, Jesus tells the disciples that “by their endurance they shall gain their *psuchas*.” In both instances, the term is variously translated as life or soul. In modern terms, Jesus delivers from anxiety and in the time of persecution promises that there will be psychological wholeness. The *psuche* is not an objective entity, the immortal soul, but the psychological self with its awareness of anxiety, sorrow, and joy.

A similar description of the *psuche* is found in the Gospel of John. There the *psuche* is one’s manner of life or self identity which must be laid down if one is to know eternal life. John describes the finiteness and mortality of the *psuche*. It is not a never-dying metaphysical entity. “Those who love their life (*psuche*) lose it, and those who hate their life (*psuche*) in this world will keep it for eternal life (*zoe aionion*)” (John 12:25).

As John contrasts *psuche* with *zoen aionion*, so Paul contrasts *psuche* with *pneuma*. Paul uses *psuche* and its cognates sparingly. In Romans and Philippians it is used to express willingness to risk one’s physical life (Rom. 11:3; 16:3-4; Phil. 2:30). In the Prison Epistles it is

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also used to express focus and unity of purpose and is translated “from the heart” (Eph. 6:6, KJV, NRSV), heartily (Col. 3:23, KJV), and “with one mind” (Phil. 1:27, NRSV). He also uses it to refer to the person in anguish (Rom. 2:9). The radical contrast which Paul makes between \textit{psuche} and \textit{pneuma}, is most evident in 1 Corinthians. In both 2:14-3:3 and 15:44-46, Paul places \textit{psuche} in contrast with \textit{pneuma}. \textit{Psuche}, the term translated soul, is evidently not “a never dying soul,” but that which humans have in common with animals.

In the context of 1 Corinthians 1-3, the \textit{psuchikoi} are Greek or Jewish Christians who are still evaluating life by their cultural heritage rather than by Christ crucified (see 1 Cor. 1:22-23). Calvin, according to Bengal, captured this distinction: “the natural man” is “whoever is taught by his own faculties.”\textsuperscript{59} In relationship to the problem Paul was addressing in the Corinthian church, the \textit{psuchikoi} are composed of both Jewish and Greek believers: “Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom.” To such Christians “Christ crucified” is a “stumbling block” and “foolishness” (see 1 Cor. 1:22-23). Paul negates the translation of \textit{psuche} as soul in any transcendent metaphysical sense. True spirituality is the life of the cross and of unity with other believers.

N. W. Porteous observes Paul’s “depreciation of the \textit{psuche},” especially in his use of \textit{psuchikos}. He adds, ‘The same attitude reappears in 1 Cor. 15:42-50. This is doubtlessly due to Paul’s emphasis on the Spirit of God. . . . For him man is hopelessly in thrall to sin and needs Christ, the last Adam, to communicate to him the Spirit.” As Porteous further observes, “Like \textit{nephesh} [in the OT], we find \textit{psuche} meaning ‘life,’ which can be cared for (Matt. 6:25), saved or lost (Mark 8:35), sought (Matt. 2:20), laid down (John 10:11), risked (Phil. 2:20), etc. \textit{Psuche} can be used reflexively (2 Cor. 1:23; 1 Thess. 2:8) or as ‘persons’ in enumerations (Acts 7:14) or as the subject of emotion (Mark 14:34; Luke 1:46; John 12:27). . . .” He further notes that in some passages of the New Testament, especially in Hebrews and the Pastoral letters, \textit{psuche} seems to receive a heightened meaning.\textsuperscript{60}


A difference of usage occurs beyond either of the Testaments in the intertestamental literature. The Apocrypha, according to Porteous, generally follows the usage of the Old Testament. There is one significant exception. In the Wisdom of Solomon “there are clear traces of Greek conceptions, e.g., references to pre-existence of the soul (8:19), immortality of the soul (3:1), soul as burdened by the body (9:15), ethical qualities attributed to the soul (1:4; 2:22; 7:27; 10:7; 17:1), the idea that soul goes to Hades (16:14). In 2 Esdras 7:102-15 there is belief in the resurrection of souls after death for judgment.61

Entire Sanctification’s Key Passage: 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24. The Wesleyan tradition of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the Holiness Movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries placed almost total emphasis on the sanctification of the soul. Soul was interpreted, as in nineteenth-century idealism, as the equivalent to spirit and mind. Mind and body were so distinct that it produced the epistemological problem regarding the interaction of mind and body. How could the mind, which was essentially transcendent, interact with the body? Entirety of sanctification was applied only to the one aspect of our humanity, the soul. But in contrast, 1 Thessalonians 5:23 applies sanctifying grace to body, soul, and spirit (soma, pseuche, and pneuma)—to the whole person, not to one aspect.

In the Wesleyan tradition man is assumed to be composed of two natures—the physical and the spiritual. The latter includes mind and soul. The first, as material, is impermanent and passes away, while the second, as spiritual, is everlasting or “never dying.” Man’s chief business is the perfecting of the soul. According to Charles Wesley, one has “a never dying soul to save and fit it for the sky.” His line—“To serve the present age, my calling to fulfill”—delivers him from mere “soul centeredness.” John Wesley assumes a dichotomy. Commenting on 1 Thessalonians 5:23, he observed: “That man cannot possibly consist of three parts, appears hence: The soul is either matter or not matter: there is no medium. But if it is matter, it is part of the body: if not matter, it coincides with the spirit.”62 Though he frequently quotes Paul’s trilogy of spirit, soul, and body, the entirety of grace is applied to the soul. Thus, in his sermon “On Perfection” (1784), his statements are: “Only the soul can be the seat of

61Ibid.
sin,” and “Why cannot the Almighty sanctify the soul?” In his sermon “On Patience” (1784) he uses the expression “universal change was wrought in his soul.” Wesley seems to overlook his own exegetical work in his Notes on the New Testament.

Contemporary biblical scholarship questions this division. Howard Marshall asks whether Paul should be interpreted as a dichotomist or a trichotomist (though he does not use these terms) and gives several examples of these positions, and then rejects both, giving the following analysis:

In our view the most probable view . . . [is that] Paul here distinguishes three aspects of the Christian’s personality, his life in relationship with God through the “spiritual” part of his nature, his human personality or “soul” [the psuche], and the human body through which he acts and expresses himself. . . . Paul lists them together here to emphasize that it is indeed the whole person who is the object of salvation.”

John A. T. Robertson agrees, affirming that Paul’s description is “not necessarily trichotomy as opposed to dichotomy.” As evidence, he points to “the singular verb (teretheie) and singular adjective (holokleron), showing that Paul conceives of the man as an undivided whole.” To apply Marshall’s statement, Paul is teaching that it is “indeed the whole person who is the object of sanctification.”

To see if this proposition is viable, let us examine 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24—“May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul (psuche) and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this” (NRSV).

**Verbs: Tense and Mood.** The key verbs in this Thessalonian passage are in the aorist tense and optative mood. These are, “May . . . sanctify” (hagiasai—aorist, active, optative) and “May . . . be kept” (teretheie—aorist, passive, optative). The promise which accompanies these—“He will do this” (poiesei)—is in the future active indicative.

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64 This suggests that in his notes Wesley identified with Bengel’s exegesis, but that in his sermons he resorted to that in which he was encultured.
What is the significance of the optative mood? Daniel Wallace categorizes the usage in 5:23 as “volutil optative,” which may express: (1) “mere possibility” and does express “a great deal of doubt”; (2) “stereotyped formula,” such as me genoito (an expression of abhorrence); or (3) “polite request.” This last is expressed “without necessarily a hint of doubting.” Nevertheless, the general implication of the optative expresses doubt about “what the response will be.” The aorist optative is the tense and mood frequently used by Paul in prayer.

The optative was rare in Koine Greek and may have been primarily a literary form rather than one commonly spoken, even in the Attic Greek. Thus Wallace concludes, “. . . when a Hellenistic author uses the rarer form, he normally does so consciously and with understanding.” The New Testament authors who use it most frequently are Luke and Paul, both of them functioning easily with the nuances of the Greek. Robertson and Davis observe, “In the New Testament [the optative] occurs only sixty-seven times, Luke using it twenty-eight and Paul thirty-one. . . and Mark and Hebrews once each, Jude twice, Peter using it four times.”

Robertson and Davis also observe that in the union of the aorist tense with the optative mood, as also with the subjunctive and imperative, “no time element is involved, but only the point of action.” The term aorist means “undefined action,” but it is often referred to as punctiliar. This must not be understood as a point of time, such as a second or minute, but rather as a unit of action undefined by time.

What then is the nature of the action when Paul says, “May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely, and “may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless” (5:23)? Is this a request for God to act in a moment of time or in the remaining life time of the believer seen as a unit? Obviously, the idea of keeping is descriptive of a period of time, long or short, depending on one’s expectation regarding the Lord’s coming, the parousia. Insight can be gained by looking at Paul’s other prayers in 1 and 2 Thessalonians. As is evident from the verbs involved, instantaneous action is not being described by the use of the aorist optative. Instead, the verbs “direct,” “increase,” and “abound” are describing dura-

67Ibid, 480.
69Ibid, 296.
tion of action. I. Howard Marshall asks about the instantaneousness of the sanctification desired (5:23) and answers: “We can answer the question by comparing the wish in 3:12, which must refer to an increase in love as a gradual process but which is also expressed in the aorist form; here, too, therefore, Paul can have a process in mind.” 70 Observe that the purposive phrase that God “may strengthen your hearts in holiness” (3:13) seems to be parallel in thought to “sanctify. . . and. . . kept sound and blameless” (5:23).

The aorist optative is also found in the prayers of 2 Thessalonians. In these also action over a period of time rather than in a moment of time is implied. In 2:16-17 Paul prays: “may our Lord Jesus Christ . . . comfort (parakalesai—aorist active optative) . . . and strengthen (sterixai—aorist, active optative). In 3:5 he prays, “May the Lord direct (kateuthiunai—present active optative) your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.” In 3:16 his prayer is, “Now may the Lord of peace himself give you (doe—anorist active optative) peace at all times in all ways.” All of these scriptures imply a duration of action, seen as a unit, i.e., as a kind of action: “comfort,” “strengthen,” “direct,” “give.” The aorist optative, then, does not in and of itself express an instant of time.

The only question remaining is whether the verb sanctify (hagiazo—1 Thess. 5:23) in and of itself implies action in a single moment of time. If the implied meaning is consecrate, then a moment of time could be implied, but the sanctification is of every aspect of the person—“the whole of you, the spirit and soul and body,” to cite Wesley’s translation. Furthermore, an ongoing moral result is implied: “blameless.” Wesley may have come close to the idea presented by the aorist optative when he asks why God bestows sanctifying grace “on some before they ask for it; and yet permits other believers to wait for it, perhaps for twenty, thirty, or forty years; nay and others, till a few hours, or even minutes, before their spirits return to him.” His response was, “A full conviction of our ignorance may teach us a full trust in his wisdom.” 71 God is sovereign in response to prayer and the time of fulfillment, whether long or short, is his; thus the use of the optative is appropriate.

70I. H. Marshall, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 161.
The Time of Fulfillment. In what time period is sanctification expected? The sanctification requested in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 is in preparation for “the coming of our Lord Jesus” (1 Thess. 5:23), the Parousia. This is also the goal of the prayer in 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13: “blameless before God our Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus.” Compare these with the prayer of John 17:17: “... sanctify them through your truth.” Here sanctification is requested, using the aorist imperative. The context in John 17:17 is not for the parousia but for witness in the world: “As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world” (John 17:18). A similar prayer of equipping, using as does Paul the aorist optative, is found in Hebrews: “May the God of peace ... make you complete [katartisai] in everything good so that you may do his will” (Heb. 13:20-21). The verb katartisai means “put in order, restore,” or “prepare, make, create.” The exact nature of either the equipping or the goal is not stated. What is affirmed is God’s ability to equip.

The sanctifying work of John 17:17 prepares; that of 1 Thessalonians 5:23 completes. The sanctifying work described in John 17:17 is, to use the analogy of 2 Corinthians 3:18, a degree of glory; while that of 1 Thessalonians 5:23 is the perfection of that same glory into the likeness of Christ. The equivalent of the latter is the assurance that we are “predestined to be conformed to the image of [God’s] Son” (Rom. 8:29), and that “when he is revealed, we shall be like him” (1 John 3:3). The language of “entire” does not belong to an intermediate preparatory stage unless it is qualified descriptively as perfect preparation for a life of service, just as Acts 15:9 describes the work of the Holy Spirit at both Pentecost and at the household of Cornelius as the cleansing of the heart (Acts 15:9). To use another analogy—that of Philippians 3:12, 15, John 17:17 expresses the perfection of commitment (see Phil. 3:15, teleios), while 1 Thessalonians 5:23 expresses the perfection of the goal (see Phil. 3:12, teleioo).

The Extent of Sanctification in the Person. Understanding can also be gained by looking at how far sanctification is pictured as extending over the human personality. In 1 Thessalonians 5:23 sanctification is not only “entirely” in degree, but it is comprehensive within the human personality. Because Wesley sees human persons as essentially dichoto-

mous, he does not seem to be able to decide whether the soul belongs with the body or with the spirit.

Bengal’s comment on 1 Thess. 5:23 is of value: “Wholly—whole—He wishes that collectively and individually they should become and remain wholly God’s; collectively, all the Thessalonians without exception, so that no one should fail; individually, every one of them, with spirit, soul and body. . . . There might be an elegant Chiasmus, and if holokleron, whole, were taken adverbially, it would cast new light on the exposition. In another sense, holokleron humon, your whole, would constitute the class and the whole: the three following words would be the parts. Your spirit and soul and the body.”

Here Wesley the biblical exegete wrestles with Wesley, the follower of the Platonic tradition. Wesley’s translation is: “And the God of peace sanctify you wholly; and may the whole of you, the spirit and the soul and the body, be preserved blameless unto the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Body, soul and spirit serve as an explication not only of “the whole of you” but also of “entirely.” Thus, “entirely” is not just a term of intensity describing the sanctification of only one aspect of the person, for example, the soul, but refers to the entire person: the spirit, the psychological (mind and emotions—psuche), and the body. Thus soma, psuche, and pneuma define the extent of God’s sanctifying work.

Following this prayer (1 Thess. 5:23-24) expressed as desire (the aorist optative, 5:23), Paul assures the Thessalonians that the prayer will be fulfilled (future indicative). First, the character of God presumed in the prayer is affirmed: “The one who calls you is faithful” (5:24); then his ability and purpose are assured, “he will do this.” This returns us to “the very God of peace,” which describes God, not only as the destroyer of all hostility but also as the provider of all the completeness of life promised to those who are in covenant with him: “he rewards those who seek him” (Heb. 11:6). The entirety expressed in the prayer expresses God’s commitment, and not just for the spiritual dimension. Paul is promising nothing less than the transformation of the whole person, including the psychological and the bodily. The body, too, is meant for the Lord (1 Cor. 6:13-15). Though Paul reminds us that we carry the treasure of sanctifying grace in “clay jars” (2 Cor. 4:7), we “are being transformed into the same image [of the Lord] from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor. 3:18). “Sound

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73 Bengal, op. cit., 1 Thess. 5:23.
and blameless” is not an expression describing that which is not improv-
able, but rather an affirmation that both are received by grace (Rom. 5:1; 8:1).

The Terms “Entire” and “Perfect.” In what sense is “entire” applicable at an intermediate and essentially equipping stage of the Christian’s journey? Wesley and Fletcher provide valuable guidance by their use of “perfect.” While their critics rejected the term perfection, they rec-
ognized the dynamic meaning of the term. Wesley describes perfection as occurring in three stages, including that of the new Christian: “A babe in Christ is so far perfect as not to commit sin.”74 Both Wesley and Fletcher distinguish between an intermediate perfection and a final perfection. Wesley, commenting on Philippians 3:12-15, observes: “There is a differ-
ence between one that is perfect and one that is perfected. The one is fit-
ted for the race (v. 15); the other is ready to receive the prize.” About the final perfection (3:12), he comments: “Perfect holiness, preparatory to glory.”75 He affirms that God perfectly equips a new Christian to begin the journey of faith and obedience. Beyond this is “Evangelical Perfe-
tion,” to use Fletcher’s term, and the goal “one that is perfected” which is named by Fletcher, “the perfection of suffering and glory.”76 God does an entire equipping (see Heb. 13:20-21) for every stage of the journey. Both Wesley and Fletcher are in harmony with Paul’s two perfections of Philippians 3, the perfection of commitment (3:15) and the perfection of the goal (3:12). By these two usages, Paul identifies himself with the perfec-
tion of commitment to the goal—“let those of us” (3:15)—and also denies having arrived at the goal (3:12).

Conclusion

Our research gives evidence that sanctification is a life-long process with “entire sanctification” being its goal. To assign 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 to the goal of the Christian life does not deny an intermediate stage of sanctification and perfection. This does not deny that there are crises within the process. Sanctification occurs in three stages: (1) initial sanctification, concomitant with the new birth (1 Cor. 1:2; see 2 Peter

75 Wesley, Explanatory Notes on the New Testament, Phil. 3:12.
76 See Fletcher, “Last Check to Antinomianism,” Section VI; Works, 598.
1:4), (2) equipping sanctification (John 17:17) concomitant with the baptism with the Holy Spirit, and (3) entire sanctification (1 Thess. 5:23), concomitant with Christlikeness (Rom. 8:29; 1 John 3:2, 4:17). This last stage is the goal of the Christian, promised by God (1 Thess. 5:24). How then shall we define sanctification in a moral and transformational sense, the primary New Testament sense? Sanctification is all that God does in us and through us to transform us into the image of God’s Son.
IRENAEUS AND THE DOCTRINE OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

by

Christopher T. Bounds

The language of Christian perfection has receded almost entirely to the background in contemporary Christianity, particularly in Protestantism. Even in many Wesleyan-Arminian denominations, historically committed to the proclamation and experience of Christian perfection, there has been retreat, relegating the language of perfection to neglected articles of religion and confessions of faith, with little or no bearing in the life of the church. In contrast, the Church Fathers in the first two centuries used this language pervasively in expressing the Christian conception of salvation.1 The most notable example is Irenaeus, often recognized by scholars as the greatest theologian of his era. Irenaeus recapitulated the earlier teaching on perfection in the Apostolic Fathers, faithfully developed it, and established perfection in a comprehensive soteriological system, becoming the first theologian we know to do so.

Specifically, the purpose here is to examine Irenaeus’ teaching on Christian perfection in its historical theological context and illuminate its primacy for him, as well as the second-century church. We will begin by reviewing his life, the primary and secondary sources used as the basis of

1See Clement of Rome’s First Epistle to the Corinthians 1:2; 9:2; 44:2,5; 49:5-50:3; 53:5; 55:6; 56:1; Ignatius of Antioch’s Epistle to the Ephesians (short) 14-15, (long) 8,15; Epistle to the Philadelphians (short) 1, 3; (long) 1,3; Epistle to Polycarp (long) 1-3; Didache 1.4; 6.2; 10.5; 16.2; Epistle of Barnabas 1.5; 4.11; 6.8-19; 14.4-8; Polycarp’s Epistle to the Philippians 3:1-3; 12.1-3; and The Shepherd of Hermas 2.9.1; 3.5.1-3.

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our study, and identify our research methodology. Then, we will explore the different Gnostic systems of perfection as understood by Irenaeus.

Gnostic heresy fueled Irenaeus’ need to clarify the church’s “rule of faith” on the subject of perfection and played a crucial role in the theological landscape of the period. Once this foundation is in place, we will turn our attention to Irenaeus’ doctrine of perfection as he articulates it within his larger doctrinal system. Finally, we will conclude with an attempt to locate the doctrine of perfection in general and Irenaeus’ teaching in particular within early Ante-Nicene theology.

**Background and Methodology**

Irenaeus was born in Asia Minor, possibly Smyrna, where as a youth he listened to the preaching of Polycarp. As an adult, he traveled to Gaul, where he became a presbyter in the church at Lyons and a leader in the struggle against Gnosticism. When Bishop Photinus died as a martyr in 177, Irenaeus ascended to the episcopal office. As a bishop, he focused his work on sending missionaries into unevangelized regions of his area and maintaining unity in the church through a vigorous defense of the “rule of faith” in the face of persistent heresy. Most likely, he died as a martyr in the Roman massacre of Christians in Gaul in 202.

Although Irenaeus wrote a number of books and treatises, only two remain today. The most famous, *Adversus Haereses* or “Against Heresies,” is the focus of our study. Until archeological discoveries of Gnostic texts in the twentieth century, this work provided scholars with one of the few substantial access points to Gnosticism in early Christianity. In Irenaeus’ description and refutation of Gnosticism, he specifically draws upon primary Gnostic sources and earlier pieces of Christian apologetics directed at heresy. As such, his work has been a crucial source for understanding Gnosticism, the development of early Christian orthodoxy, and the relationship between the two.

While scholars have recognized the doctrine of salvation as the key issue in Irenaeus’ work, many have failed to recognize or acknowledge

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4 The other extant work of Irenaeus is *The Demonstration of Apostolic Preaching*. 

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that the doctrine of Christian perfection in particular is the larger rubric in which Gnosticism is described and rejected.\(^5\) Irenaeus spends the first book of *Adversus Haereses* giving a detailed account of the Gnostic systems of Christian perfection and the last four books presenting the church’s teaching on the subject. Against the backdrop of other concerns regarding Gnosticism, such as the unity of God, the incarnation, and the resurrection of the body, the doctrine of Christian perfection forms the larger framework through which Irenaeus addresses each subject.

For our study, we use *Sources Chrétiennes*’ constructed critical edition of the earliest Greek and Latin texts of *Adversus Haereses*.\(^6\) We begin by locating and examining every place in Irenaeus that directly mentions, addresses, or develops the term “perfection” in its various grammatical forms as it relates to humanity. Specifically, the most common words for “perfection” in the Greek New Testament and subsequent Latin translations of the early church (“τελειός” in Greek and “perfectus” in Latin) have been the focus of our attention.\(^7\) Once identified, we then attempt to interpret these passages within their literary contexts. Our hope is that this approach has enabled us to capture Irenaeus’ teaching on perfection more fully, to shed light on its strategic importance in his theology, and to construct a more robust understanding of the role of perfection in the second-century church.

**The Gnostic Doctrines of Christian Perfection**

In Irenaeus’ description of Gnostic redemption, the language of perfection, “τελειότης,” “τελειός,” “τελειώμα,” “τελείωσις,” and “τελειωτής” is pervasive. Repeatedly, perfection as a noun is used to

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\(^6\)Irenaeus, *Contre les Hérésies I* (*Sources Chrétiennes* 263, 264; Paris, 1979); *Contre les Hérésies II*, (*Sources Chrétiennes* 293, 294; Paris, 1982); *Contre les Hérésies III*, (*Sources Chrétiennes* 210, 211; Paris, 1974); *Contre les Hérésies IV*, (*Sources Chrétiennes* 100; Paris, 1965); *Contre les Hérésies V*, (*Sources Chrétiennes* 152, 153; Paris, 1969).

describe the goal of redemption, as a verb, the process by which individuals are redeemed, and as an adjective, those who have experienced redemption in the present life and in life after death. Furthermore, the personal testimony of perfection, or greater degrees of perfection, is one of the means by which Gnostic leaders established authority in their communities. As such, language of human perfection forms the crux of the Gnostic vocabulary of salvation.

More specifically, in Book One of *Adversus Haereses* Irenaeus offers an extensive account of the Valentinian system of perfection as a representative model of Gnosticism. The Valentinians believed that there is a “perfect, unbegotten, invisible, and incomprehensible aeon” named First Beginning or First-Father. Along with his consort Idea, he begat other aeons, who in turn begat others, until there were thirty aeons forming the Pleroma.

In an attempt to know First-Father in an untimely and unwarranted manner, Sophia, one of the lowest aeons, fell from the Pleroma. Her descent brought into being an “amorphous substance” that became the material substance from which the universe was fashioned and an “animal” substance from which she fashioned a being named Demiurge. Then, of her own accord, she produced a third substance—spiritual existence, which she gave to Demiurge in his creation.

In ignorance of his origins, the larger Pleroma, and his spiritual nature, Demiurge then fashioned the visible world from the material substance caused by Sophia’s fall and formed humanity in his image and

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8Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 1.6.1-1.8.4; 1.11.5; 1.13.1,6; 1.21.1-4; 1.29.3; 1.31.2; 4.35.2.
9Ibid., 1.13.6.
10Ibid., 1.1.1.
11Ibid., 1.1.2-3. The aeons named by Irenaeus that comprise the Pleroma include: Proarche (First Beginning) and Ennoea (Idea) who generated two other aeons—Nous (Mind) and Aletheia (Truth), who in turn produced Logos (Word) and Zoe (Life). From this tetrad other aeons came into being: Bythius (Deep), Mixis (Mingling), Ageratos (Undecaying), Henosis (Union), Autophyes (Self-existent), Hedone (Pleasure), Acinetos (Immovable), Syncrasis (Blending), Monogenes (Only-Begotten), Macaria (Happiness), Anthropos, Ecclesia, Paracletus (Advocate), Pistis (Faith), Patricos (Ancestral), Elpis (Hope), Metricos (Metrical), Agape (Love), Ainos (Praise), Synesis (Understanding), Ecclesiasticus (Ecclesiastical), Macariotes (Felicity), Theletos (Desiderated), and Sophia (Wisdom).
12Ibid., 1.2-5.
likeness, with “image” referring to his material existence and “likeness” to his “animal” nature. He also imparted to humanity unknowingly his spiritual nature, given secretly to him by Sophia.\(^{13}\)

Therefore, Gnostics taught that humanity is comprised of three types of substances: material, animal, and spiritual. Humanity’s material existence by its nature is destined for destruction; their animal nature will end in corruption or incorruption, depending on its progress in the present life; and their spiritual substance, if its potential is unleashed, will unite humanity with the Pleroma and impart incorruptibility. Unfortunately, like Demiurge, the bulk of humanity lives in ignorance of their spiritual nature.\(^{14}\)

Consequently, humanity is comprised of three groups. The first is called the “perfect ones.” They are perfected by knowledge of their true spiritual nature, giving them a place in the Pleroma after death. The second group is the “psychics,” who possess some knowledge, have some understanding of their spiritual state, but lack “perfect” knowledge. Their future is with Demiurge, existing outside of fellowship with the Pleroma. Finally, the third group, comprising the bulk of humanity, lives in ignorance of their spiritual state and exists solely on a material level. Their ignorance prohibits their spiritual nature from being released. Their fate is complete corruption.\(^{15}\)

According to Irenaeus, the Valentinians taught that Sophia and Demiurge are unable to enlighten human beings about their spiritual nature. This is because Sophia is outside the Pleroma and Demiurge has complete ignorance of his own spiritual nature and humanity’s. If any part of humanity is going to reach perfection, the level of the Pleroma, then a member of the Pleroma had to take the initiative. Therefore, the aeon Christ came to effect redemption for humanity by uniting with the man Jesus.\(^{16}\)

The means to perfection in Gnosticism is knowledge—an understanding and grasp of certain propositional truths about humanity’s origin and nature which was revealed secretly to select individuals through the aeon Christ, residing in the man Jesus. This knowledge enlightens indi-

\(^{13}\)Ibid., 1.5-6.1
\(^{14}\)Ibid., 1.5-6.1.
\(^{15}\)Ibid., 1.6-7.2; 1.7.5.
\(^{16}\)Ibid., 1.8-9.
viduals about their true spiritual existence and releases their spiritual seed, empowering them to grow toward the Pleroma, making them perfect.\textsuperscript{17} The more knowledge Gnostics gain, the more spiritual they become and advance to higher levels of perfection.

Perfection in Gnostic understanding is dynamic in nature, not static. Perfection begins with enlightenment through knowledge, then progresses and increases throughout life, culminating after death. Gnostics arrive at final perfection when they are separated from their physical bodies at death and are united with the aeon Christ in the Pleroma.

Because knowledge is the means of perfection and perfection is spiritual in nature, Gnostics were not concerned with the material world. As a result, Irenaeus testifies that the “most perfect” adherents among them were prone to hedonism. Rampant sexual promiscuity, celebration of pagan festivals, attendance at bloody spectator sports, along with lust, pride, greediness, and “everything sinful” characterized their lives.\textsuperscript{18}

Irenaeus’ Doctrine of Christian Perfection

In his preface to the second book of \textit{Adversus Haereses}, Irenaeus summarizes his earlier work to this point, “I have showed moreover, that all these heretics . . . have introduced impious and irreligious doctrines into this life; and I have explained the nature of their ‘redemption’ and their method of initiating those who are rendered ‘perfect,’ along with their invocations and their mysteries.”\textsuperscript{19} After addressing heretical conceptions of perfection in Book One, he moves to explain the church’s “rule of faith” on Christian perfection in the final four books.

In Irenaeus’ description, the language of perfection, “τελειότης,” “τελειός,” “τελειώσα,” “τελειώσας,” “τελειωτής” and “τελειωτής” is extensive. Like Gnosticism, perfection as a noun describes the goal of redemption, as a verb, the process of redemption, and as an adjective, the various degrees of redemption experienced in the present life and ultimate perfection in the life to come.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., 1.8-9.
\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., 1.6.3.
\textsuperscript{20}Ibid., 2. preface; 2.26.1; 2.28.1-2.9; 2.30.7; 3.1.1; 3.2.1; 3.3.1; 3.12.5,13; 4.9.2-3; 4.11.2-5; 4.20.12; 4.27.1; 4.37.7-4.39.4; 5.1.1-3; 5.6.1-2: 5.8.1-5.9.3; 5.21.2; 5.36.3.
Perfection is an all-encompassing soteriological rubric by which Irenaeus describes the creation of humanity, the fall of Adam and Eve, Christ’s redemptive work, the reception of the Holy Spirit, and humanity’s final union with God. God has worked in the past and continues to labor in the present to bring His crowning achievement to perfection. As such, Irenaeus’ conception of perfection encompasses the entirety of human history and is the focal idea around which his theological system coalesces.

To understand Irenaeus’ doctrine of Christian perfection, we must begin with his doctrine of God and creation. He teaches that God alone is perfect because every divine attribute is perfect and exists in perfect relationship with the others. For example, the perfection of divine omnipotence is seen in God’s work of creatio ex nihilo and in omnipotence’s perfect relationship with divine omniscience, demonstrated in the utilitarian construction of the world, which in turn is grounded in God’s perfect goodness, manifested in the providential care given to all of creation. Therefore, creation testifies to the perfection of God’s omnipotence, omniscience and benevolence and their perfect union in God’s nature, character, and will.

While Irenaeus ascribes perfection to God because of His attributes, he does so most notably in recognition of God’s uncreated nature (which is linked to divine incorruptibility, eternality, and immortality) and His supreme love. When he speaks about God’s perfection, he has divine love and incorruption foremost in mind.

This doctrine of God sets us up for Irenaeus’ anthropology. He teaches that God created humanity in His image and likeness for the purpose of sharing in God’s perfection. Through the imago dei, God bestows humanity with the capacity to reflect the divine attributes, particularly incorruptibility and love, thereby manifesting “God’s glory” in the world and achieving perfection. In the Garden of Eden, humanity had this perfection in nascent form, with the expectation that they would fully develop it over time.

At this point, Irenaeus anticipates the question, “Why did God not impart full perfection to humanity in the beginning?” He responds with

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21Ibid., 2.29.2; 3.5.1; 3.10.1; 3.11.2; 4.11.2; 4.12.2.
23Ibid., 4.38.3-4; 5.1.3; 5.8.1; 5.10.1; 5.16.2; 5.28.4; 5.36.3.
two answers. First, God created the world and humanity with Adam’s fall in mind. While God did not cause humanity’s disobedience and fall into corruption, through divine foreknowledge, He made provision for it. Therefore, God did not make humanity fully perfect, but in a way that ultimate perfection could be achieved through a gradual advancement in degrees of perfection.24

Irenaeus pictured humanity’s first parents as “infants” or “children” given the gift of free will, by which they could follow the divine commandments and mature into full perfection. This divine gift of freedom enables every person to “justly possess” the goodness already inherent in them and grow to perfection. As such, God created the world with the end of helping humanity achieve perfection through the trials, temptations, and hardships of life, the consequences of Adam’s disobedience. God brought good out of evil by using humanity’s fall as a means of perfecting humanity.25

Second, Irenaeus believed humanity was incapable of being made fully perfect in the beginning because of the nature of created existence. Only God is truly perfect since ultimate perfection is rooted in having an uncreated incorruptible nature. He states:

If, however, anyone says, “What then? Could not God have exhibited man as perfect from the beginning?” let him know that, in as much as God is indeed always the same and unbegotten as respects Himself, all things are possible to Him. But created things must be inferior to Him who created them, from the very fact of their later origin; for it was not possible for things recently created to have been uncreated. But in as much as they are created, for this very reason do they come short of the perfect.26

As such, humanity could not receive God’s perfection because, as a newly created being, humanity could not “receive,” “contain,” “and “retain” perfection.27 However, through growth and maturity, over time, humanity’s created nature could develop to a place where it could participate in the divine nature and realize full perfection.

24Ibid., 4.38.3-4.
27Ibid. 4.38.2.
Irenaeus teaches that, before humanity’s first parents could mature fully into the image and likeness of God, before they could realize ultimate perfection in the Garden of Eden, the Devil deceived them into defying God’s law not to eat from the tree of knowledge. Their “fall” led to consequences far beyond their lives and initiated a history of human misery, sin, enslavement to the Devil, and death. In this condition, humanity was powerless to change, impotent to bring about God’s purpose for their lives—the perfection of the divine image and likeness.

Humanity, created by God to have life, forfeited that life to the “Serpent” through Adam. Irenaeus argues that if humanity had been left in death, then God would have been defeated, not merely thwarted. Because of God’s omnipotence and perfect goodness, He could not allow humanity’s misery to go unaddressed. God had to act to restore humanity’s capacity to reach perfection. Therefore, through a series of successive covenants established with Adam, Noah, and the nation of Israel, God conferred greater degrees of grace to humanity, culminating in the covenant enacted by Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, whereby human perfection was made possible once again. These covenants became the means by which the image and likeness to God in humanity could be renewed and perfected.

For Irenaeus the incarnation of God’s Son was indispensable for human redemption. God could not bring about humanity’s renewal and perfection in the divine image and likeness, defeat the Devil, destroy sin, overcome death, give life, and impart incorruption without entering the troubled conditions of humanity. Consequently, Christ passed through every stage of human life, thereby restoring to each stage fellowship with God and paving the way for perfection. Irenaeus states this eloquently:

For he came to save all through means of himself—all, I say, who through him are born again to God—infants, and children, and boys, and youths, and old men. He therefore passed through every age, becoming an infant for infants, thus sancti-

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28 Ibid., 4.38.2.
29 Ibid., 4.9.3. One of the classic questions in Christian theology asks, “Could God have left humanity in sin and death? Did God have to act to redeem humanity?” Irenaeus’ answer is that God did not have a choice. Because of God’s character and nature, He had to act to redeem humanity.
30 Ibid., 3.11.8; 4.9.3.
31 Ibid., 2.22.4; 3.18.3-5; 3.19-20; 3.23.1-8; 5.1.1.
fying infants; a child for children, thus sanctifying those who are of this age, being at the same time made to them an example of piety, righteousness, and submission; a youth for youths, becoming an example to youths, and thus sanctifying them for the Lord. So likewise he was an old man for old men, that he might be a perfect master for all, not merely as respects the setting forth of the truth, but also as regards age, sanctifying at the same time the aged also, and becoming to them likewise. Then, at last, he came on to death itself, that he might be “the first-born from the dead, that in all things he might be preeminent,” the Prince of Life, existing before all, and going before all.32

Accordingly, Christ’s work of recapitulation prepares humanity for the reception of the Holy Spirit, whose role is to complete the work of making Christians perfect in the image and likeness of God. Irenaeus teaches that through the Son’s union with the “ancient substance of Adam’s formation” in the incarnation and the Spirit’s union with believers through Pentecost, Christians are rendered “living and perfect,” receptive of the “perfect Father.”33 The earthly ministry of Jesus makes perfection objectively possible for humanity and the outpouring and reception of the Holy Spirit makes humanity subjectively perfect. The Holy Spirit applies the benefits of Christ’s ministry of recapitulation to the Christian.

Irenaeus teaches that “natural” or unredeemed humanity consists of a body, mind and soul.34 In physical composition, humanity bears God’s image. However, in their natural state humanity lacks God’s likeness, which is the Holy Spirit. Christ’s redemption paves the way for the outpouring and reception of the Holy Spirit. When people receive the Spirit and become Christians, they are made perfect through the Spirit’s infusion and union with the human soul and body.35 Irenaeus’ quintessential

33Ibid., 5.1.1.
34Ibid., 5.6.1.
35Ibid., 5.6.1-8.4. Irenaeus states, “The Lord has redeemed us through His own blood, giving His soul for our souls, His flesh for our flesh, and also poured out the Spirit of the Father for the union and the communion of God and man, imparting indeed God to men by means of the Spirit, and on the other hand attaching man to God by His own incarnation . . . in the end, the Word of the
example is Pentecost. The disciples received God’s likeness through the outpoured Spirit, making them perfect.36

While the work of perfection is completely dependent upon the initiative and work of God through the Son and Holy Spirit, it does not happen without human cooperation. Irenaeus teaches that the full work of redemption begins with the grace of God, but it must be united with humanity’s obedience. In his synergistic understanding, Christian perfection is possible only through Christ’s recapitulation of human life and the Spirit’s union with body and soul, but it is experienced only through the exercise of faith, choice of the good, and obedience to God. Humanity is empowered to do all this through the gift of free will.37

At this point, we can begin to see that Irenaeus has a dynamic understanding of Christian perfection. Perfection begins when a person receives the Holy Spirit, which he describes as “an earnest” on final perfection, and continues throughout present life until it culminates in bodily resurrection and consummation with God in the future eschaton.38 More specifically, Irenaeus sees perfection as a “ladder of ascent to God.”39 After the reception of the Holy Spirit, making Christians “perfect,” the Spirit works relentlessly to fashion them into greater degrees of divine likeness by adorning them with “purity,” “works of righteousness,” and most notably the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, continence, and chastity.40 In contrast to the Gnostics, true Christian perfection has moral consequences. Through the Spirit’s abiding presence, the “perfect” are blameless in soul and body (a Christian’s body is the temple of God and must be kept free from sin), and deal “righteously with their neighbor.”41

Father and the Spirit of God, having become united with the ancient substance of Adam’s formation, rendered man living and perfect, receptive of the perfect Father“ (5.1.1).

36 Ibid., 3.12.5.
37 Ibid., 4.38.2.
38 Ibid., 5.8.1. Irenaeus states, “but man receives advancement toward God, for as God is always the same, so also is man, when found in God, for neither does God at any time cease to confer benefits upon, or to enrich man; nor does man ever cease from receiving the benefits, and being enriched by God, for the receptacle of His goodness and the instrument of His glorification is man . . .” (4.9.2).
39 Ibid., 3.24.1.
40 Ibid., 5.8.4; 5.9.2; 5.11.1.
41 Ibid., 5.6.1.
The highest expression of Christian perfection is perfect love, marked by human realization of the two greatest commandments—to love God completely and neighbor as self. These laws are “the precepts of an absolutely perfect life,” encapsulating both the law of the Old Testament and the Gospel of Jesus Christ.\(^{42}\) The perfect love of God manifests itself in singular devotion and obedience to God, and the perfect love of neighbor makes itself known primarily in genuine concern for the poor and one’s enemies.

Irenaeus illustrates the first command by drawing a contrast between Solomon, who allowed foreign wives to lead him away from the “perfect love of God,” and Paul, who through his Christian life reached a “high degree of perfection in the love of God.”\(^{43}\) He then offers the deacon Stephen as an example of perfect keeping of the second command when he forgave those who unjustly stoned him to death, following the example of Christ.\(^{44}\)

Growth in perfection climaxes in the life to come when Christians are “clothed” with incorruptibility through the final resurrection.\(^{45}\) Just as the Holy Spirit begins the process of perfection in this life, it is His role to complete it in the next. Irenaeus builds his doctrine upon Paul’s statement in 2 Corinthians 5:4, “For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed, but to be clothed, in order that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge.” Irenaeus teaches that the Holy Spirit is the wedding garment that will enable Christians to participate in the great marriage supper of the Lamb after the resurrection. When Christ is joined in consummation to His bride the church, humanity will take up incorruptibility and the work of perfection will be completed, for humanity will be fully like God, incorruptible and living a life of supreme love.\(^{46}\)

\(^{42}\)Ibid., 4.12-13.

\(^{43}\)Ibid., 4.27.1; 2.30.7.

\(^{44}\)Ibid., 3.12.13.

\(^{45}\)As was stated earlier, this is the most prominent part of the divine perfection (along with the divine love) that God wanted to communicate to humanity. God does so in the ultimate perfection of a Christian.

\(^{46}\)Ibid., 4.36.6.
The Place of Irenaeus’ Doctrine of Christian Perfection in the Second-Century Church

To address the place of Irenaeus’ particular doctrine of Christian perfection in the second century, as well as the place of perfection in general, we need to address two issues: (1) the centrality of Christian perfection in Irenaeus’ polemics with Gnosticism; and (2) the relationship of his doctrine to the church’s “rule of faith.”

First, the doctrine of Christian perfection clearly is “front and center” in Irenaeus’ refutation of Gnosticism. Perfection is the primary lens through which Irenaeus engages and rejects Gnosticism. He uses the language of perfection to establish the contrast between the Gnostic’s perfect aeon, first beginning, and the church’s perfect God, between the Gnostic understanding of fall, creation, redemption and the church’s teaching on creation, fall and redemption, between the Gnostics’ ethical instruction and the church’s expectation of holiness, and between the Gnostic teaching on humanity’s progression to the Pleroma and the church’s doctrine of human consummation with God.

The language of perfection in Adversus Haereses is not merely a rhetorical or argumentative tool used by Irenaeus and Gnostic teachers, but represents two competing interpretive schools of Christian perfection in the second century. Both doctrines are sophisticated, well developed and comprehensive in scheme. Perfection is not peripheral or ancillary, but the organizing rubric around which all other doctrinal teachings coalesce. It forms humanity’s goal in the present experience of redemption, as well as the future. The attention and detail given to perfection by Irenaeus and the Gnostics points to its centrality in second-century thought and experience, particularly in the latter half. Therefore, Irenaeus’ doctrine appears to exist within a historical and theological environment in which focus on perfection was standard.

Second, as a part of his refutation, the issue of sources in doctrinal transmission comes to the fore. Again, the language of perfection sets up the contrast between Gnostic knowledge and true Christian knowledge. According to Irenaeus, the Gnostics based their doctrine on secret information mysteriously passed down to a select few and closed to public inspection. They believed their “perfect” knowledge enlightened “pneumatics” scattered throughout humanity, allowing them to comprehend God.

Irenaeus countered that the twelve disciples of Jesus were given “perfect” but limited knowledge (no one can comprehend God) which
was publically transmitted and available to everyone. This is the “rule of faith,” taught throughout the universal church. The apostles were given the “rule of faith,” along with the Scriptures, in order to make them “perfect and blameless.” They in turn passed it down to the present through apostolic succession. Christian teaching that leads to perfection is open to all, not just a select few.\footnote{Ibid., 3.1.1-3.2.3.}

Central to Irenaeus’ argument in \textit{Adversus Haereses} is that his doctrine of Christian perfection is a faithful portrayal of what the church has always taught from the time of the apostles to his day. His doctrine is rooted in and is an exposition of the “rule of faith.” If we take a cursory look at Irenaeus’ immediate predecessors, we find strong evidence of continuity, particularly with the Apostolic Fathers of the late first and early second centuries, people he would have received as faithful teachers of the “rule of faith.”\footnote{See Irenaeus’ mention and discussion of the Apostolic Fathers: 3.3.1-4; 5.33.4.}

These Fathers used the language of perfection extensively in expressing the church’s conception of salvation.\footnote{See Clement of Rome’s \textit{First Epistle to the Corinthians} 1:2; 9:2; 44:2,5; 49:5-50:3; 53:5; 55:6; 56:1; Ignatius of Antioch’s \textit{Epistle to the Ephesians} (short) 14-15, (long) 8,15; \textit{Epistle to the Philadelphians} (short) 1, 3; (long) 1,3; \textit{Epistle to Polycarp} (long) 1-3; \textit{Didache} 1.4; 6.2; 10.5; 16.2; \textit{Epistle of Barnabas} 1.5; 4.11; 6.8-19; 14.4-8; Polycarp’s \textit{Epistle to the Philippians} 3:1-3; 12.1-3; and \textit{The Shepherd of Hermas} 2.9.1; 3.5.1-3.}

While they did not give any systematic account of Christian perfection, they made repeated reference to it in their pastoral counsel and employed it as a primary thrust in their arguments. Their literature testifies of Christians who had reached perfection in this life and makes clear an expectation that every believer should be perfected in the “here and now” through the redemptive work of Christ and the sanctifying presence of the Holy Spirit.\footnote{For a more thorough discussion of the Apostolic Fathers teaching on Christian perfection, see Christopher T. Bounds, “The Doctrine of Christian Perfection in the Apostolic Fathers,” \textit{The Wesleyan Theological Journal}, 42.2 (Fall 2007), 7-27.} Through their extensive use of perfection in their practical and doctrinal teaching on salvation, they set the context for the prominence that Christian perfection takes in Irenaeus’ theology and his expectation of its experience in the present life.
They also focused their understanding of perfection on a Christian’s perfection in love, defined by Christ in the two greatest commandments, and freedom from sin, a life lived in obedience to God.51 Similarly, Irenaeus’ strongly believed that through the reception of the Holy Spirit, Christians are perfected in love, empowered to fulfill the same commandments given by Christ, and freed from bondage to intentional sin, having their hearts oriented in love and purity. He states that Christians, made perfect by the Spirit, “guard against sinning of any kind,” “possess humility,” and have a single eye toward loving God and their neighbors.52

Irenaeus recapitulates the Apostolic Fathers’ core teaching on perfection in *Adversus Haereses*. He also develops their doctrine in two ways. First, he directly connects Christian perfection with the image and likeness of God in humanity and brings it to the fore as a principle idea. Previously, it had only been a nascent theme in *The Epistle of Barnabas*, but in Irenaeus it becomes the primary way to describe what perfection is, not simply how perfection manifests itself in life.53 The *imago dei* in humanity, both its renewal and full realization, leads to perfect love, holiness, and, in the future eschaton, incorruptibility. Second, Irenaeus establishes perfection in a comprehensive theological and soteriological scheme, becoming the first theologian we know to do so, or at least the first to articulate this system in writing. However, in both these developments, the essence of the Apostolic Fathers’ teaching remains intact.

**Conclusion**

In summary, through a careful examination of the language of perfection in his polemic against Gnosticism, *Adversus Haereses*, we have argued that Irenaeus has a clear, comprehensive doctrine of Christian perfection. He believes that Christian perfection is the renewal of the image and likeness of God in humanity through the work of Christ and the

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51 For perfection in love, see *I Clement* 49.5-50.1-3; *Epistle of St. Ignatius to the Ephesians* 14.1-3; *Epistle of St. Ignatius to the Philadelphians* 1.1-3; The *Didache* 1.4, 6.2, 10.5; *The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philadelphians* 3.1-3, 12.1-3; and *The Shepherd of Hermas* 2.9.1, 3.5.1-3. For freedom from sin, see *I Clement* 1.2, 9.2-12.8; 50.5-6; *Epistle of St. Ignatius to the Ephesians* 14.2-3; The *Didache* 1.4 -6.2; *The Epistle of Barnabas* 4.7-14, 6.10-19, 14.5-9; *The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philadelphians* 3.1-3; and *The Shepherd of Hermas* 2.9.1, 3.5.1-3.


indwelling Spirit. This restoration of the *imago dei* manifests itself supremely in the perfect love of God and neighbor, in the fruit of the Spirit, and in a life free from intentional sin. Perfection develops and matures throughout life and culminates after death when a Christian takes up incorruptibility in final resurrection and union with God.

In placing Irenaeus’ doctrine within the flow of second-century thought, we have tried to show that his focus and attention to perfection is not out of the ordinary. Rather, the doctrine of Christian perfection appears to have a crucial role in the theology of the second century, both in the church and in Gnosticism. In particular, Irenaeus’ doctrine encapsulates and develops the teaching of the earlier Apostolic Fathers. Through Irenaeus’ work, we see a maturation of the Apostolic Fathers’ thought, but not any essential change.

In conclusion, while the doctrine of Christian perfection may languish in contemporary Christianity, the second-century church bears witness to the power and hope of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to perfect believers in love, setting them free from the power of sin. In contrast to anemic portrayals of present salvation in today’s evangelical circles, Irenaeus and the early Ante-Nicene Fathers cast a beautiful vision of what Christianity can be in this life and in the life to come. Historically, Wesleyan teaching on Christian perfection aligns with the primary thrust of Irenaeus’ theology and the early church. With focus on renewal in the image of God, resulting in perfect love and freedom from sin, our Wesleyan doctrine is not original, but rooted in the earliest Christian instruction. With a doctrinal pedigree that stretches to the beginnings of Christianity, grounded in the early “rule of faith,” our Wesleyan denominations have cause to recalibrate their focus on Christian perfection in proclamation and personal experience.

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“THE ONE THING NEEDFUL”: 
CHARLES WESLEY ON SANCTIFICATION

by

John R. Tyson

An investigation of Charles Wesley’s understanding of sanctification provides an opportunity to examine his unique theological contribution to what is often considered early Methodism’s most distinctive doctrine and characteristic emphasis.¹ Seen from this particular vantage point, Charles steps out from behind his brother John’s shadow and strikes out in his own theological direction. Sanctification was one of the few theological doctrines that caused controversy and dispute between the Wesley brothers. This occurred because they brought different emphases to the doctrine and—as brothers and sisters are apt to do—each sought to correct the other.

The Formative Stage

Charles Wesley’s understanding of sanctification began at the Epworth manse where he imbibed a unique blend of Anglican spirituality and Puritan piety. Charles’s father Samuel (as well as his mother Susanna) had been a convert to the Church of England from Puritanism.² He

¹This was certainly John Wesley’s point of view. As he wrote to Robert Carr, Esq., on Sept. 15, 1790, “This doctrine is the grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodists; and for the sake of propagating this chiefly he appeared to have raised us up. Thomas Jackson, ed. The Works of John Wesley 14 vols. (London: The Wesleyan Conference, 1872), XIII:9.

embraced the Anglican tradition and practices with vigor. In his mother, Charles met a Christian spirituality that was more associated with personal devotions and examination of one’s conscience. Thus, while they were away at college, both John and Charles wrote to their father when they had questions about theology, but they wrote to their mother, Susanna, about their spiritual struggles. Charles’s Anglican proclivities had the added stimulus of his spending his formative years (from the age of eight until he left for the university) in the care of his eldest brother, Samuel Wesley, Jr. He too was an ardent Anglican, “a strict Churchman who bought me up in his own principles,” Charles wrote.

The paper trail for tracing the development of Charles Wesley’s understanding of sanctification becomes more ample as we look at his Oxford years. In 1729, Charles recalled that he and a few of his fellow students formed a discipleship group and earned themselves the “harmless name of a Methodist.” Their reading of the Greek New Testament and Patristics set the Oxford Methodists on a regiment of spiritual disciplines aimed at producing holiness of heart and life. William Law’s *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* appeared in 1728, the same year as the Oxford “Holy Club.” Law urged his readers to “unite themselves into little societies professing voluntary poverty, virginity, retirement, and devotion, living upon bare necessities, that some might be relieved by the charities and all be blessed with their prayers and benefited by their example.” The Oxford Methodists devoured this book and intended to emulate its doctrine and practices.

In 1729 Charles read Henry Scougal’s devotional book entitled *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*. He subsequently loaned the book to fellow Holy Club member, George Whitefield, and it became the instrument of Whitefield’s evangelical conversion. In that book, Charles Wesley met with what would be his foundational definition of the goal and the nature of sanctification. Scougal urged: “true religion is an union of the soul

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5 Ibid.
with God, a real participation in the Divine nature, the image of God
drawn upon the soul, or in the Apostle’s phrase, ‘it is Christ formed within
us.’” In describing “true religion” as “divine life,” Scougal pointed his
readers to both the source and the nature of true religion. He wrote: “I
come next to give an account of why I defined it by the name Divine Life;
and so it may be called, not only in regard to its fountain and original
[sic] having God for its author and being wrought in the souls of men by
the power of the Holy Spirit, but also in regard of its nature, religion
being a resemblance of the divine perfections, the image of Almighty
shining in the soul of man.” Scougal taught sanctification was a recovery
of the image of God within a person; it became one of Charles Wesley’s
most characteristic descriptions of entire sanctification or Christian Per-
fection.

In October, 1735, Charles Wesley found himself on board a ship
headed for Georgia. His brother, John and two of the Oxford Methodists
had volunteered for foreign missionary service in that remote and primi-
tive place, and Charles was swept up in their excitement and thirst for
adventure. He was assigned to duty in the military out-post, Frederica,
while John served in Georgia’s only city, Savannah. As an autobiographi-
cal letter later reported: “the hardship of lying on the ground, and etc.,
soon threw me into a Fever and Dysentery, which in half a year forced me
to return to England.” Charles’ failing health was paralleled by his
falling spirits as he quickly became the focus of local gossip and small
town intrigue. On many accounts, Charles’ Georgia mission seemed to be
a dismal failure.

While he was on the London Galley headed to Boston on the return
leg of his trip, Charles Wesley busied himself by making copies of several
of his brother’s sermons. While these sermons were composed by John,
they were copied and preached by Charles. This event gives us some

8Winthrop Hudson, ed., Henry Scougal’s Life of God in the Soul of Man
9Scougal, Life of God, 33.
10Tyson, C. W. Reader, 59.
11Richard Heitzenrater, “John Wesley’s Earliest Sermons, “ Proceedings of
the Wesley Historical Society, vol. 37 (1969-70, 110-28, first drew our attention
to these sermons. Kenneth G. C. Newport, ed., The Sermons of Charles Wesley
(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 74-90, “Charles Wesley’s Sermon Cor-
pus,” offers a detailed analysis of them.
insight into the depth of the partnership in ministry of these brothers; it also gives us abundant witness to their shared understanding of sanctification. While several of these sermons have bearing upon Charles’ doctrine of sanctification, two in particular bear special attention. The first of these was called “The Single Eye.” It was based on the scripture text Matt. 6:22 ("The light of the body is the eye; if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness.").

This sermon was copied from John Wesley’s manuscripts and preached by Charles both in America and England. The sermon is about the purity of intention to be found through a person’s heart not being “divided between two ends.” This is the light that shines upon the way to sanctification: “This single intention will be a light in all thy paths; all darkness and doubt will vanish before it. All will be plain before thy face. Thou wilt clearly see the way wherein thou shouldst go, and steadily walk in it.” On the other hand, “if thou aimsest at anything besides the one thing needful [emphasis added], namely a recovery of the image of God; ‘thy whole body shall be full of darkness;’ thou wilt see no light, which way soever thou turnest.”

The aforementioned phrase “The one thing needful,” links with the title of a second sermon from this early pre-conversion collection that has significant bearing upon Charles Wesley’s understanding of sanctification. “The One Thing Needful” was also a sermon which Charles copied from John’s manuscripts during their American adventure. It was based on Luke 10:42 where Jesus says: “But one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her” (KJV). Charles Wesley preached this sermon both before and after his conversion experience, and he continued to use the phrase “the one thing needful” as an important metaphor for purity of heart and the recovery of the image of God within a person. Charles often considered entire sanctification or Christian Perfection to be the recovery of the image of God in which all humans had been created (Gen. 1:26). This was an unqualified conception of perfection which amounted to the “original righteousness” in which humans had been created before the fall into sin.

12Newport, Sermons of Charles Wesley, 306.
13Ibid., 307.
14Ibid.
15Newport, Sermons of Charles Wesley, 363.
Charles considered the recovery of this “image of God” to be “the one thing needful.” As he preached in this sermon: “To recover our first estate, from which we are thus fallen, is the one thing now needful—to re-exchange the image of Satan for the image of God, bondage for freedom, sickness for health. Our one great business is to raise out of our souls the likeness of our destroyer, and to be born again, to be formed anew after the likeness of our Creator.”

Since love is both the image and the nature of God, an infusion of God’s love is able to transform the human soul into its original, pristine state: “Love is the health of the soul,” Wesley wrote, “the full exertion of all its power, the perfection of all its faculties. Therefore, since the enjoyment of these was the one end of our creation, the recovery of them is the one thing needful.”

On May 21, 1738, after the depressing failure of the Georgia mission and intermittent, but debilitating illness, Charles Wesley affirmed wholehearted faith in Christ. One of his nurses had challenged him with the words: “In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, arise and believe and thou shalt be healed of all thy infirmities.” In fear and apprehension, he professed, “I believe! I believe!” Charles recalled feeling “a strange palpitation of heart,” after his confession of faith. He reported: “I now found myself at peace with God, and rejoiced in hope of loving Christ.” Even more characteristic of Charles Wesley’s post-conversion life, however, was the fact that he soon began writing hymns to express his newly found faith. When his brother John visited him, fresh from his own Aldersgate experience, they sang Charles’ hymns together.

One of the hymns that Charles wrote immediately after his conversion experience was subsequently published in 1739 under the title “Free Grace.” It is more familiar to us when framed in the phraseology of the author’s first line: “And can it be, that I should gain.” The first few verses express the wonder and excitement that Charles had found in God’s grace made available to him in Christ: “Amazing love! How can it be/That

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16Ibid., 364.
17Ibid., 365.
Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?” Verses four and five of the same hymn are replete with what would become standard Wesleyan soteriological themes. The life of sin is likened to a sinful slumber. Justification by faith leads directly to deliverance from sin and new birth—which in Wesleyan parlance is often called initial sanctification. Deliverance from sin brings with it the witness of the Spirit, as Christ is formed within the Christian by faith.\textsuperscript{20}

\textbf{A Matter of Definition}

In the 1740s the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification reached many of its classical expressions. John Wesley had begun preaching a perfection of heart and mind, which was none-the-less (to borrow the phrase of his critics) an “imperfect, perfection.” This was based on his definition of sin as a \textit{voluntary} transgression of a \textit{known} law of God. First voiced in his sermon on 1 Jn. 3:9, “Whosoever is born of God, doth not commit sin,” John’s definition of sin focuses attention upon what a person wills and knows, and hence upon a person’s heart and mind—and not upon his performance.\textsuperscript{21} The inner reservoir of a person’s identity could be transformed by the Holy Spirit and the inflowing of divine love. This was a volitional perfection, or wholeness, in which a person learned to love and follow God’s will; yet it made no claims upon the utter perfection which properly belongs only to the glory of God. John Wesley’s insightful definition appears first in his Standard Sermon #19, which he preached as early as September 23, 1739.\textsuperscript{22} It became the lynch-pin of his argument in his famous \textit{Plain Account of Christian Perfection} (first published in 1766),\textsuperscript{23} and resounded across the broad span of his ministry.\textsuperscript{24}

Interestingly, we meet no such limiting definition of sin, in Charles Wesley’s writings. His hymns of the 1740s evidence what would become

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 323.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Albert Outler, ed., \textit{Sermons}, 3 vols., in \textit{The Works of John Wesley} (Nashville: Abington Press, 1984), “The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God” Sermon #19, I:431-443. John wrote: “By ‘sin’ I here understand outward sin, according to the plain, common acceptation of the word; an actual, voluntary transgression of any command of God acknowledged to be such at the time that it is transgressed.”
\item \textsuperscript{22} Outler, \textit{Sermons JW}, I:415-16.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Jackson, \textit{Works of John Wesley}, XI:366-446.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Outler, \textit{Sermons JW}, III:79-80.
\end{itemize}
his standard expressions and metaphors. The hymn “Sinners, Your Savio -
iour See,” which was a redemption hymn published in Hymns and Sacred
Poems (1740) illustrates his views quite well. Since this hymn stems
from a hymn-book which was published jointly by the Wesley brothers, a
word must be said about its authorship. We may feel certain that this par-
ticular hymn was written by Charles because of various internal factors;
most notable is the use of the word “dear” in verse three, in the phrase
“dear, redeeming Lord.” John Wesley stated directly that he never used
the word “dear” to refer to the Deity; that “one particular word, which I
never use myself either in verse or prose, in praying or preaching. . . .” He
considered it unseemly that a person should do so; he studiously
avoided it in his own hymns, and often edited it out of Charles’ com-
pilations. It seems likely that this hymn was written by Charles, and some-
how escaped John’s editorial pen.

This is a long hymn, comprised of ten verses, based on Isaiah 45:22
(“Look unto Me, and be saved, all ye ends of the earth”). The phrasing of
the scripture text caused Charles to place the words of the passage upon
the lips of Jesus Christ. In his poem, the Risen Christ establishes a poeti-
cal dialogue between himself and the singer of the hymn. The hymn
teaches “justification by faith and grace, “the once for all atonement of
Christ,” and lauds the cleansing power of Jesus’s cross; our sins are
“Blotted out by blood Divine. . . .” But in verse five he wrote, “justified,
we ask for more,” and this “more” is the doctrine of sanctification. Verse
5 describes sanctification as a restoration of the Divine Image within
Christians by a work of the Holy Spirit. Verses 6 and 7 imply that the
process of sanctification is not complete until the singer sees the heavenly
face of Christ. But the experience is not entirely forestalled till heaven,
because (again in verse 7) the love of God (an everlasting love) enters our
lives and saves us to the “utmost.” These three, powerful verses are very
representative of Charles Wesley’s poetical description of sanctification.

Charles Wesley wrote a series of poems under the rubric “Groaning
for Full Redemption,” and many of these found lasting expression in the

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25 George Osborn, ed., Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley (London:
Wesleyan Conference, 1872), I:336-39, for the full text of this hymn.
26 Jackson, Works of John Wesley, VII:293.
27 John R. Tyson, “Charles Wesley’s Sentimental Language,” The Evangelical

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In these hymns, the singer longed for that fullest expression of sanctification. Once again, one hymn will stand as the representative of many. Wesley’s “I Want the Spirit of Power within,” first published in Hymns and Sacred Poems, 1740 edition, represents this category of hymn quite well. The poem of five verses begins with the singer praying to God for a fresh visitation of the Holy Spirit, which allows him/her to be victorious over the power of “inbred sin.” This visitation gives the person new health, that continues even as the physical body dies.

As the “Comforter” comes into the Christian’s life, the Holy Spirit brings “righteousness divine,” And Christ and all with Christ is mine!” (verse 2). The Holy Spirit not only visits the human heart, but takes “possession of my breast” and turns the singer into “The temple of [the] indwelling God.” Verses 4 and 5 describe this visitation of the Holy Ghost as a the witness of the Spirit, which attests “I am born again;” this is also a “baptism with fire” which purges and purifies. Hence the singer implores: “I cannot rest in sins forgiven; Where is the earnest of my heaven?” Sanctification, the “more” beyond forgiveness, is described as a spiritual work that anticipates the life of heaven. This same work is described in verse 6 as the “stamp” of the kingdom of God, “the signature of love Divine,” and “the Fullness of love—of heaven—of God” within the human heart.

Charles Wesley’s desire to “go on to Perfection” had many expressions, often characterized by a sense of longing and struggle. He could find the process of sanctification at work in almost any biblical passage. Jacob wrestling with the angel in Genesis 32:24-32 became in his poetical imagination a narrative of full salvation or perfect love. Dependence upon God, symbolized by Jacob’s injured thigh, becomes the key to life with God now and in the life to come. Limping, the singer enjoys victory over “hell, earth, and sin” as he/she waits to “fly home” to heaven. As Wesley’s twelfth verse reports triumphantly:

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29 Hildebrandt, Collection of Hymns, 349-552.
30 Osborn, Poetical Works, I:307-08. First published as “Groaning for the Spirit of Adoption.” John Wesley shortened it by removing its original first verse.
31 Hildebrandt, Collection of Hymns, #365, 534.
32 Ibid., 534-35.
33 Hildebrandt, Collection of Hymns, 535.
12. Lame as I am, I take the prey,
    Hell, earth, and sin with ease o’ercome;
I leap for joy, purse my way,
    As a bounding hart fly home,
Through all eternity to prove,
    Thy nature, and thy name is LOVE.34

Charles Wesley saw a direct connection between Christian perfection and the triumphant death of Christians. On Friday May, 1, 1741, for example, Charles’s journal reports: “I visited a sister dying in the Lord; and then two others, one mourning after, then rejoicing in, God her Saviour. I found sister Hooper sick of love. Her body too, sunk under it. . . .”35 After visiting Mrs. Hooper several times, Charles was at her side on May 6 when she died. In her triumphant death, he believed that he had witnessed an example of Christian Perfection. Charles wrote:

My soul was tenderly affected for her sufferings, yet the joy swallowed up the sorrow. How much more then did her consolations abound! The servants of Christ suffer nothing. I asked her whether she was not in great pain. “Yes,” she answered, “but in greater joy. I would not be without either.” But do you not prefer life to death [Charles Wesley asked]. She replied, “All is alike to me; let Christ choose; I have no will of my own.” [Wesley concluded] This is that holiness, or absolute resignation, or Christian Perfection!36

Utter consecration, or in this case resignation of one’s self to the will of Christ, was viewed as the “single eye” which led to holiness or Christian Perfection. Charles soon wrote “A Funeral Hymn” for Mrs. Hopper, which was published in his Hymns and Sacred Poems (1742) edition. His hymn celebrated Mrs. Hooper’s victorious death, and viewed her as an example of Christian Perfection. In the last four verses of that hymn, Charles wrote:

4. In her no spot of sin remain’d,
    To shake her confidence in God;
The victory here she more than gain’d,
    Triumphant through her Saviour’s blood.

34Hildebrandt, Collection of Hymns, 252.
36Ibid., I:304.
5. She now the fight of faith hath fought,
   Finish’d and won the Christian race;
   She found on earth the Lord she sought,
   And now beholds Him face to face.

6. She died in sure and steadfast hope,
   By Jesus wholly sanctified;
   Her perfect spirit she gave up,
   And sunk into His arms, and died.

7. Thus may we all our parting breath
   Into the Saviour’s hands resign:
   O Jesu, let me die her death,
   And let her latter end be mine!37

The Subject of Controversy

The doctrine of Christian perfection was frequently a matter of con-
versation at the annual conferences which the Wesleys held with their
preachers. The 1744 annual conference was held at Wesley’s London
Foundry; the “minutes of conference” indicate that sanctification and
Christian perfection were hot topics. Written in a question and answer for-
mat, the “Minutes” began the process of hammering out the Wesleyan
conception of sanctification as Christian Perfection:

Q. 1. What is it to be sanctified?
   A. To be renewed in the image of God, in righteousness
      and true holiness. . . .

Q. 3. What is implied in being a perfect Christian?
   A. The loving the Lord our God with all our heart, and
      with all our mind, and soul and strength. . . .38

This discussion continued at the next annual conference, August 2, 1745,
which was held at the New Room, in Bristol. The Minutes suggest that
questions were arising among the Methodists about the timing of Chris-
tian Perfection or “entire sanctification.” There was agreement that the
power of original sin is broken in a person’s life, and he is sanctified in
body, mind and soul. The Minutes allow that entire sanctification gener-
ally occurs “a little before death,” but they also seem to chide those who
assume that it can occur no sooner than death. Note: “Q3. Is it ordinarily

37 Osborn, Poetical Works, II:184.
38 Jackson, Works of John Wesley, VIII:279.
given a little before death? A. It is not, to those that expect it no sooner, nor consequently ask for it, at least, not in faith.”

Sanctification as it related to the so-called “article of death” continued to be a matter of controversy among the early Methodists. This seems to form the background against which the Minutes of the 1747 annual conference argue against prolonging the reception of entire sanctification till the moments just before death. We have no way of knowing whether or not Charles Wesley was among those at the 1747 annual conference who argued that entire sanctification occurred only in the article of death. But, as we shall see below, that approach would subsequently become his most characteristic expression for the timing of Christian perfection.

Also in 1747, Charles Wesley published what would become one of his most famous hymns on Christian Perfection, “Love divine, all loves excelling.” In the first verse of the hymn Jesus is presented to us as love personified. Salvation is ours when Jesus enters “every trembling heart.” The love which Jesus incarnates in the believer’s heart is none other than God’s perfecting love; it turns the singer into God’s “new creation.” That which had been lost in sin is “perfectly restored” as the singer is “changed from glory into glory” and prepared to enter heaven.

In late 1760 and early 1761 a controversy began brewing over the doctrine of Christian Perfection as entire sanctification. A few Methodist people in Otley, Yorkshire, professed entire sanctification, and this witness soon appeared in London. On March 12, 1760, John Wesley met with a number of people drawn from neighboring towns “who believed they were saved from sin.” He reported their testimony in this manner: “(1) that they feel no inward sin and, to the best of their knowledge, commit no outward sin; (2) that they see and love God every moment and ‘pray, rejoice and give thanks evermore;’ and (3) that they have constantly as clear a witness from God of sanctification as they have of justification.” John believed these testimonies were so “plain” that they were either true or “willful and deliberate lies. . . .” A year later, on March 6,
1761, John Wesley was back in London meeting with about 40 people “who believe God has delivered them from the root of bitterness [original sin]. Their number increases daily.”

John Wesley’s letters and journal depict him trying to steer a middle course between an exuberant acceptance of these claims to Christian Perfection (for fear of the growth of fanaticism or “enthusiasm”) and outright opposing them (for fear of losing the Methodist hope that God can deliver a person from willful sin in this life). Fanaticism did, however, soon rear its head in the London Methodist Society, due in part of the leadership of Thomas Maxfield and George Bell; the latter was especially given to extra-ordinary claims, including setting a date for the end of the world—February 28, 1763.

On November 2, 1762, John Wesley wrote Maxfield an extensive epistle outlining what he liked and what he disliked about the latter’s preaching on Perfection. Wesley reported, pointedly, “I dislike your supposing man may be perfect ‘as an angel’; that he can be absolutely perfect; that he can be infallible, or above being tempted; or that the moment he is pure in heart he cannot fall from it.” Maxfield and the others had (apparently) missed some of the subtlety of John Wesley’s doctrine of imperfect Christian Perfection. Wesley did not preach freedom from sin in an absolute sense; his was a relative perfection, a perfection in love that transformed the inner person to the degree that a person did not commit willful, or intentional sin. Smarting under the criticism of George Whitefield, Martin Madan, and probably also his brother Charles, that he had dallied too long with the fanaticism of George Bell and the others, John Wesley published a letter in the January 8, 1763, edition of the London Chronicle in which he announced Bell and his followers were no longer part of the Methodist movement. But the damage had already been done, as John Wesley was forced to admit: “They made the very name of Perfection stink in the nostrils even of those who loved and honoured it before.”

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46Ibid., IV:402.
47Ibid., IV:394.
49Telford, The Letters John Wesley; V:38.
Charles Wesley’s full role in the controversy over Christian Perfection is difficult to document, in large part because his journal from this period of time is not extant. He had on another occasion quipped that his brother John was “born for the benefit of knaves”; it is likely that he believed his brother was being duped by the pretenders to Perfection. In a letter to early Methodist lay preacher Joseph Clowney, Charles claimed to be at least as good a prophet as George Bell was: “I gave warning four years ago of the flood of Enthusiasm which has now overflowed us; and of the Sect of Ranters that should arise out of the Perfect Witnesses. My late hymns are a farther standing testimony [against them].”

It is certain that Charles was no friend to their extravagant claims of perfection or their religious fanaticism. During this same period, a letter from John Downes to Joseph Clowney indicates that Charles Wesley was monitoring the activities of the extremists. Downes noted John Wesley’s slowness to act against them: “As to the follies of the enthusiasts,” Downes wrote, “Mr. Charles Wesley hears every week less or more. Why his brother suffers them, we cannot tell. He threatens, but cannot find in his heart to put in execution.”

In 1762, in the midst of the controversy over Christian Perfection, Charles Wesley published his *Short Hymns on Select Passages of Scripture*. In the “Preface” to this work he indicated that he intended to address the topic of Christian Perfection in these hymns: “Several of the hymns,” he wrote, “are intended to prove, and several to guard, the doctrines of Christian Perfection, I durst not publish the one without the other.” Charles admitted that he was using strong language to chastise “Enthusiasts and Antinomians.”

In Charles’s *Short Hymns*, his distinctive emphases on Christian Perfection came to the forefront. These are easily traced since John Wesley did not see the manuscript prior to publication, and subsequently

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51 This unpublished letter, dated Feb. 1, 1763, is cited here from Frank Baker’s collection of Charles Wesley’s letters, with permission of the Center for Studies in the Wesleyan Tradition, The Divinity School, Duke University, Durham, N.C. It is item No. 345 in the Frank Baker Collection.
annotated it with comments about hymns he did not like. Three specific questions emerged between the Wesley brothers on the topic of Christian Perfection. 1. Was Charles setting the doctrine of Perfection “too high”? 2. Is Christian Perfection an instantaneous blessing or is it received gradually over the course of an entire life? 3. Did it occur “in the article of death,” or before. Charles’s *Short Hymns* show that he took the opposite point of view from that of his brother on all three of these questions. Charles typically affirmed an unqualified view of Perfection (restoration of the image of God), which was gradually received over the course of a person’s Christian life, and which generally occurred in its fullest and final sense in a victorious faith-filled death.

In an interesting letter which he wrote to Dorothy Furly, dated September 15, 1762, John Wesley warned, “Take care you are not hurt by anything in the *Short Hymns* contrary to the doctrines you have long received.” In the same letter John had stressed that Christian perfection is “an instantaneous deliverance from all sin.” It was, however, a qualified perfection, which is not inconsistent “with living in a corruptible body; for this makes it impossible ‘always to think right.’ While we breathe we shall more or less mistake. If, therefore, Christian perfection implies this, we must not expect it till after death.”

On July 9, 1766 John wrote his brother Charles directly about the same matter: “One word more concerning setting perfection too high. *That perfection* which I believe, I can boldly preach, because I think I see five hundred witnesses of it. Of *that perfection* which you preach, you do not even think you see any witnesses at all. . . . Therefore I still think to set perfection *so high* is effectually to renounce it.” The same letter indicted Charles’ hymns as culprits in the debacle surrounding Thomas Maxfield and the pretenders to Christian perfection: “When your hymns on one hand were added to his talking, and acting on the other, what was likely to be the consequence?”

**Gradual or Instantaneous?**

We have seen that, almost from the beginning of his ministry, Charles Wesley looked upon Christian perfection as the “one thing need-

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56 Ibid., V:19.
ful,” a restoration of the image of God within a person. Reacting to the charge that this unqualified kind of perfection is impossible, Charles’ “Short Hymn” on Matt. 5:58 (“Be Ye Perfect. . . .”) argues for its actual possibility:

1. Would’st Thou require what cannot be?
   The thing impossible to me
   Is possible with God:
   I trust Thy truth to make me just,
   Th’ omnipotence of love I trust,
   The virtue of Thy blood.

2. Perfection is my calling’s prize,
   To which on duty’s scale I rise;
   And when my toils are pass’d
   And when I have the battle won,
   Thou in Thy precious Self alone,
   Shalt give the prize at last.57

Where John Wesley was more apt to stress the instantaneous reception of Christian perfection, which could be received in this life, Charles had come to emphasize the gradual work of Christian perfection that went on until a person laid down his or her life in death. Many of Charles’ Short Hymns exemplified this emphasis. In the one based on Joshua 6:20, for example, the Bible’s seven marches around the walls of Jericho became a metaphor for the life-long quest for sanctification:

Then let us urge our way,
   And work, and suffer on,
Nor dream, the first, or second day
   Will throw the bulwarks down:
We on the sacred morn
   Our seventh toil repeat,
Expecting that the latest turn
   Our labour shall complete.58

John Wesley’s editorial pen wrote “When God pleases!” at the end of the last line above; he reacted negatively to his brother’s implication that God would not give perfection in this life. Indeed, “gradual” was becoming one of Charles’ favorite descriptions for Christian perfection:

57Osborn, Poetical Works, X:173.
58Osborn, Poetical Works, IX:121-22.
Shall we mistake the morning-ray
Of grace for the full blaze of day?
Or humbly walk in Jesu’s sight?
Glad to receive the gradual light [JW, “And the Sudden!”]
More of His grace and more to know,
In faith and in experience grow,
Till all the life of Christ we prove,
And lose ourselves in perfect love!59

John Wesley wrote: “And the Sudden!” at the asterisk in this “Short Hymn,” based on Prov. 4:18, “The path of the just is a shining light.” Charles’ poetical comment on Matt. 20:22 (“Ye know not what ye ask”) was even more strident in its affirmation of a gradual perfection that was fully realized only in death:

1. Advancement in Thy Kingdom here
   Whoe’er impatiently desire,
   They know not, Lord, the pangs severe,
   The trials which they first require:
   They all must first Thy sufferings share,
   Ambitious of their calling’s prize,
   And every day Thy burden bear,
   And thus to late perfection rise.

2. Nature would fain evade, or flee
   That sad necessity of pain;
   But who refuse to die with Thee,
   With Thee shall never, never reign:
   The sorrow doth the joy ensure,
   The crown for conquerers prepared;
   And all who to the end endure,
   And grasp through death the full reward.60 [JW, “Not until Death?”]

At the end of the last line, John Wesley wrote on the manuscript: “Not until Death?” indicating that he did not approve of Charles’ suggestion that most people “to late perfection rise” by pursuing it until the end of life, and “grasping through death the full reward.”

59 Ibid., IX:345-46.
60 Ibid., X:336.
Charles Wesley’s correspondence with Methodist lay preacher Joseph Cownley is quite instructive regarding Charles’ posture during the perfectionist controversy. Apparently Cownley had written to Charles offering the testimony of a correspondent who professed having received sinless perfection in an instant. On May 1, 1764, Charles wrote back to Cownley: “My dear brother, one who is now called ‘Perfect’ was at first [e.g., the beginning of the movement] called ‘a soul in its first love.’ Strip the correspondent of her enthusiasm and she is neither more or less than a believer living up to her privileges [e.g., victory over sin]. My brother [John Wesley] will be convinced of this more and more. Trust him to God.”

On July 1 of the same year, Charles wrote to Joseph Cownley about his own role in putting out the flames of controversy over Christian perfection. Challenging the idea that a person could be made sinless by a simple profession of faith, Charles pointed Cownley to his Short Hymns as being illustrative of his “private judgment and mind” on this matter. As his letter drew to a close, Charles opined that the very pride that caused a person to claim instantaneous perfection, indicated—in Charles’s mind—that he or she was not perfected in love. In this matter Wesley and Cownley were of opposite opinions, hence Charles Wesley wrote:

I need not tell you, that I write in confidence—of your discretion. My private judgment and mind is known by my hymns. Cannot you spread them? They have been useful as an antidote in several places. . . . When I left London last year, the number of witnesses [to instantaneous perfection] was 500. Half of them have since recanted. Those who live another year may expect to see them all convinced of their own great imperfection. You believe a man Perfect because he says “I am;” that’s the very reason for which I believe and am sure he is not perfect. How are you and I exactly of one mind? . . .

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61 This unpublished letter, dated May 1, 1764, is cited from Frank Baker’s collection of Charles Wesley letters, with permission of the Center for Studies in the Wesleyan Tradition, the Divinity School Library, Duke University, Durham, N.C., where it is item No. 362.

62 This unpublished letter, dated July 1, 1764, is cited from Frank Baker’s collection of Charles Wesley letters, with permission of the Center for Studies in the Wesleyan Tradition, Duke University Divinity School, where it is item No. 377.
John Wesley would continue to try to draw Charles closer to his own expressions and formulations of Christian perfection, most notably in John’s letter of January 27, 1767, in which the elder Wesley sought to build consensus between himself and his brother on “the thing, the manner, and the time” of Christian perfection. Three times John asked: “Do we agree or differ here?” Charles’s reply to this letter, if there was one, is not extant. But by 1767 it must have been clear to John, as it was to most people in the Methodist movement, that he and his brother—while being in fundamental agreement about the nature of Christian perfection—preferred to emphasize opposite aspects of it. Where John had come to stress a qualified conception of Perfection that could and should be expected now, instantaneously, Charles preferred to emphasize an unqualified perfection (“the one thing needful”) which was gradually received over the course of a Christian’s life, and was most fully experienced when he or she laid the moral body down in death.

Using a gospel analogy, Charles opined that Christian perfection is like leaven, which (borrowing the phraseology of Matt. 13:33) gradually spreads throughout a person’s heart and life “and slowly sanctifies the whole”:

That heavenly principle within
Doth it at once its power exert,
At once root out the seed of sin,
And spread perfection through the heart?
No; but a gradual life it sends,
Diffuse through the faithful soul.
To actions, words, and thoughts extends,
And slowly sanctifies the whole.64

It is instructive to see Charles Wesley developing his own emphases and phraseology with respect to sanctification and Christian perfection. In this matter, as in many others, Charles was more than a faint copy of his more famous brother. Charles was well able to develop his own direction and his own doctrine. In many instances, his contributions to the Methodist movement were equal, if not always opposite to those of his brother John. In the case of sanctification, Charles agreed with John that

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Christian perfection was one of “the two great truths of the everlasting gospel” which God had entrusted to the Methodists (the other being universal redemption). It is also clear in his theology of sanctification that Charles Wesley’s emphasis upon a gradual and unqualified view of Christian perfection both complemented and counter-balanced those of his brother John. For Charles, Christian perfection was “the one thing needful” which makes human life new, whole, and complete.

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65 Kimbrough and Newport, Manuscript Journal, I:319.
Strange Bedfellows: A Reappraisal of Mildred Wynkoop’s *A Theology of Love*

by

Mark K. Olson

Mildred Wynkoop’s *A Theology of Love* has become a modern classic in holiness theology. At the time of its original release in 1972, many considered it groundbreaking in its approach, the “first modern theology of holiness.”¹ The book’s influence is demonstrated by its continued use as a standard textbook in courses on Christian holiness.² As Mark Quanstrom notes, “anyone interested in contemporary discussion of holiness theology was familiar with her book.”³

Our central aim is to reappraise whether Wynkoop was a faithful interpreter of John Wesley. The sheer number of quotations from Wesley in the book is impressive.⁴ They give the impression that Wynkoop had

¹Orjala, Paul *On Doing Theology vs. Rehashing Theology*. 1-2 Nazarene Archives.

²The book was added to The Church of the Nazarene’s Ministerial Course of Study in 1986. It was part of this author’s required reading when he took the course of study for eldership in the early 1990s. The book is also one of the class textbooks in a recent course on holiness theology that the author took in 2008 at Nazarene Theological Seminary.


⁴The author counted 115 indented block quotations, according to references of Wesley’s writings. Some of the blocks involve more than one quotation being referenced. This does not include the many quotations in the text. This confirms that Wynkoop believed she was grounding her theology in Wesley.
thoroughly read Wesley on the subject and is competent to be his interpreter. Throughout the book, Wynkoop holds up Wesley as her mentor and source of inspiration.\textsuperscript{5} Even a quick reading highlights her reliance on Wesley for support of her arguments and principles. The reader is left with the impression that Wynkoop has faithfully integrated Wesley’s teachings into her program to systematize a contemporary holiness theology.

In \textit{A Theology of Love} Wynkoop seeks to place the Wesleyan theology of holiness, especially entire sanctification, on a more solid theological and biblical footing. This is stated in the opening chapter: “Is there a principle of interpretation—a hermeneutic—which can explain Christian doctrine and Christian life in the same system without either one undercutting the integrity of the other?”\textsuperscript{6} So Wynkoop’s intent is not merely to contemporize the doctrine of holiness (and entire sanctification), but to systematize its principles and teachings to be more coherent to everyday life. Her design is to give the doctrine better existential grounding.

\textbf{The Credibility Gap}

The heart of the problem, as Wynkoop sees it, is that traditional holiness theology created a “credibility gap” between doctrine and life. In other words, what the doctrine of entire sanctification claims is untenable in real everyday life:

Our problem is a credibility gap. Of all the credibility gaps in contemporary life, none is more real and serious than that which exists between Christian, and particularly Wesleyan, doctrine and everyday life. The absolute of holiness theology may satisfy the mind but the imperfection of the human self seems to deny all that the perfection of Christian doctrine affirms.\textsuperscript{7}

Wynkoop gives several reasons for the credibility gap. To begin, traditional holiness advocates have made the colossal mistake of placing too sharp of a wedge between justification and sanctification. There is a tendency to isolate the two into separate, unconnected, crisis experiences.

\textsuperscript{5}For example, see the chapters “What is Wesleyanism?” and “A Hermeneutical Approach to Wesley.”


\textsuperscript{7}Ibid., 39.
This led to placing too much confidence in ‘‘crisis’ experiences to solve all human problems.’’ Wynkoop judges that traditional holiness theology encourages a kind of ‘‘spiritual magic’’ when it comes to relating holiness to everyday life. As a consequence, the correlation between grace and real-life issues has been neglected, or at least strongly muted.

However, as Wynkoop probes deeper, she sees the root cause to be that holiness theology draws upon Greek concepts, not Hebraic ones, to formulate its understanding of human nature. Ancient Greek perspective, viewed humanity in substantive categories. That is, human nature is seen as a divine soul trapped in a material body that is evil. From this perspective the goal of salvation is to escape the body. From this substance view of human reality, Wynkoop argues, the American Holiness Movement interpreted sin as genetically propagated. This entails the view that sin is a substance that needs to be eradicated.

By contrast, the Hebrew perspective views humanity in relational terms. As Wynkoop puts it, ‘‘Man is a unity, not a union of parts.’’ Therefore, ‘‘sin is something wrong with the whole man, not just his body or human nature…sin is not a substance.’’ Accordingly, Wynkoop argues that the substantive position views salvation as a kind of magic—a ‘‘sub-rational, psychological mutation’’ that supernaturally removes sin from the person, as if it was a substance. In contrast, the relational perspective sees salvation as thoroughly moral to the core. If I read Wynkoop correctly, this distinction between substantive and relational serves as the axial theme of her entire program to systematize holiness theology.

**Wynkoop’s Relational Program**

In every essential doctrine, Wynkoop applies her axial theme with tight logical consistency. We begin with humanity’s creation in the *imago Dei*. Wynkoop contends that traditional holiness theology erred by holding to a “substance theory” of the image of God. The substantive perspec-

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8Ibid., 47.
9Ibid., 49.
10Ibid., 49.
11Kenneth Collins defines an axial theme as a “soteriological leitmotif that serves an integrating role in light of which other key doctrines are best understood” (*The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007, 5). It is in this sense that I use “axial theme” here.
tive sees the image as “something in man,” either a “corporeal substance or some function . . . or being in possession of a spirit as well as a soul and a body.” The view also defines the image by identifying those qualities or characteristics that distinguish humanity from the animal kingdom. The fundamental problem, as Wynkoop sees it, is that this perspective leads its advocates to view the fall as a loss of some thing or function in man before God and creation. Salvation then becomes a recovery of that which was lost. Salvation and sanctification become an ontological issue.

In contrast the relational theory interprets the image as “man before God.” The image is viewed holistically and relationally. It does not reside in human nature, but refers to all that is essential to human beings dynamically involved in moral relationships. Therefore, Wynkoop affirms that the image was never lost since to affirm so implies a substantive transformation to human nature:

We do not find any biblical reference to the loss of the image of God. Hence, as would be expected, there is no word regarding the “restoration” of the image. . . . To avoid this untenable position, theologians have divided “the image” into two aspects, a natural and a moral image, the first sustaining a “hurt” in the Fall, the second being lost. . . . If the image is lost so that man is totally depraved, then redemption must be in principle only, not in experience.

This redefinition of the imago Dei shapes how sin and holiness must be understood.

The substantive position sees sin as “some alien substance clinging to (the) soul.” But sin, Wynkoop counters, is perverted love—love locked into a false center—and holiness is love locked into Christ, the true center. Consequently, and significant to our study, Wynkoop believes that the substantive perspective understands holiness to involve a

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12 Ibid., 105; italics hers. This definition will become very important later as we attempt to locate Wynkoop’s theology within the larger stream of holiness theologians.
13 Ibid., 105.
14 Ibid., 146.
15 Ibid., 146-47.
16 Ibid., 164.
17 Ibid., 158.
sub-volitional transformation. But this is wrong, says Wynkoop. Since holiness is relational, and relationships must involve volition, salvation cannot mean an alteration in the sub-volitional nature, because this is not a relational change but an ontological one. This makes salvation appear as magic. Wynkoop believes that, when Scripture calls attention to the heart as evil, it is not some “thing” in human nature that is being referred to, but to sinful dispositions. This leads to her often repeated statement that “holiness and sin are personal relationships.” Her point is that salvation is relational to the core. People interact and engage each other and God on a relational plane.

The redefinition of salvation leads to a change in how grace works in the heart. Saving grace is practical, not abstract. It engages the whole person, because that is how moral beings interact and relate. Proponents of the substantive view often conceptualize the Holy Spirit as “being added numerically and substantially to the human spirit” for the purpose of suppressing inherent sinful impulses and implanting new holy ones. But Wynkoop argues that a Hebraic understanding rejects this view of grace working in the person:

When God’s grace begins to operate upon the person, it is at this point of moral responsibility. Grace awakens into sharp awareness everything that moral means. Both persons, God and man, confronting each other maintain personal integrity. . . . The coming of the Spirit does not occasion an eclipse of human rationality and consciousness.

This is Richard Taylor’s point: “Part of the problem was Dr. Wynkoop’s earnest desire to refute what she considered a false concept of sin, viz., the concept of materiality in sin. She understood that general holiness teaching to imply such materiality. But this is a straw man. The ‘substantive’ view of sin in the sense of a material entity or a thing has never been espoused by reliable Wesleyan advocates of holiness” (Why The Holiness Movement Died, unpublished article).

A Theology of Love, 167.

Ibid., 167. It is interesting that both sides in this debate lay claim to dispositional transformation in the work of sanctification but differ on how to interpret this transformation. Relationalists, like Wynkoop, and substantivalists interpret such transformation in keeping with their axial themes.

Ibid., 187, 214.

Ibid., 191-193.

Ibid., 215-216.

Ibid., 220; emphasis hers.
So, the substantive and relational camps understand salvation quite differently. But that is not all, for Wynkoop also challenges the substantive view of faith. Faith is not a “thing” but an “essential element of personality.” Faith serves as the “rational link” between the divine and the human. It is not a new power supernaturally infused, as the substantive position holds, but a “changed direction of confidence and affection.” Therefore, faith is not passively implanted in the person, but is an “act which engages the whole of man” and “operates on the personal level.”

This brings up the subject of what it means to have sin purged from the human heart. Substantivalists see inner cleansing as a divine work in the sub-rational realm. That is, God does “‘something’ to the soul to make it pure.” But, Wynkoop counters, in the moral realm cleansing must refer to the integrity of one’s love: “A clean heart is one whose deepest purpose has been centered in Christ.” Holiness is single-minded devotion of the whole person to God, not the removal of some “thing” within the human spirit. Sanctification is moral union, the “very real commitment of the self to God so that there is no contrary purpose in the heart.”

Moral integrity, defined by love, is the heart of entire sanctification:

Evangelical perfection . . . is fundamentally moral integrity and is consistent with human probationary status. It lies in the context of moral responsibility and proceeds in human life as moral capacity waxes and wanes. It never sacrifices moral and rational awareness to irrational emotional states. . . . It is an emphasis on moral integrity defined by love.

Wynkoop goes on to define perfect love as “unalloyed sincerity,” relative to the believer’s moral capacity. So Wynkoop’s relational theolog-
ology concludes that sanctification is “right relationship.” She is certainly correct that the American Holiness Movement tended toward a reductionism by turning biblically rich terms, like holiness and sanctification, into abstractions severed from the complexities of real life. This reductionism led to a severing of sanctification from justification in a manner not taught by Wesley:

Wesley’s concept of justification is very high—so high indeed that it may seem to some that he is confusing it with sanctification. BUT THIS IS JUST THE POINT. Wesley insisted that sanctification began in justification—not only is Christ for us, but He is in us. . . . Justification and sanctification are not two kinds of grace, but two dimensions of the experience of God’s love and grace.

But Wynkoop moves away from Wesley when she says that salvation is potentially complete at justification. Her point is that God does not give only a part of himself at conversion (justification and new birth). There are no “higher or lower levels of grace” and no “states of grace” as Wesley taught. The second moment is neither a “correction of the first nor a completion of a partially realized work of grace.” Consequently, Wynkoop believes there is no necessary reason for a second sanctifying moment. Yet, a second moment is usually needed. Though sufficient grace is given in the new birth for the believer to consecrate their whole person to God, they usually fail to fully appropriate this grace. The problem is not on God’s part but with human weakness. So the Christian consecrates to God at conversion and later establishes their devotion by “locking” their consecration on Christ.

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34 Ibid., 329.
35 Ibid., 311; emphasis hers.
36 Ibid., 332.
37 Ibid., 334.
38 Many examples could be given from Wesley’s middle and late periods; cf. sermons: “Christian Perfection” (1741); “On the Discoveries of Faith” (1788); “On Faith” Heb. 11:6 (1788); Journal entry 1/25/39.
39 A Theology of Love, 349.
40 Ibid., 334. Wynkoop writes, “It must always be held possible that the spiritual insight of some individuals is great enough, at the moment, to make the total human commitment which moral experience requires and the second distinctive kind of act performed.”
41 Ibid., 347.
From beginning to end, Wynkoop builds a holiness theology by demarcating between substantive and relational categories. There is no doubt that what most concerned her was the idea of introducing materiality into the realm of moral relationships. For Wynkoop, this was the “error of errors”\(^{42}\) when constructing a viable theology of holiness.

**Faithful Interpreter?**

We can now pause and evaluate Wynkopp’s overall argument. For starters, has she been that faithful to John Wesley? She continually reaches back to Wesley for support and legitimacy. This is demonstrated by the sheer volume of quotations and her admiration of him as a theologian.\(^{43}\) She does capture many important emphases in Wesley’s thought. These include his synergism, *imago Dei* motif, Adam’s federal headship, prevenient grace, the centrality of love, sanctification rooted in justification, perfection as the single intention, and the crisis/process conjunctive. There is no doubt that Wynkoop was heavily influenced by Wesley in the systematizing of her relational theology. But when we take a closer look, strong disjunctives emerge.

For starters, Wynkoop failed to acknowledge how much Wesley differed from her on core doctrines. Wynkoop quotes several of Wesley’s writings to support her relational view of the *imago Dei*. Yet, when we read carefully these same quotations, we see that Wesley did support the substantive position. Wynkoop defined the substantive position to mean the image pertains to “either a corporeal substance or some function of the human person.”\(^{44}\) She then includes three pages of quotations from Wesley that she believes support her relational position. But in the very first quotation Wesley speaks of the image as involving the “innate principle of self-motion.” This is clearly a substantive statement. Wesley then identifies the image with human faculties.\(^{45}\)

These functions agree with Wynkoop’s definition of the substantive position. This conclusion is bolstered by Wynkoop’s admission that Wesley followed standard Reformation practice by dividing the image into

\(^{42}\) This was Count Zinzendorf’s response to John Wesley on the subject of inherent holiness. *The Works of John Wesley*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984-Present, 19:212 (hereafter: *Works*).

\(^{43}\) Wynkoop indulges in hero worship of Wesley in chapters four and five.

\(^{44}\) *A Theology of Love*, 105.

\(^{45}\) Ibid., 106; Sermon: “The General Deliverance” I.1.
three categories—natural, political, and moral—that can be damaged, lost and restored.\textsuperscript{46} Once again, this is explicitly contrary to Wynkoop’s relational view. Yet, she never acknowledges this fundamental difference between her position and his. As Wynkoop argues throughout the \textit{Theology of Love}, the substantive and relational perspectives regarding the \textit{imago Dei} are foundational to developing all other doctrines of redemption, including holiness.

Wynkoop does acknowledge that Wesley held to a substantive concept of sin.\textsuperscript{47} In \textit{On Sin in Believers} Wesley defines original sin according to the Articles of the Anglican Church: “Original sin is the corruption of the nature of every man, whereby man is in his own nature inclined to evil so that the flesh lusteth contrary to the Spirit.”\textsuperscript{48} This is the substantive position regarding sin. Moreover, in opposition to Wesley’s teaching, Wynkoop denies the idea of states and degrees in regard to deliverance from sin.\textsuperscript{49} This is one of the implications of her relational perspective. Since Wesley viewed sin as evil dispositions that need to be removed and replaced by loving ones (pure love), he would not have supported Wynkoop’s relational views regarding sin and holiness. Just as Wynkoop’s relational theology deplores the idea of saying that sin can be “destroyed,” Wesley had no qualms using such language.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{46}Ibid., 109. That Wesley supported a relational perspective is not in dispute (“Justification By Faith” I.1; \textit{Works} 1:184). The point is that he also supported the substantive perspective (“The New Birth” I.1; \textit{Works} 2:188). Accordingly, the image was damaged (natural and political) and lost (moral) in the Fall, and restored by redemption in Christ. Wesley’s relational and substantive perspectives can be harmonized when we note that he relates the relational to the moral category of his substantive perspective.

\textsuperscript{47}\textit{A Theology of Love}, 153.

\textsuperscript{48}I.2; \textit{Works} 1:318.

\textsuperscript{49}\textit{A Theology of Love}, 198, 206-07. On Wesley’s use of the idea and language of “state” and “degrees,” see his letter to Henry Stebbing (\textit{Journal}, 7/31/39); his journal comments March 28 & May 5, 1740; his letters to Miss March (3/14/68), Ann Bolton (8/12/70, 11/16/70), and Joseph Benson (3/16/71); and his sermons “Christian Perfection,” “On Faith” Heb. 11:6, “On the Discoveries of Faith.” For a thorough discussion of this subject, see my \textit{John Wesley’s Theology of Christian Perfection: Developments in Doctrine & Theological System}. Fenwick: Truth In Heart, 2007, 2009 (revised).

\textsuperscript{50}“Christian Perfection” II.25; \textit{Works} 2:118 (emphasis mine). Wesley told Joseph Benson, “I use the word ‘destroyed’ because St. Paul does” (Letter 10/5/70, Telford 5:204). Wesley uses the same language in his \textit{Plain Account of Christian Perfection}.  

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A significant difference between Wynkoop and Wesley regards how each understood perfection and entire sanctification. Wynkoop defines holiness in purely relational terms. Perfection is viewed as full consecration. Her famous definition of love “locked” into Christ makes clear her meaning. Sanctification is simply “right relationship.” The believer consecrates at conversion and later “locks” this consecration in a second moment. As she acknowledges, there is not an intrinsic reason for a second moment. But Wesley understood perfection, pure love, and entire sanctification differently. Perfection is a deeper transformation of the dispositional nature—the replacing of sinful tempers with holy ones. The believer then becomes “all love.” Various quotations from the Plain Account illustrate his substantive understanding of holiness. These quotations illustrate what John Wesley understood sanctification to be: the transformation of the dispositional nature.

As Randy Maddox reminds us, Wesley understood “temper” to be a ruling disposition or affection. A couple of related points necessarily follow. First, dispositional transformation involves a change deeper down in the human person than what conscious consecration implies. While conscious consecration must be included in any reconstruction of Wesley’s perspective, a transformation of the tempers involves more, for it reaches deeper, even into the “sub-rational” realm of the human person (using Wynkoop’s terminology). Only a substantive conceptual framework of human personality and motivation can do justice to this understanding of inner renewal and cleansing.

Wesley’s substantive perspective becomes even more evident when we turn to his views on original sin. He continually refers to inbred sin as a “corruption of nature,” from which the “seeds” of “sin of every kind” spring. This kind of language does not favor a purely relational view of sin and holiness. To the contrary, Wesley argues that sin’s “roots” go

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52 “He (Wesley) was using ‘temper’ in this connection in a characteristic eighteenth-century sense of an enduring or habitual disposition of a person” (Responsible Grace. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994; 69).
much deeper in human nature than the relational/cognitive level.\textsuperscript{54} This perspective of sin profoundly shaped his understanding of holiness as inward purity and dispositional transformation.

Furthermore, the kinds of sin removed in the grace of perfection demonstrate that Wesley held a substantive view of sanctification. Wesley lists pride, (sinful) anger, self-will, and (unwholesome) desire; the “roots” of which reach deeper than merely the “rational” level.\textsuperscript{55} An important lesson emerges at this point: \textit{Wesley’s doctrine of entire sanctification should never be summarized solely in terms of consecration} (i.e., the single intention).\textsuperscript{56} Holiness is perfect love—holy tempers purifying and ruling in the heart and life. As Maddox so aptly concludes, Wesley taught a view of perfection in which the believer’s “love for God and others becomes a ‘natural’ response.”\textsuperscript{57} Perfection as holy tempers is one of the constants in Wesley’s theologizing throughout his lengthy career.

It is amazing to this author that for all the study of Wesley’s writings that Wynkoop did, she would deviate so far from his core principles and then claim his mantle. Besides the doctrinal points covered above, we

\textsuperscript{54}In \textit{The Repentance of Believers} III.1 Wesley links the themes of sin’s roots to its destruction and to salvation from the carnal mind, inward sin, and the “bent” to backsliding (\textit{Works} 1:350).

\textsuperscript{55}Wynkoop continually stresses the “rational” throughout \textit{A Theology of Love}. Of course, this fits her view of entire sanctification as full consecration at the conscious level.

\textsuperscript{56}When it comes to interpreting Wesley on holiness, this is the “error of errors” of the Holiness Movement (once again, using Zinzendorf’s response to John Wesley). Part of the problem is that modern holiness exegetes often build their interpretations of Wesley on the opening chapters of the \textit{Plain Account}, but fail to see that Wesley is telling his story of how his views developed over time. These chapters introduce the subject of holiness, as the single intention, but do not represent his full-orbed views on the subject. When we purview the rest of the \textit{Plain Account} (along with Wesley’s sermons, letters and other writings) and keep in mind his dispositional psychology, dispositional transformation is the \textit{core idea} of his views, not full consecration. This insight must inform our understanding of his perspective of perfect love.

\textsuperscript{57}Maddox’s full quotation further clarifies this point, “Wesley was convinced that the Christian life did not have to remain a life of continual struggle. He believed that both Scripture and Christian tradition attested that God’s loving grace can transform our lives to the point where our own love for God and others becomes a ‘natural’ response” (\textit{Responsible Grace}, 188). Wesley’s continual appeal to 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 to delineate perfect love confirms Maddox’s point.
could add others to the list. Where Wynkoop went wrong in her interpretation of Wesley is with her axial theme. By driving a sharp wedge between substantive and relational concepts of human nature, sin, holiness, and perfection (and other related doctrines), Wynkoop necessarily departed from John Wesley. But she did more. She not only failed to faithfully interpret John Wesley, but she leads unwary readers to misread Wesley on fundamental aspects of his theology. This is the danger when novices rely on Wynkoop’s work to interpret and understand Wesley on holiness.

Strange Bedfellows

So, if Wesley would never have supported Wynkoop’s argument, who does? If Wesley disagrees with Wynkoop on fundamental points of her system, then who embraces them? If Wynkoop’s system is not congruent with Wesley’s, then who shares her principles? The immediate answer is Charles G. Finney. This will come as a shock to many. After all, Wynkoop never once quotes Finney, nor even alludes to him in her entire work. But, as I read and re-read Wynkoop’s book, I keep asking myself: between Finney and Wesley, who would stand and applaud Wynkoop’s argument? No doubt it would have been Charles Finney. Though Wynkoop never quotes Finney, she nevertheless embraces the core principles of his theology. This makes for strange bedfellows since Wynkoop would never have imagined that her system aligned more with Charles Finney’s than with John Wesley’s (her professed mentor).

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58 An example would be on the nature of saving faith. We saw above that Wynkoop explicitly rejects a passive reception of faith in the heart. Yet Wesley demonstrates a strong identification with Moravian views and with Martin Luther at this point. One can note the passivity of Wesley during his Aldersgate “heart-warming” (Journal, May 24, 1738), his understanding of faith as a temper or disposition (e.g., “Salvation By Faith” I.4; Works J 5:9; “On Faith” Heb. 11:6 P.1; Works J 7:195) and its link to assurance (e.g., Plain Account 8:1-2; 13:16; “The Scripture Way of Salvation” II.1, 3; Works J 6:46-47). Wesley’s affinity to Luther at this point is strong when he declares faith is a “work of omnipotence” (An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion §9 (Works 11:48). Because Wesley tended to view faith as received passively as a gift of God, he relied even heavier on the Spirit’s direct witness to confirm that faith lives in the heart. Wynkoop’s view of faith relies little on the Spirit’s direct witness because the believer is active in the saving moment: faith is a conscious, deliberate act of the will.

59 Laurence Wood makes an excellent point in a recent article: “Scholars who treat Wesley’s writings as a consistent system of thought are more likely manufacturing a myth . . .” (“The Origin, Development, and Consistency of John Wesley’s Theology of Holiness” in Wesleyan Theological Journal, Vol. 43, Num. 2, Fall 2008, 33).
Wynkoop’s affinity to Finney becomes evident when we list the major agreements between their two systems:

1. Wynkoop’s relational/substantive conjunctive parallels Finney’s physical/moral government axiom. Both authors use the same axial theme to methodologically interpret core doctrines and develop their theological systems. In his Lectures on Systematic Theology, Finney grounds his entire system on a distinction between physical and moral law. Physical law governs the material universe, including the human body, constitution, and involuntary mental states. Moral law is the law of liberty, of motive and free choice. Finney then defines physical and moral government in terms reminiscent of Wynkoop’s relational/substantive conjunctive. Physical government is the government of “substance…whether the substance be material or immaterial.” It “presides over and controls . . . changes of substance or constitution, and all involuntary states and changes.” Moral government is the guidance of “free will by motives . . . it presides over intelligent and voluntary states or changes of mind.” Like Wynkoop, every aspect of Finney’s system is organized around this axial theme.

So Wynkoop’s and Finney’s systems use the same axial theme to develop their respective theologies. This is true even though Finney’s work is more philosophical in argument, while Wynkoop’s is more psychological. As a consequence, a comparative reading demonstrates how both theologies take on the same flavor and characteristics as logically structured systems. One of these characteristics is that both authors find it necessary to defend against the charge of Pelagianism in their descriptions of the Christian life.

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61 Ibid., I:49, 50.
62 Ibid., I:50.
63 This reflects the difference in eras in which these authors lived. Finney (1792-1875) is a child of the Enlightenment, which still held a strong sway in the popular mind in antebellum America. Wynkoop is a product of the twentieth century when Freudian ideas have gained ascendancy.
64 Anyone familiar with Finney’s ministry and writings on theology are well aware of the accusation that he was Pelagian. See the series of articles recently republished from the Princeton Review in the 1830s that charge Finney and others in the New Divinity Movement of Pelagianism (Princeton Versus The New Divinity, Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 2001). Mark Quanstrom makes the same point about Wynkoop’s work (A Century of Holiness, 145). See also Wynkoop’s response that her work is not Pelagian (A Theology of Love, 171).
In the end, Wynkoop agrees with Finney on the most significant aspect of systematics—the choice of axial theme. So, according to Wynkoop and Finney, God works in the relational and cognitive realms in salvation, not deeper down in the constitution itself. This logically leads to point two.

2. Wynkoop and Finney embrace a thoroughly moral view of holiness that rejects any kind of sub-volitional transformation in sanctification. Finney argues this point repeatedly in his massive tome. For instance, “Sanctification does not imply any constitutional change, either of soul or body. It consists in the consecration or devotion of the constitutional powers of body and soul to God, and not in any change wrought in the constitution itself.”65 In regard to regeneration, Finney’s position is clear: “It is not a change in the substance of soul or body. . . . The words conversion and regeneration do not imply any change of substance, but only a change of moral state or of moral character. The terms are not used to express a physical, but a moral change.”66

As we saw above, Wynkoop agrees: “Holiness is not metaphysically conditioned substance, but a proper relationship to God by the Holy Spirit.”67 Again, she explains that “a clean heart is a single heart…purity cannot be a sub-rational, impersonal ‘something’ that happens to the substance of the soul.”68

So both authors explicitly deny any kind of sub-volitional, sub-cognitive transformation in the work of sanctification (and regeneration). Grace transforms on the relational and cognitive levels. Since Wynkoop and Finney view holiness as single-minded devotion of the whole person to God, then logically sin must mean it’s opposite.

3. Wynkoop follows Finney by defining sin as a moral selfishness. Her well-known definition of sin as “love locked into a false center, the self” confirms the point.69 In keeping with her relational program Wynkoop sees sin as perverted love. “Sin is love, but love gone astray.”70 While this statement can be read in a manner that Wesley would support,

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65 Lectures on Systematic Theology, II:784.
66 Ibid., I.546.
67 A Theology of Love, 177.
68 Ibid., 266.
69 Ibid., 158.
70 Ibid., 157.
her overall program precludes such a conclusion. Her commitment to the relational/substantive conjunctive (her axial theme) compels her to deny any kind of sinfulness deeper down or further back than the cognitive powers: “Original sin is not ‘deeper down and farther back’ than our moral responsibility. It is not a thing, but a commitment of the self to a controlling center, always itself personal.”71 Her primary concern is that to espouse a substantive view of sin logically leads to a belief that sin is a “substructure of some alien substance” clinging to the soul and not one’s “own alienation from God.”72

Whether one agrees or disagrees with Wynkoop is beside the point. What is important is that she acknowledges that her views are different than Wesley’s.73 Charles Finney is in full agreement with her, as the following several quotations confirm:

All sin or disobedience to moral law is a unit, and consists in selfishness, or the choice of self-gratification as an end. . . . To make sin an attribute or quality of substance is contrary to God’s definition of sin. “Sin,” says the apostle, “is anomia,” a “transgression of, or a want of conformity to, the moral law” (1 Jn. 3:4). That is, it consists in a refusal to love God and our neighbour, or, which is the same thing, in loving ourselves supremely. . . . To represent the constitution as sinful is to represent God, who is the author of the constitution, as the author of sin. . . . This doctrine represents sin as a disease, and obedience to law impossible, until the nature is changed by a sovereign and physical agency of the Holy Spirit.74

Once again, we see that Wynkoop and Finney are theological bedfellows. They both place holiness and sin on the personal and relational levels. In agreement with their axial theme, sin can not refer to a sub-volitional, sub-cognitive dynamic of the soul or constitution (i.e., a sinful inclination in human nature). Therefore, Finney and Wynkoop do not favor the church’s language of a sinful nature inherited from Adam.75

71 Ibid., 150.
72 Ibid., 164.
73 Ibid., 153.
74 Lectures on Systematic Theology, I:340, 524-25.
75 Finney writes, “Moral depravity, as I use the term, does not consist in, nor imply a sinful nature, in the sense that the substance of the human’s soul is sinful itself. It is not a constitutional sinfulness . . . a constitutional appetency or craving
4. Wynkoop and Finney define holiness or perfect love as the full consecration of a person’s present constitutional powers. While this is Finney’s terminology, Wynkoop agrees with him in principle. We begin with Finney’s definition:

Sanctification may be entire in two senses: (1) In the sense of present, full obedience, or consecration to God; and, (2) In the sense of continued, abiding consecration or obedience to God. Entire sanctification, when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of consecration to God.76

Disinterested benevolence is all that the spirit of moral law requires, that is, that the love which it requires to God and our neighbor is good-willing . . . this willing is a consecration of all the powers, so far as they are under the control of the will, to this end.77

These quotations confirm that Finney delineated the Christian life along the contours of consecration to benevolence (love). According to this scheme, the “goal of the Christian seeking entire or permanent sanctification is to maintain this benevolent heart from moment to moment without returning time and again to selfishness.”78 We now let Wynkoop speak for herself:

Holiness is love locked into the True Center, Jesus Christ our Lord. . . . Sin is love locked into a false center, the self. . . . Purity of heart in itself is the loving of God with the whole heart, mind, soul, and strength. It is not the suppression of human impulse but the centering of the entire heart and life and activity in God. . . . (Sanctification) means separation from sin to total devotedness to God.79

for sin (Lectures on Systematic Theology, I:500, 507). Wynkoop writes, “Sin is a rupture of fellowship with God . . . original sin is not ‘deeper down and farther back’ than our moral responsibility. It is not a thing, but a commitment of the self to a controlling center, always itself personal” (Theology of Love, 156, 150). Mark Quanstrom confirms that Wynkoop did not favor “sinful nature” terminology (A Century of Holiness Theology, 146).

76Lectures on Systematic Theology, II:785.
77Ibid., I:198.
79A Theology of Love, 158, 253, 328.
The parallels between the two are evident. Wynkoop agrees with Finney that the goal of the “second ‘moment’ is a crucial, midpoint correction which ‘locks’ the compass to the Morning Star.”\(^{80}\) The essence of entire sanctification is to establish the believer’s consecration to God and thereby secure their cognitive obedience to the known will of God. Once again, we see that sanctification is wholly a relational concern. While Finney uses the language of “permanent consecration” and Wynkoop of “love locked,” their meaning is the same and confirms that their doctrines of sanctification are essentially identical.

5. Furthermore, the above quotations demonstrate that Wynkoop follows Finney by collapsing entire sanctification into the moment of justification and new birth. It is true that Wynkoop and Finney espouse a second sanctifying moment. But this moment is so nuanced in their systems that there is no qualitative difference between the moment of initial sanctification (justification) and the moment of entire sanctification. This is due to their conceptual delineation of the Christian life as consecration.

At the moment of justification, says Finney, the repentant believer offers a “present full consecration to God.”\(^{81}\) But in the second moment the believer offers the same full consecration to God. So what has changed? Finney answers that in the second moment the believer’s consecration becomes “permanent.” So it logically follows that the quality of the believer’s consecration (holiness) remains essentially the same in both moments. This is surely a collapse of entire sanctification into the moment of justification. When one is justified, that person is also entirely sanctified in the sense that a full complete consecration to God is offered. There is no change in the nature of the consecration in both moments, just its consistency.

\(^{80}\) Ibid., 347.

\(^{81}\) *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, II:736. Finney continues, “Some theologians have made justification a condition of sanctification, instead of making sanctification a condition of justification. But this we shall see is an erroneous view of the subject…. By sanctification being a condition of justification, the following things are intended. (1) That present, full, and entire consecration of heart and life to God and his service is an unalterable condition of present pardon of past sin, and of present acceptance with God. (2) That the penitent soul remains justified no longer than this full-hearted consecration continues” (Lectures on Systematic Theology, II:736-37, 739).
Wynkoop’s system parallels Finney’s at this point. While she articulates it in a manner different than Finney, her conclusion is the same:

In no sense is one “work of grace” limited for the purpose of reserving a place for another “work of grace.” God does not partially save and fully save. Men do not respond with part of the personality and then later with the rest of it. Sin is not partially destroyed at one time and fully destroyed at another, nor is a second work of grace for the purpose of correcting the defects of the first.82

There is nothing inherently defective in the Christian’s consecration in the moment of justification. Since sin is a “rupture of fellowship with God,”83 and holiness is “personal communion . . . (and) fellowship with God,”84 it logically follows that when that relationship is restored the believer is fully sanctified. In this way, Wynkoop is led to “deny any essential distinction between the first crisis of justification and the second crisis of entire sanctification.”85 Once again, we see just how far Wynkoop embraced the core principles of Finney’s theology.

6. Last, Wynkoop agrees with Finney regarding the nature of the Spirit’s work in salvation and sanctification. She makes this plain when she rejects any notion of the Spirit working deeper down than the moral and relational levels. We need to look at her argument to appreciate her affinity to Finney.

When discussing the divine-human interaction in sanctification, Wynkoop argues that the substantive perspective holds that “certain impulses” in human nature are “in themselves right or wrong,” that is, people are born with a sinful nature that inclines them toward sin. In salvation and sanctification God’s grace comes as a “supernatural force” and “acts sub-rationally,” that is, by a “sort of spiritual operation of the Holy Spirit” to change these sinful impulses into holy ones.86 Wynkoop decries

82A Theology of Love, 206-207.
83Ibid., 156.
84Ibid., 154.
85Quanstrom, 147.
86A Theology of Love, 216. Though Wynkoop holds up Dr. Graham, hence the Baptists, as exponents of this view, in reality this is the substantive perspective on human nature. People are born with a sinful nature that inclines the soul toward sin. As we saw above, this is John Wesley’s position.
this view of sanctifying grace since it implies that God works below the relational/cognitive level. At one point she links it to “magical manipulation.”\textsuperscript{87} Later, she summarizes her perspective:

Although all Christians “have” the Holy Spirit, there is a unique and proper sense in which one may be said to be “filled” with the Spirit only when the total commitment has been reached. In statements like this, any corporeal concept of the self or Spirit must be resolutely avoided. These are personal relationships only—not personality “invasions.”\textsuperscript{88}

Charles Finney would stand and wholeheartedly applaud Wynkoop’s argument. He was a tireless opponent of what he called “physical regeneration”—that the Spirit of God produces a dispositional inclination deeper down than the cognitive, relational level. Instead, he advocated that the Spirit works by means of “divine moral suasion.”\textsuperscript{89} Though he speaks of the Spirit personally indwelling the believer,\textsuperscript{90} when Finney describes the nature of the Spirit’s work he nearly always does so in terms of “influence.”\textsuperscript{91} Like Wynkoop, Finney decries any concept of sin or of the Spirit working in the sub-rational realm:

I object to the doctrine of constitutional sinfulness, that it makes all sin, original and actual, a mere calamity, and not a crime. . . . This doctrine represents sin as a disease, and obedience to law impossible, until the nature is changed by a sovereign and physical agency of the Holy Spirit, in which the subject is passive.\textsuperscript{92}

As was noted above, Wynkoop’s affinity to Finney makes for strange bedfellows since she never once quotes or alludes to Finney, and few have taken note of how close her core principles agree with his.\textsuperscript{93} But there can

\textsuperscript{87}Ibid., 166.
\textsuperscript{88}Ibid., 351.
\textsuperscript{89}Lectures on Systematic Theology, I:567. Finney discusses the substantive position under the headings of “the taste scheme” and “the susceptibility scheme.” In both cases he argues against a “constitutional relish, taste, or craving for sin” in fallen human nature (I:554).
\textsuperscript{90}Ibid., I:633.
\textsuperscript{91}Ibid., I:415-16, 567-70.
\textsuperscript{92}Ibid., I:525.
\textsuperscript{93}One of those few was Richard Taylor, who identified Wynkoop’s concept of sin as the same as Finney’s (cf. Why The Holiness Movement Died).
be no doubt that in several ways Mildred Wynkoop presents a modern version of Finney’s theology.  

Let me add that it matters little if we agree with Wynkoop and Finney on the six points or in other areas. That is not the purpose of this study. What is important is how far Wynkoop strayed from John Wesley in developing her theology of holiness.

**John Wesley’s Response**

We have already pointed out the sharp differences between Wesley and Wynkoop. So it will come as no surprise that Wesley parts paths with Wynkoop and Finney on the above six points. We can briefly summarize Wesley’s responses as follows.

1. Wesley did not use the conjunctives of substance/relational or physical/moral government to develop his theology of holiness. This alone guarantees that Wesley would theologize and develop his understanding of holiness differently than did Wynkoop and Finney.

2. Wesley did embrace a sub-volitional transformation of the dispositional nature in his doctrine of sanctification. Therefore, any reading of Wesley that fails to grasp this point misinterprets him.

3. Wesley’s understanding of sin (and holiness) is much more comprehensive than either Wynkoop or Finney embraces. Sin involves a corruption of human nature, which Wesley often refers to as “inbred sin.” Wesley believed that every person is born with a sinful nature that inclines them toward sin.

4. Wesley’s position on Christian perfection goes beyond consecration. Holiness is more than the single intention; it is love made perfect and involves the rooting out of sinful tempers from the dispositional nature: *perfect love is a deeper transformation of the dispositional nature than experienced in the new birth at justification.*

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94One of the main differences between Wynkoop and Finney concerns prevenient grace. Finney explicitly rejects the Wesleyan understanding of prevenient grace under the rubric of “Gracious Ability” (*Lectures on Systematic Theology*, I:663ff.). But this author believes that Wynkoop’s system does agree with Finney’s concerning the freedom of the will as a inherent attribute of human nature, not a gift of prevenient grace (as in Wesley).

95Kenneth Collins identifies grace and holy love as the axial themes of Wesley’s theology (*The Theology of John Wesley*, 5-12).
5. Wesley consistently maintained a definite ordo salutis within a larger via salutis. From 1739 and thereafter, he consistently maintained (1) an ongoing path of discovery, growth and maturation in salvation, (2) the distinct moments of justification and entire sanctification within this larger journey, and (3) the proper order of these twin moments and their cognates.\textsuperscript{96} Therefore, Wesley did not collapse sanctification into justification.\textsuperscript{97}

6. Wesley did believe that divine grace works at a deeper level than the relational and cognitive, as the following quote confirms: “The Holy Spirit works the same in our hearts, not merely creating desires after holiness in general, but strongly inclining us to every particular grace, leading us to every individual part of ‘whatsoever is lovely.’”\textsuperscript{98} In agreement we can add what John Wesley so often prayed:

\begin{quote}
Almighty God, unto whom all hearts be open, 
all desires known, and from whom all secrets are hid;
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify 
thy holy Name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.\textsuperscript{99}
\end{quote}

Therefore, we are on solid ground to conclude that John Wesley would never have supported Mildred Wynkoop’s articulation of holiness as in her book \textit{A Theology of Love}. His fundamental convictions naturally led him to theologize in a different manner, and to conceptually articulate holiness according to different principles.

\textsuperscript{96} n relation to justification, new birth, and sanctification, Wesley maintained a clear ordo salutis within a larger via salutis of renewal in God’s image.

\textsuperscript{97} Of course, Wesley \textit{did} collapse entire sanctification into justification for a short time during his Aldersgate period (1738). Theologically, this was the primary cause behind his struggle following his evangelical conversion on May 24\textsuperscript{th} and later became the central issue of the stillness controversy in 1740. For a full discussion, see my \textit{John Wesley’s Theology of Christian Perfection: Developments in Doctrine and Theological System} (Fenwick: Truth In Heart, 2007, 2009 [revised], 120-129).

\textsuperscript{98} “Farther Thoughts on Christian Perfection” Q.34 (Plain Account, 221); emphasis mine.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that Mildred Wynkoop formed a system of holiness theology that she believed was congruent with John Wesley’s principles. But in her attempt to remain logically tight in her principles, specifically, with her axial theme, she moved quite far from Wesley’s principles. Probably without realizing it, she ended up embracing several core aspects of Charles Finney’s “New Divinity” theology. This makes for strange bedfellows since Wynkoop would never have imagined that her primary arguments in *A Theology of Love* fit better with Finney’s theology than with Wesley’s.

In the end, Wynkoop blends Finney’s theology with Wesley’s to form a distinct modern theology of holiness. Yet, not withstanding all her quotations of Wesley and her claims to wear his mantle, her theology differs from his in very significant ways, leading to a Wesleyan theology that is more in agreement with the core principles of New Divinity Calvinism, which Charles Finney represents. This confirms just how far many heirs of Wesley have drifted from their professed mentor without recognizing it.\(^{100}\) Therefore, novices of Wesley’s writings should not rely upon Wynkoop’s study to learn his theological principles, for they will inevitably walk away with a great many misconceptions.

Nevertheless, Wynkoop’s presentation does remain a viable option within the Holiness Movement, and deserves to be regarded as a classic, since that tradition has been shaped as much by Charles Finney, Asa Mahan, Phoebe Palmer, and others, as by John Wesley.

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\(^{100}\) The merger of Wesleyanism with moderate Calvinism on core principles is evident in the recent presentation on sanctification by Melvin Dieter (Wesleyan) and John Walvoord (Augustinian-Dispensational) in *Five Views on Sanctification* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1987). When one gets past the differences in conceptual terminology, Dieter and Walvoord disagree on very little, if anything, of substance.
AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN WORSHIP:
RELEVANCE OF WESLEY’S CRITERIA

by

Todd A. Stepp

The nineteenth-century American holiness movement was a revival of John Wesley’s emphasis on Christian perfection. The denominations identified with this movement, especially those with strong ecclesial ties to their Methodist heritage, have consciously attempted to retain traditional Wesleyan teachings. Nevertheless, most have strayed far from Mr. Wesley concerning their understanding and practice of worship.

My own denomination, the Church of the Nazarene, like other Wesleyan-holiness churches, has been quick to embrace Wesley’s warm-hearted faith, but has failed to be as enthusiastic about his liturgical/sacramental inclinations. American Methodism in general had early traded in Wesley’s version of *The Book of Common Prayer*, which he titled *The Sunday Service of the Methodist in North America (The Sunday Service)*, for American frontier revivalism (*John Wesley’s Prayer Book*). As camp meetings were adopted by holiness proponents, entire sanctification became the focal point. Immediacy of experience, spontaneity, and feelings played a primary role in this movement.

Concern that people experience the new birth and that believers go on to experience entire sanctification has led the Church of the Nazarene and other Wesleyan-holiness denominations to adopt a revivalistic mode of preaching, with corresponding altar calls, in order to lead people into these Christian experiences. The prizing of a sense of the Holy Spirit’s presence and spontaneity has led to the diminishing importance of sacramental worship, which is often seen as a part of formal, non-spiritual, or dead religion.

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As Brad Estep says, “The holiness movement of the nineteenth century was not a movement of liturgical reform; it was, rather, the revival of a doctrinal emphasis perceived to have been lost” (98). James R. Spruce, after reflecting upon various early accounts of Nazarene worship, concludes, “Thus, Nazarenes worshiped—or even more accurately, celebrated!” (39). What those early Nazarenes and other Wesleyans did is more accurately described as celebration, not worship. As Randall E. Davey rightly asserts, “In the early Nazarenes’ zeal to promote holiness and minister to the poor, it seems fair to say that they uncritically embraced a worship form framed by pragmatism, rationalism, self-reliance, personal piety and innovations” (3-4).

As a denomination, the early Nazarenes did not operate out of a conscious theology of worship. Even today, Nazarenes have no official theology of worship. Each pastor and congregation decide how they will worship God. As culture has changed, many Nazarenes have found that the worship forms of the nineteenth-century camp meetings are no longer viable. They have, therefore, sought guidance from various sources. With the 1970s advent of the Church Growth movement, the Kennedy School of Evangelism, and the 1980s Willow Creek phenomena, Nazarenes have become increasingly eclectic in worship, to the discomfort of some, the displeasure of others, and the delight of not a few (Davey 12).

After ninety years of relative silence on the rubrics of worship, Nazarenes are ripe for the change. With their pragmatic bent and penchant for innovation, they have pressed the extremes of “spirit” and “structure,” driven by an ardent desire to “grow the church.” (Davey 12) Like their early Nazarene heritage, the pursuit for effective worship patterns has often been led by an uncritical pragmatism that has prized an emotionalism tending to be self-focused. One missing source as Nazarenes have sought guidance in the area of worship is the denomination’s spiritual forefather, John Wesley.

When we look to Wesley for guidance concerning worship, we encounter a stark contrast with the sources above. Wesley was certainly the father of warmhearted religion. He was committed to evangelism. He was concerned about the genuine presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of worshippers, but the pattern found in Wesley is that of “spirit via [original emphasis] structure” (Staples 288). This warmhearted evangelical was also a “High Churchman, the son of a High Churchman” (Wesley, Journal 325):

*Both [original emphasis] spirit and structure were important, and they were not mutually exclusive. Structure was not*
opposed to spirit but its very conduit. Forms of worship, ordered services, the *Book of Common Prayer*, hymns that directed the soul to God, ancient creeds, written prayers, and the like were the very channels through which God could send His convicting, regenerating, sanctifying Spirit. They were “means of grace.” (Staples 288)

If Nazarenes and other Wesleyan Christians were to look to John Wesley for guidance concerning worship, they would discover a very different kind of criteria than those presently adopted by many Nazarenes.

**Biblical/Theological Foundations**

The fundamental task of the church is the worship of God. The first question in the “Westminster Shorter Catechism” seeks to identify the chief aim of humankind. The answer given in the Catechism is exactly right: “to glorify God and enjoy him forever” (200). The order of the content of that answer is significant. Glorifying God is first.

Examples of Scripture passages that command or call people to worship are numerous. One such passage is 1 Chronicles 16:29: “Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come before him. Worship the Lord in holy splendor” (NRSV). Of course, the Scriptures include other commands, and many within the church would point to the Great Commission. They would argue that the fundamental task of the church is evangelism. The fact is, both are important, and neither can be left out. Nevertheless, when people look at Matthew 28:17, they discover that the Great Commission is given in the context of worship. Further, Jesus summarizes all of the commandments in the Great Commandment: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30). That passage is a worship command.

The first four of the Ten Commandments assume people’s role as worshippers. Creation demands that worship be seen as the people’s fundamental activity. The idea that people were created calls them to stand in awe of their Creator, to adore their Creator, and to worship their Creator. Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that the Father seeks worshippers who will worship him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). Jesus, during his wilderness temptations, tells the devil that “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him’” (Luke 4:8). Jesus is seen as supporting Israel’s worship practice in the temple, the synagogue, and in observing religious feasts.
The New Testament church emphasized the importance of worship. Throughout the book of Acts and the epistles, readers see the continuing involvement of Christians with the established Jewish patterns of worship. In addition to the services of the Word found in synagogue worship, early Christians gathered in homes to celebrate the Eucharist. Further, Hebrews 10:25 warns Christians not to neglect meeting together, which Wesley understood to mean the meeting together for worship (Explanatory Notes 585).

Because worship is the fundamental task of the church and since the church’s worship is to be directed towards God, then worship demands a Christian’s utmost consideration. In fact, Wesley understood corporate worship to be so essential to Christianity that in his fourth discourse, “Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount,” he says, “By Christianity I mean that method of worshipping God which is here revealed to man by Jesus Christ” (Works Bicentennial 1: 533). Mark Horst is correct in stating that, for the Wesleyan tradition, worship in its broadest sense “encompasses not only public rituals and private devotions, but the Christian life in all its fullness” (297). Nevertheless, essential to that Christian life is corporate worship. Wesley argues that “Christianity is essentially a social religion, and that to turn it into a solitary religion is indeed to destroy it” (Works Bicentennial 1: 533).

Wesley, according to James F. White, espoused a vision for the Christian life that built firmly upon the foundation of “the God-given means of grace, particularly sacrament, scripture, and prayer” (Introduction 9). Wesley based his pattern for the Christian life on “a community gathering each Sunday for morning and evening prayer, and celebrating the Lord’s Supper ‘on every Lord’s day’” (9). He developed such an understanding of worship within the Christian life from such passages as Acts 2:42: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and the prayers.” When commenting on this verse, Wesley says, “So their daily church communion consisted in these four particulars: 1. Hearing the word; 2. Having all things common; 3. Receiving the Lord’s Supper; 4. Prayer” (Explanatory Notes 281).

In speaking from Colossians 2:20, Wesley insists that Christians are obligated to observe the ordinances of Christ. He bases his understanding of many of the acts of worship upon the clear commands of Christ. By tying the Lord’s words about prayer from Luke 18:1 to the command concerning the assembling together from Hebrews 10:25, Wesley demon-
strates his presupposition that the command to pray includes prayer within the context of corporate worship.

Further, Wesley understands such acts of corporate worship to be means of grace. He says, “For God hath in Scripture ordained prayer, reading or hearing, and receiving the Lord’s Supper, as the ordinary means of conveying his grace to man” (Works Bicentennial 19: 157). He insists that in the ancient church all baptized believers participated in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper every day. This statement is buttressed by referring to the Acts 2:46 report that they “all continued daily in the breaking of bread and prayer” (Works Bicentennial 19: 158). He further insists that “the Lord’s Supper was ordained by God to be a means of conveying [original emphasis] to men either preventing [original emphasis] or justifying [original emphasis], or sanctifying grace [original emphasis], according to their several necessities” (Works Bicentennial 19: 159).

Wesleyan worship, therefore, is more than mere outward forms. It brings worshippers into the presence of God where they lovingly contemplate God’s holiness (Horst 297). It uses outward forms to bring us to God. Wesley understands Scripture to teach that Christian worship involves the unity of “inward power and outward form” (Horst 297). As Horton Davies says, Wesleyan worship blends “the Spirit and the Liturgy” (240). On the one hand, “The nature of religion is so far from consisting in . . . forms of worship, or rites and ceremonies, that it does not properly consist in any outward actions of what kind so ever” (Works Bicentennial 1: 219). On the other hand, if one does not mistake “the means for the end,” then Wesley argues that Christians should “use all outward things; but use them with a constant eye to the renewal of your soul in righteousness and true holiness” (545). The outward forms are not ends in themselves, but Scripture indicates that they are given by God to be used as means of grace. As demonstrated above, Wesley evidenced a biblical theology of worship wherein the Spirit works through the forms of worship.

Scripture demonstrates that worship is the fundamental task of the church; thus, worship demands Christians’ utmost consideration. The biblical theology of worship seen in Wesley was formed around the understanding that God revealed to the church through Scripture his desire for the church’s worship. In particular, Wesley focused upon God having given to the church the Word and the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, along with prayer, as means of grace. Thus, Christian worship consists of the interplay between the church and God. As the church worships
according to God’s revelation, God’s grace is poured out to the church. Such a revelation from God, as seen in Scripture, demonstrated by the primitive church, worked out by reason, and confirmed by experience, forms the foundation for Christian worship that may be understood to be authentically Wesleyan.

**Wesley’s Criteria**

In 1784 Wesley sent to the people called Methodist living in North America his revision of the *Book of Common Prayer* of the Church of England. He titled it, *The Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America (The Sunday Service)*. In his letter to Coke, Asbury, and the Methodists in North America, Wesley indicates that his revision was made in response to the advice sought by American Methodists in order that “those poor sheep in the wilderness” might be fed and guided (*John Wesley’s Prayer Book* a-ii). In his preface to *The Sunday Service*, Wesley writes, “I believe that there is no liturgy in the world, either in ancient or modern language, which breathes more of a solid, scriptural, rational piety, than the *Common Prayer* of the Church of England” (A1).

This statement indicates that Wesley assessed the value of particular forms of worship based, at least in part, upon two branches of what Albert C. Outler identifies as the Wesleyan Quadrilateral (7-18). The church’s worshipping of God in a way that was “Scriptural and rational” was vitally important for Wesley. In the letter that accompanied *The Sunday Service*, Wesley says that the American Methodists “are now at full liberty simply to follow the scriptures and the primitive church” (iii). Thus, he added a third leg of the quadrilateral to his basis for evaluating forms of worship. Karen Westerfield Tucker adds the final leg of the quadrilateral by saying that Wesley’s theological criteria for his revision of the Anglican prayer book included evangelical experience (*Sunday Service* 19).

Wesley was not satisfied with the “worship” of the Methodist societies alone. He considered them, apart from Anglican worship, to be essentially defective. As Lester Ruth indicates, Wesley argued that they lacked the kind of breadth found in the services of worship in the Church of England, and apart from the worship of the established church, Methodist worship was an unbalanced diet (140).

Wesley’s vision for the Christian life, as demonstrated within his prayer book revision and according to White, was “firmly built upon the God-given means of grace, particularly sacrament, scripture, and prayer”
The pattern espoused for the Christian life was “based on a community gathering each Sunday for morning and evening prayer, and celebrating the Lord’s Supper ‘on every Lord’s day’” (9). It took seriously Acts 2:42: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and the prayers,” and “the breaking of the bread” was understood to be the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.

I agree with Henry H. Knight, III’s argument that “it is the necessity of experiencing the presence and identity of God in a relationship with God that implicitly underlies Wesley’s insistence on the patterning of the means of grace” (11). I am contending that that which Tucker identifies as “evangelical experience” (Sunday Service 19) ought to be expanded to include this same principle of the necessity of experiencing both the presence and the identity of God. This expansion of the understanding of experience helps to form the criteria whereby worship can be assessed as being authentically Wesleyan. Following, then, are Wesley’s four criteria for authentic Christian worship.

1. Scriptural Piety

The first Wesleyan criterion for planning and assessing worship is that of scriptural piety (cf., Wesley, John Wesley’s Prayer Book A1). The first question that must be answered is what Wesley means when he uses the term “scriptural.” The second question is how this term applies to the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England. By answering these two questions, “scriptural piety” will be established as a Wesleyan criterion for assessing worship.

The Meaning of “Scriptural.” Wesley tended to look to four main sources as theological norms, though he did not use such a term as “quadrilateral.” Wesley inherited the first three from his own Anglican tradition. To these three he added the norm of experience. The one leg of the quadrilateral that held preeminence above the other three was that of Scripture. As H. Ray Dunning correctly states, “Properly understood, the three auxiliary sources [of theology] directly support the priority of biblical authority” (77).

Wesley refers to himself as homo unius libri, a man of one book (Works Bicentennial 1: 105). Scott J. Jones declares that, for Wesley, “Scripture alone is the authority for Christian faith and practice. On this point Wesley is definite. It is the Bible that serves as the final court of appeal” (41). The student of Wesley can see that when he referred to
something as being “scriptural,” he meant that it was either filled with, founded upon, based upon, flowed from, or consistent with the Bible and its teachings. Further, something could be viewed as scriptural if it proclaimed the gospel message of Jesus Christ as found in Scripture. In this sense Tucker can speak of Wesley’s belief that no creedal or conciliar decisions of the Church have any authority unless they conform to the witness of Scripture (*Sunday Service* 20). By implication, if those creedal statements did conform to the witness of Scripture, they could be considered as having authority because they were “scriptural” statements.

**The Book of Common Prayer as Scriptural.** Many would argue that the Scriptures have been worked more thoroughly into Anglican worship than any other branch of Christianity (Tracy and Ingersol 102). Bishop Stephen Neill indicates that the creeds and the liturgy of the prayer book express its strong biblical quality. In fact, “the Anglican Churches read more of the Bible to [those attending worship] than any other group of Churches” (418). This biblical content illustrates one important way in which the English liturgy would have been considered by Wesley to be scriptural. The Scripture content of Wesley’s *The Sunday Service* is emphasized by White:

> Scripture there was in abundance in Wesley’s services: a lesson from the Old Testament was provided for each Sunday both for morning and evening prayer in his table of proper lessons; abundant psalmody was arranged over a thirty-day period; and the liturgical epistles and gospels were retained as provided in the BCP. A note suggests that a gospel chapter be read at morning prayer and an epistle chapter at evening prayer. By far the largest portions of the book are devoted to selections from Scripture. (Introduction 10)

What White says of Wesley’s *The Sunday Service* is equally true of the *Book of Common Prayer*. Nearly 95 percent of the prayer book comes straight from the Bible (Hobbs 8). Even parts of the prayer book that are not direct quotes from Scripture are often compilations of various biblical passages. The General Confession is an example of such a compilation (8).

The thorough use of Scripture in the prayer book is not the only reason for Wesley’s positive assessment of the English liturgy. As surely as the gospel is proclaimed through the liturgy, it may be assessed as being scriptural. The prayer book announces the commandments, calls people to
repentance, assures them of forgiveness, proclaims Christ and the promises of God, and calls people to experience God’s grace through the sacrament. Wesley would have seen all of this proclamation of the gospel as being thoroughly scriptural, despite those few “scripturally indefensible” portions. In addition, the observance of the Christian festivals as outlined in the calendar of the prayer book assisted in the proclamation of the gospel story throughout the year.

However, when Wesley declared the prayer book to be scriptural, he did not mean the particular liturgies or structures therein were found explicitly in the Bible. The radical Puritans insisted upon explicit precedents in Scripture for worship practices. Wesley saw no reason to insist that the Scriptures “be the blueprint for Christian worship”; valid forms could indeed “flow” from Scripture (Tucker, *Sunday Service* 20). Wesley indicates such in “Ought We to Separate from the Church of England?”:

“But is not the Bible the only rule of Christian worship?” Yes, the only *supreme* [original emphasis] rule. But there may be a thousand rules *subordinate* [original emphasis] to this, without any violation of it at all. For instance the supreme rule says, “Let all things be done decently and in order.” Not repugnant to, but plainly flowing from this, are the subordinate rules concerning the time and place of divine service. And so are many others observed in Scotland, Geneva, and in all other Protestant churches. (*Works* Bicentennial 9: 570)

Thus, the prayer book conforms to Scripture once again.

As indicated, the use of the prayer book necessarily includes an emphasis upon the sacraments. The high view of the sacraments demonstrated by Wesley’s *The Sunday Service* is thoroughly biblical. As J. Kenneth Griders says, “Sacraments are needed . . . because they were instituted by Christ himself” (492). As one sees from Luke 22:7-20, Jesus clearly instituted the Lord’s Supper. Further, the New Testament Church continued the observance of the sacrament (see 1 Cor. 11:26). While biblical scholars must admit that Christ did not *overtly* command converts to be baptized (493), he did give the example by being baptized himself (Matt. 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22). Further, he gave the Great Commission, commanding that Christians baptize (Matt. 28:19). Further, Wesley’s understanding of the New Testament and early Church was such that he could write that the Lord’s Supper was “a constant part of the Lord’s day’s service. And for several centuries they received it almost every day. Four times a week always, and every saint’s day beside” (*Works* Bicentennial 3: 430).
While Wesley did not see particular structures of worship explicitly demonstrated within the Bible, the general structure of worship found within the prayer book can be seen as consistent with a biblical foundation. Robert Webber sees a fourfold pattern as being rooted in Scripture—Acts of Entrance, Service of the Word, Service of the Table, and Acts of Dismissal. He points to Acts 2:42, which demonstrates that early Christians gathered in worship around the apostles’ teaching and the breaking of bread in the context of prayer and fellowship. In this passage, he finds evidence that from its inception, Christian worship had two primary focuses: Word and Table. To these were added acts of gathering and acts by which worshippers were sent forth (Planning Blended Worship 20).

Modern Methodists have seen in the Emmaus Road account (Luke 24) an illustration of the basic fourfold pattern of worship (United Methodist Book 14). This basic fourfold pattern may be demonstrated in various theological traditions and worship styles. The Book of Common Prayer and Wesley’s The Sunday Service demonstrate one particular way to fulfill the fourfold pattern found in the Emmaus Road story. Therefore, the general structure of prayer book worship may be understood as being consistent with Scripture.

2. Rational Piety

In Wesley’s quote concerning the Book of Common Prayer, he referred to it as being scriptural and rational (John Wesley’s Prayer Book A1). For Wesley, reason was so important that he could insist that the one who rejects reason rejects religion:

Whenever, therefore, you see an unreasonable man, you see one who perhaps calls himself by the name [i.e., Christian], but is no more a Christian than he is an angel. So far as he departs from true genuine reason, so far he departs from Christianity. (Wesley, Works Bicentennial 11: 55)

Reason played an essential role in Wesley’s understanding of the Christian faith. In order to establish rational piety as a Wesleyan criterion for planning and assessing worship, the first question is what Wesley meant when he used the term “rational” or “reason.” The second question is how this term applied to the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England.

The Meaning of “Rational.” In “The Case of Reason Impartially Considered,” Wesley begins by setting out to define reason. The first defi-
ition he gives the word is that of *argument*. He refers to the use of the word in a sentence such as, “He has good *reasons* [original emphasis] for what he does,” and Wesley comments that, in that context, it seems to mean “he has sufficient *motives* [original emphasis], such as ought to influence a wise man” (*Works* Bicentennial 2: 589). Wesley used reason in this sense throughout his writings, but this sense was not Wesley’s technical, philosophical use (Miles 84-85).

Wesley rejected reason as an independent source of knowledge. He did not subscribe to the Platonic school of thought (Miles 85). Instead, Wesley embraced an empirical understanding of reason as a tool or capacity for understanding. Reason processed information or data that was derived from other sources (86). Thus, Grider says that it is “mainly a vehicle for taking revealed data and sorting out what it means. It is a vehicle that we humans can use to sort out what is meant by the Word of God lived out in Christ and written out in Scripture” (109). In fact, it is a necessary tool. Wesley explains the human capacity to receive and apprehend divine communication:

> It means a faculty of the human soul; that faculty which exerts itself in three ways: by simple apprehension, by judgment, and by discourse. *Simple apprehension* [original emphasis] is barely conceiving a thing in the mind, the first and most simple act of understanding. *Judgment* [original emphasis] is the determining that the things before conceived either agree with or differ from each other. *Discourse* [original emphasis] (strictly speaking) is the motion of progress of the mind from one judgment to another. The faculty of the soul which includes these three operations I here mean by the term *reason* [original emphasis]. (*Works* Bicentennial 2: 590)

Unlike the empiricists of his day, however, Wesley believed that human beings had “spiritual senses.” Tucker says, “Not simply the exercising of the God-given gift of the human intellect, reason more importantly was the perceiving of divine revelation through the agency of the Holy Spirit” (*Sunday Service* 22). Reason was understood by Wesley to be the means whereby Christians are enabled by the Holy Spirit to understand God’s communication with them.

Finally, in addition to the concept of reason as a tool, Wesley sometimes used reason as a synonym for “common sense.” Reason was seen as “a pragmatic, common sense wisdom” that most people would accept
Instead of understanding reason as a tool or processor, it was understood as a set of conclusions derived from the process that any reasonable person would accept (93). An example of this use is seen in Wesley’s letter to Robert Carr Brackenbury on 9 March 1782:

> It is exceeding clear to me, first, that a dispensation of the Gospel is committed to you; and, secondly, that you are peculiarly called to publish it in connexion with us. It has pleased God to give so many and so strong evidences of this, that I see not how any reasonable person can doubt it. (*Works* 3rd ed. 13: 3)

Wesley’s comments to Brackenbury are derived from a clear process he is sure any reasonable person would accept.

Wesley “recognized the judicious use of reason coupled with Scripture when he admitted the possibility of various styles of worship, as long as the basic faith was maintained” (Tucker, *Sunday Service* 23). “Rational human beings had a God-given right to worship as they were persuaded” (23). Wesley expresses this same opinion:

> I do not mean, “Embrace my modes of worship,” or, “I will embrace yours.” This also is a thing which does not depend either on your choice or mine. We must both act as each is fully persuaded in his own mind. Hold you fast that which you believe is most acceptable to God, and I will do the same. (*Works* Bicentennial 2: 89-90)

Christians should be free to worship in a manner considered by them to be most reasonable. On the other hand, Wesley does insist that Christians should be reasonably persuaded as how best to worship:

> But the man of a truly catholic spirit, having weighed all things in the balance of the sanctuary, has no doubt, no scruple at all concerning that particular mode of worship wherein he joins. He is clearly convinced that *this* [original emphasis] manner of worshipping God is both scriptural and rational. He knows none in the world which is more scriptural, none which is more rational. Therefore without rambling hither and thither he cleaves close thereto, and praises God for the opportunity of so doing. (*Works* Bicentennial 2: 93)

Wesley’s statement in the preface to *The Sunday Service* makes quite clear that he was convinced that the manner of worshipping God as pre-
scribed by the *Book of Common Prayer* was both scriptural and rational. He knew of none in the world that was more scriptural or more rational (*John Wesley’s Prayer Book* A1).

**The Book of Common Prayer as Rational.** I have already established that for Wesley rules for Christian worship were subordinate to the supreme rule of the Bible, and that these subordinate rules did not violate the supreme rule but flowed from it (*Works* Bicentennial 9: 570). These subordinate rules flow from the Bible in accordance with reason. Reason, used as a tool, helps to formulate the structure and the content of the liturgy.

Edward C. Hobbs says that the rationality of the prayer book tradition “is one which conforms to the rationale of the Christian faith—i.e., it systematically exhibits the Christian’s relation to God, in accordance with the Christian understanding of that relationship” (9). He sees this structure centering on a basic threefold arrangement of the service (9). Hobbs identifies the “versicles,” or exchanges of dialogue between the minister and the people, as the transition points between each of the three sections of the service.

The first exchange begins, “O Lord, open thou our lips; And our mouth shall show forth thy praise.” The signal is clear—we are about to enter a service of praise. The other is the common, “The Lord be with you; And with thy spirit; Let us pray.” The signal is just as clear—prayer is to follow. (9)

Following these transition clues, the researcher sees that the three portions of the service include one of penitence and confession, one of praise, thanksgiving, and God’s Word, and, one of the worshipers offering themselves and all to God. Hobbs calls these sections “the Service of confession, the Service of the Word, . . . and the Service of offering” (9).

This structure follows the pattern of the Christian’s relationship with God. The structure does so as “a reminder and an interpretation of that life” before God (Hobbs 10). In other words, if the church’s worship of God is to be “rational,” then Christians cannot simply worship according to their own whims. Instead, Christians must worship in the same way “in which we always meet and acknowledge God when we meet the God who confronts us in Christ” (10). Hobbs says that “all the great services of Christian worship, from beginning till now, follow this fundamental scheme; the Communion is simply an elaboration of it, chiefly in the third portion” (12). This structure of worship proves to be thoroughly rational.
From a different perspective, as illustrated in the previous section on scriptural piety and the following section on the primitive church, the structure of prayer book worship may be seen as one of a number of ways to demonstrate the fourfold pattern wherein “(1) We enter into God’s presence; (2) We hear God speak; (3) We celebrate at God’s Table; and (4) We are dismissed” (Webber, *Signs* 37). Webber understands the “content of worship” to be the gospel (21). The structure of prayer book worship, therefore, follows a reasonable procedure. Thus, any reasonable person would agree that the structure of the liturgy makes sense.

Further, worship based upon the services of the prayer book can be seen to be rational in that they provide a “balanced worship” on a weekly basis. The design of Sunday worship according to the prayer book tradition provides spiritual breadth for worshippers, “including the acts of repentance, petition, intercession, and thanksgiving,” as well as the Lord’s Supper (Ruth 140-41). These are elements of worship the Methodist societies often lacked apart from the English liturgy. The *Book of Common Prayer* provided a solid means of spiritual formation because it included a systematic reading of Scripture, preaching, and the sacrament.

3. **Continuity with the Primitive Church**

In his letter accompanying *The Sunday Service*, Wesley says the American Methodists “are now at full liberty, simply to follow the scriptures and the primitive church” (*John Wesley’s Prayer Book* iii). Thus, the third criterion whereby worship can be assessed as being authentically Wesleyan is that of continuity with the primitive church. In order to establish this third element as a criterion, I will identify what Wesley was referring to when he spoke of “the primitive church.” I will then identify how continuity with the primitive church may be seen in worship.

**Identity of the Primitive Church.** In one sermon, Wesley sets out to answer the question, “What is Methodism?” (*Works* Bicentennial 3: 585). He identifies Methodism as “the old religion, the religion of the Bible, the religion of the primitive church [emphasis mine], the religion of the Church of England” (585). Wesley goes on to speak of the religion of the primitive church as that of “the whole church in the purest age” (586): “It is clearly expressed even in the small remains of Clemens Romanus, Ignatius, and Polycarp. It is seen more at large in the writings of Tertullian, Origen, Clemens Alexandrinus, and Cyprian. And even in the fourth century it was found in the works of Chrysostom, Basil, Ephrem Syrus,
and Macarius.” (586) Wesley intends Methodism to mirror the religion of these early Christians.

Beyond the biblical time period, Ted A. Campbell identifies the ante-Nicene period as being Wesley’s primary meaning when referring to the primitive church (5). Campbell indicates that early Anglican leaders agreed that the time of the primitive church may have extended into the fourth or fifth centuries (13). Wesley makes reference to the fourth century (Works Bicentennial 3: 586). Nevertheless, when he speaks of the primitive church, Wesley primarily refers to the church in the first three Christian centuries, to which the fourth and fifth centuries may be added. Thus, Wesley says, “And even [emphasis mine] in the fourth century . . .”(586). Such a view is consistent with that of Wesley’s father, Samuel. The latter showed more regard for the first three centuries, but did give his approval to fourth and fifth century works, especially the Nicene formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity (Campbell 25).

Wesley sees a shift in the history of Christianity beginning with the reign of Constantine in the early fourth century. He sees much greater unity and demonstration of purity prior to Constantine (Campbell 47). He frequently recommends “the Ante-Nicene Fathers” or “the writings of the first three centuries” (47): “The esteeming the writings of the first three centuries, not equally with, but next to, the Scriptures, never carried any man yet into dangerous errors, nor probably ever will. But it has brought many out of dangerous errors, and particularly out of the errors of Popery (Wesley, Works 3rd ed. 10: 14). Wesley elsewhere says, “How much more shall I suffer in my usefulness, if I have wasted the opportunities I once had of acquainting myself with the great lights of antiquity, the Ante-Nicene Fathers” (10: 493). Thus, Wesley indicates that the ante-Nicene period is his primary reference when speaking of the primitive church.

**Continuity in Worship.** Wesley understands the Anglican liturgy to be one of the areas in which the Church of England showed great continuity with the apostolic and primitive church (Campbell 97). Concerning the sacraments, Wesley understands the practice of infant, as well as adult baptism to be consistent with the practices of the early church (95). The Eucharist was celebrated daily in the earliest times, and in later times it was celebrated every Sunday (96). Such a view was consistent with Wesley’s insistence upon “The Duty of Constant Communion” (Works Bicentennial 3: 427-39). Wesley, like the church of the East, also understands that the primitive church communed baptized infants (Campbell 96).
Wesley is aware of the yearly feasts observed by the ancient Christians as they celebrated Easter, Pentecost, and Epiphany. Further, he is quick to adopt certain ancient practices for these celebrations. Wesley records, “During the twelve festival days we had the Lord’s Supper daily; a little emblem of the Primitive Church. May we be followers of them in all things, as they were of Christ” (Works Bicentennial 22: 441). Again, he records, “Sun. 30.—Easter Day was a solemn and comfortable day, wherein God was remarkably present with His people. During the Octave I administered the Lord’s Supper every morning, after the example of the Primitive Church” (23: 45-46). Thus, Wesley demonstrates his desire to remain in continuity with the worship practices of the primitive church.

Nevertheless, contemporary liturgical scholarship reveals that some of Wesley’s notions of early Christianity were less than correct. As an example, Campbell cites Wesley’s belief that the “Spiritual Homilies” were actually the work of the fourth-century Egyptian monk Macarius (4). Within his lifetime, Wesley’s beliefs about ordination and episcopacy changed as he gained clearer insights into the practices of the ancient church:

Mon. 20. I set out for Bristol. On the road I read over Lord King’s Account of the Primitive Church. In spite of the vehement prejudice of my education, I was ready to believe that this was a fair and impartial draught. But if so, it would follow that bishops and presbyters are (essentially) of one order. (Works, Bicentennial 20: 112)

As a result of such a change in his understanding of the ancient church, Wesley eventually exercised his presbyterial authority to ordain other presbyters.

Such examples of Wesley changing his position on issues when gaining a more correct understanding of the primitive church sets a precedent for contemporary liturgists as they view the primitive church through the eyes of more recent scholarship. This precedent implies that, where contemporary scholarship reveals aspects of ancient worship practices to which Wesley did not have access, Wesleyan liturgists need not follow Wesley verbatim in the development of liturgical texts in order for their texts to be considered authentically Wesleyan.

I am suggesting that one important way contemporary Wesleyans might adhere to their spiritual forefather’s admonition to follow the worship pattern of the primitive church (John Wesley’s Prayer Book iii) is to adopt the basic, historical fourfold pattern of worship. This pattern understands
Christian worship to center around “Word and Table” (Webber, *Signs* 34). To those two basic acts of worship, the early Christians added the development of acts of entrance and acts of dismissal (37-41). This pattern of gathering for worship around the Word and the Table is seen clearly in the second century in Justin the Martyr’s *The First Apology* (chaps. 61-67). This pattern has been popularized in recent years by Robert Webber (Worship 150). The implementation of this pattern is one way for contemporary Wesleyans to follow the worship pattern of the primitive church.

Among contemporary Wesleyans, this general pattern has been adopted by the United Methodist Church in the *United Methodist Book of Worship* as an attempt to reclaim their biblical and historical heritage (13-15). The fourfold pattern has also gained some attention within the Church of the Nazarene, most notably in David Pendelton’s doctoral dissertation. It highlights “the historical four-fold pattern of worship as a common ground for Christ-centered worship in the Church of the Nazarene” (6). I am suggesting that the fourfold pattern of worship is one important expression of being consistent with the primitive church’s worship practices, and, thus, one important step in being guided by the criteria for authentic Wesleyan worship. My position broadens the possibilities of authentic Wesleyan worship well beyond the exclusive use of the *Book of Common Prayer* or *The Sunday Service*, although the use of those resources would be one possibility for fulfilling the fourfold pattern.

This fourfold pattern naturally leads to the consideration of Wesley’s concept of “The Duty of Constant Communion” (*Works* Bicentennial 3: 427-39). While, perhaps, few Nazarene congregations are likely to implement the practice in the near future, nevertheless the celebration of the Eucharist on a weekly basis should be viewed as the norm. As Nazarene general superintendent Greathouse affirms, “Every Lord’s Day the early Christians celebrated Christ’s atoning sacrifice by eating His body and drinking His blood in the simple faith that He was present with them at the table” (11-12).

Another practice of the early Church of the Nazarene that should be reasserted, over against the strong influence of baptistic baptismal practices, is the practice of infant baptism. The practice of infant baptism is highly consistent with the Wesleyan heritage and with the practice of the early church. Such a position does not speak to the norm of adult baptism for sacramental theology, but to the accepted practice of the early church, as well as those within the Wesleyan tradition.
Finally, worship leaders should seek to recover the great festivals of the church, thereby helping the church to order its life according to the Christian year. Although Wesley omitted most of the “holy-days (so called) . . . as at present answering no valuable end” (John Wesley’s Prayer Book A1) when he revised the prayer book for “those poor sheep in the wilderness” (ii), he did retain references to Advent, Christmas, Easter, Whitsunday (Pentecost), Trinity Sunday, Good Friday, and Ascension Day. I suggest that the observance of these days is scriptural in the sense that they help to proclaim the gospel. Such observances also connect worshippers to the primitive church.

The observance of Easter, Pentecost, and Epiphany developed within the first three centuries of Christianity, the former two having been inherited and adapted from Judaism (White, Brief History 62). Ever since the fourth century, Christians have observed Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Day as the sacred triduum (63). By 336, reference is made to the celebration of what is now called Christmas (64). Thus, ever since the fourth century, Christians have had “a year of two cycles, nativity and paschal, consisting of four seasons: Advent and Christmas, Lent and Easter plus the intervals in between” (65). While not all of these observances fit within the first three Christian centuries, they do fit within Wesley’s extended understanding of the primitive church. Thus, the observance of these feasts/fasts provides one means of fulfilling this criterion of authentic Wesleyan worship.

4. Experience of the Presence and Identity of God

The fourth criterion for worship to be authentically Wesleyan is that of experience. My contention is that, just as Knight identifies the necessity of experiencing the presence and the identity of God through Wesley’s patterning of the means of grace (11), so, too, both elements are vital for authentic Wesleyan worship. Although this criterion is not explicit in the letter accompanying The Sunday Service, it is a synthesis of Wesley’s statements in a variety of places and should be presumed as the backdrop for Wesley’s letter. In order to establish the experience of the presence and the identity of God as a criterion for authentic Wesleyan worship, I will review Knight’s exploration of the presence and the identity of God in the means of grace. I then will apply my findings to the area of Wesleyan worship.

The Presence of God. Knight identifies certain of Wesley’s means of grace that encourage openness to the presence of God. They include
Christian community, works of mercy, extemporaneous prayer, fasting, and the general means of grace (13). The latter include universal obedience, keeping all the commandments, watching, denying oneself, taking up the cross daily, and exercise of the presence of God (5). The worship of Methodist societies leaned heavily in this direction, as has typical, historical Nazarene worship. The danger in leaning too far in this direction without the balance provided by the identity of God is that worshippers will fall into the trap of emotionalism. Worshippers easily become subjective. Nevertheless, this aspect of worship is essential for safeguarding against dead ritualism. It keeps worshippers from having the form of godliness without the power.

Wesley does not discourage that which fosters the presence of God. Indeed, it is essential for the Christian life. What he is concerned about is that, while the Methodist societies fostered the presence of God, they lacked the balance of the identity of God that the worship of the Church of England provided.

**The Identity of God.** The Wesleyan means of grace identified as promoting the identity of God include Scripture, preaching, the Eucharist, and the prayers of the tradition. All of these describe the character and activity of God. They add content to the experience of the presence of God (Knight 13). All of these means of grace are important parts of Christian worship. While the free-churches may not spend as much time using the prayers of the tradition, these prayers are listed here because they function to identify God. Therefore, even if free-church worship does not use these specific prayers, worship leaders can learn from them ways to allow their extemporaneous prayers to promote the identity of God.

The free-church worship tradition, as seen in revivalistic camp meetings, clearly promotes the identity of God far less than it does the presence of God. Free-church worship does focus on preaching, and preaching will most often include at least a brief Scripture text. Nevertheless, when compared to the scope of Scripture used in the prayer-book tradition, free-church worship is shown to be quite lacking.

**Current Worship Trends**

The various elements of Wesley’s approach to worship provide insights into the possible tensions and conflicts found in the current approaches to worship by contemporary Wesleyan Christians. Wesley encountered tensions regarding worship when he was confronted by some
from the Methodist societies who insisted that the society meetings provide sufficient worship for the Methodist people. For those who are currently faced with what is often referred to as the “worship wars,” Wesley’s response may prove helpful:

But some say, “Our own service is public worship.” Yes; but not such as supersedes the Church Service; it presupposes public prayer, like the sermons at the University. If it were designed to be instead of the Church Service, it would be essentially defective; for it seldom has the four grand parts of public prayer, depreciation, petition, intercession, and thanksgiving. (Works 3rd ed. 8:321-22)

Current-day Wesleyans also face tensions and varying opinions concerning worship. A major point of contention concerns worship styles. Many Christians now identify themselves in terms of styles of worship rather than given denominations or traditions. They participate in “contemporary worship,” “traditional worship,” or “blended worship” (Plantigna 2-3). Those who advocate each of these and other styles of worship make up the various camps within what has been called the “worship wars.”

Dramatic changes have taken place in the worship practices of Protestant churches over the last few decades. These changes have served to intensify the debate over worship styles, which has tended to focus on music. Many of these changes have come as an outgrowth of Roman Catholicism’s Vatican II (Plantigna 24-26). The variety of practices has come from four major forces that have been identified as contributing to these changes. They are “the worldwide ecumenical liturgical movement, the charismatic movement, ‘front door evangelism,’ and cultural diversity” (Authentic 14). Each of these forces can have a different impact on the worship practices and perspectives of various congregations. Such impacts may be complementary, but they may just as likely be oppositional. Of these four forces, only the ecumenical liturgical movement is likely to share an internal logic similar to Wesley’s approach to worship.

The ecumenical liturgical movement sought to promote worship patterns derived from examples in the church of the second, third, and fourth centuries. This movement has been influential in recovering the pattern of Word and Table as the norm for Christian corporate worship. In addition, it has influenced the recovery of the Christian year, the development and use of a lectionary, the recovery of the prayer of thanksgiving during the
Eucharistic celebration, and an emphasis on the participation of the con-
gregation (*Authentic* 15-16). The ecumenical liturgical movement has had
great influence within mainline denominations but minimal influence
within the Church of the Nazarene.

The charismatic movement, which has emphasized the lively partici-
pation of the people, times of small group prayer, and services of healing,
has also been instrumental in bringing about the praise and worship
movement. This latter movement has focused on enthusiastic music, par-
ticularly the use of praise choruses and the use of a praise team and/or
band (*Authentic* 16-17). The charismatic emphasis upon spiritual gifts,
especially tongues, has been judged as suspicious by most Nazarenes. As
a denomination born out of the nineteenth-century holiness movement,
the history of the relationship between Nazarenes and Pentecostals has
been difficult. The charismatic movement has been understood by
Nazarenes to be an outgrowth of Pentecostalism. Nevertheless, the enthu-
siastic participation and praise and worship music has been readily
adopted by a number of Nazarene congregations. Enthusiasm was a hall-
mark of the camp meeting tradition, and praise and worship music is seen
by some as a means of recapturing that enthusiasm for a new century.

“Front Door Evangelism” has seen the worship service as a means
of reaching the unchurched (*Authentic* 17). While this concept may be
new to some denominations, it is not new to Nazarenes. What is new is
the use of sociological marketing techniques for reaching the unchurched,
very much a part of American consumer culture. The danger for the
church in using such techniques is that it will allow the desires and prefer-
ces of the consumer to distort the gospel message. In such cases, wor-
ship is no longer about *worshipping* God; rather, the focus of worship has
shifted from God to “the lost.” Spurred on by the church growth move-
ment, the “Front Door Evangelism” movement has been readily and often
uncritically embraced by many Nazarenes.

Cultural diversity has also influenced current worship practices. Just
as society has become more culturally diverse, many denominations have
also become culturally diverse. Language, music, and cultural traditions
have all played a role in enriching the worship of Christians (*Authentic*
18). In addition, society has become less literate and more entertainment
driven. People focus more on feeling and less on truth. These cultural char-
acteristics have all played a role in influencing current worship trends.

Worship practices have been enriched greatly by certain worship
trends within the present-day church. On the other hand, other trends have produced services of worship that are open to the same kinds of criticisms that Wesley expressed in his time. Within this context of the various worship trends and the current “worship wars,” the Wesleyan criteria are offered as a means of traversing the various movements and filtering the various practices in such a way as to provide authentic Christian worship.

**Conclusion**

As pastors and congregations in the Church of the Nazarene and other Wesleyan/Methodist churches continue to struggle with change in the area of worship, having adequate criteria for planning and assessing the worship of God is vital. The Wesleyan criteria can thoroughly fill the gap. The Wesleyan criteria transcend various styles of worship while promoting Christian worship that is scriptural, rational, in continuity with the Primitive Church, and that fosters the experience of the presence and the identity of God.

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A NEW TRAJECTORY IN WESLEYAN PNEUMATOLOGY: “PERCEPTIBLE INSPIRATION” RECONSIDERED

by

Joseph W. Cunningham

John Wesley was the subject of much scrutiny throughout the eighteenth century in Britain. He believed that the Holy Spirit provided an inward testimony of divine fellowship to human beings. He was convinced that personal experience of the Spirit was an indication of God’s communicative nature—that the Father of all spirits, who drew near to men and women of faith, was intimately knowable. To experience inspiration, held Wesley, was to sense the testimony of God’s Spirit within the soul.

Although the witness of the Spirit is a hallmark of Methodist spirituality, in recent years few scholars have considered its theological significance. A likely reason has to do with the shape of modern theology, its methodological fascination with systematics, and its tendency to harbor suspicion for any view that challenges the inherently rational nature of ontological being.

This also was the case in Wesley’s day. For example, two among many ardent critics labeled him a “hair-brained enthusiast” much “overheated” with false spiritual imagination.¹ Supposing that God in Spirit testified personally to human beings was to conflate the natural with super-nature, to posit a rupture of the orderly cosmos, a divine punctua-

¹See J. Wesley, “A Letter to the Reverend Mr. Baily of Cork,” in Works [BE], 9:304. See also Thomas Church, Some Farther Remarks on the Rev. Mr. John Wesley’s last Journal (1746), 64.
tion of the mundane. And this simply would not do in a post-medieval context, wherein, as Hume might well have put it, the miraculous was dismissible as simplistic and uninformed.

But the world and its philosophers have changed. The empiricist and rationalist camps no longer carry the clout they once held and, thanks to Wittgenstein and Foucault, late modernity and its inlaid structuralism has also become passé. Nevertheless, despite this turn, the modern philosophical predilection (that all knowledge must be grounded in some unquestionable epistemological edifice) has lingered. And it still informs the way that many approach theology. The time has come for Methodism to change.

The purpose of this essay, first and foremost, is to reconsider Wesley’s theology of the witness of the Spirit, and its reciprocal function between the human and divine. Perceptible inspiration provides a new trajectory for engaging in Methodist theology, especially when framed by post-foundationalist theological thought. As we have already noted, Wesley was severely criticized in context for his emphasis upon the Holy Spirit’s operation within human beings. He brooked much for his belief in “perceptible inspiration,” or the idea that humans could experience, by faith, the witness of the Holy Spirit, and subsequently germinate the fruits of holy living. The major criticism, as pseudonymous adversary John Smith put it, was the lack of concrete proof. However, as the present study seeks to demonstrate, Wesley’s theology has a useful ally.

How did Wesley define the witness or testimony of the Spirit? What was its practical function within the human person? By answering these questions, we will show that personal apprehension of the witness of the Spirit was not founded upon reason, but inward experience, which practically culminated in love of God and neighbour. Wesley’s emphasis on the witness of the Spirit, as such, is not a problematic sidebar of Methodist thought. On the contrary, when paired with post-foundationalist thought, it becomes a useful resource—a new trajectory—for evangelicals responding to neo-enlightenment challenges to religious experience.

**Testimonies of the Spirit: The Spiritual-Known**

How did Wesley define inspiration? In his view, the joint testimony marked a pivotal moment in the life of a believer—namely, the point at which one became conscious of the Spirit’s presence in his or her life.

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The experience itself occurred in dialectical fashion—that is, God’s Holy Spirit witnessed directly to the believer, and subsequently, he or she responded to God’s initial testimony. As Wesley put it, “there is in every believer both the testimony of God’s Spirit, and the testimony of his own, that he is a child of God.”3 The former he referred to as the “direct witness” of the Spirit, and the latter the “indirect witness” of our own spirit.

Collectively, the dual testimony formed a lasting imprint on the soul of the spiritual-born. It signified arousal from spiritual slumber to personal awareness of filial relationship with God. As Wesley put it, “the testimony of the Spirit is an inward impression on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God directly ‘witnesses to my spirit that I am a child of God’; that Jesus Christ hath loved me, and given himself for me; that all my sins are blotted out, and I, even I, am reconciled to God.”4

The direct witness of the Holy Spirit was God’s mode of conveying the personal dimension of His love to human beings, which we experienced by the faculty of faith. In turn, the indirect witness was marked by our spirit’s acknowledgment of God’s love—a physical awareness, which gave birth to practical holiness. As Wesley expressed it, “we must love God before we can be holy at all—this being the root of all holiness. Now we cannot love God [until] we know he loves us, and we cannot know his pardoning love to us [until] his Spirit witnesses it to our spirit.”5 The direct testimony was always experienced or perceived first; and consequently, believers responded with the witness of their own spirit—a conscious love for God, and an earnest desire to work holiness. While distinct in kind, the direct testimony was nevertheless conjoined to the indirect witness within the economy of salvation: “Not as standing alone, not as a single witness, but as connected with the other; as giving a joint testimony, testifying with our spirit that we are children of God.”6

**The Direct Witness of God’s Spirit, Perceived by Faith.** In Wesley’s theology, the direct witness of the Holy Spirit transcended propositional knowledge; it was sensed spiritually, through the eyes of our divine faculty. “It is by faith . . . beholding ‘that light of . . . the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ’ we perceive, as in a glass, all that is in ourselves,

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yea, the inmost motions of our souls. And by this alone can that blessed love of God be ‘shed abroad in our hearts’, which enables us so to love one another as Christ loved us.”

By faith, the love of God’s Spirit illumined the human soul with desire for God and charity for neighbour. How did the faculty of faith mediate perception of the divine witness? That is, if the direct testimony was tantamount to intimate participation in the life of the divine, then what shape, if any, did such an experience take in the economy of salvation? In what sense did believers attain “inward” spiritual knowledge via faith? When pressed upon the issue, Wesley tended to emphasize our experience of the event, rather than God’s divine operation. Acknowledging the ineffability of the Holy Spirit’s work (in se), Wesley described the testimony of God’s Spirit in terms of its effects within the human agent. In this respect, inward feeling and spiritual fruit comprised the evidence of direct inspiration.

Wesley described the believer’s inward experience of the direct witness of the Spirit as a kind of warmth or overwhelming torrent of personal devotion: “I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”

Furthermore, in his Answer to Mr. Church’s Remarks (1745), Wesley claimed: “Do you reject ‘inward feelings’ toto genere? Then you reject both the love of God and of our neighbor. For if these cannot be inwardly felt, nothing can.”

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8J. Wesley, “Journals & Diaries II (1738-1743),” Works [BE], 18:250. See also J. Wesley, “Predestination Calmly Considered,” in Works, 10:204. “I am inclined to believe, that many of those who enjoy the ‘faith which worketh by love,’ may remember some time when the power of the Highest wrought upon them in an eminent manner; when the voice of the Lord laid the mountains low, brake all the rocks in pieces, and mightily shed abroad his live in their hearts, by the Holy Ghost given unto them. And at that time it is certain they had not power to resist the grace of God. They were then no more able to stop the course of that torrent which carried all before it, than to stem the waves of the sea with their hand, or to stay the sun in the midst of heaven.”
9J. Wesley, “An Answer to the Rev. Mr. Church’s Remarks,” in Works [BE], 9:116. See also Wesley’s “Letter to the Reverend Mr. Downes,” in Works [BE], 9:360. “We... allow that outward actions are one way of satisfying us that we have grace in our hearts. But we cannot possibly allow that ‘the only way to be satisfied of this is to appeal to our outward actions, and not our inward feelings.’ On the contrary, we believe that love, joy, [and] peace are inwardly felt, or they have no being; and that men are satisfied they have grace, first by feeling these, and afterward by their outward actions.”

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It is clear that John Wesley considered inward feeling a primary indication of one’s spiritual awareness of God’s direct testimony. As he explained to the Rev. Dr. Rutherforth in 1768: “with respect to ‘inward feelings,’ whoever denies them . . . must deny all the life and power of religion, and leave nothing but a dead, empty form. For take away the love of God and our neighbor, the peace of God, and the joy in the Holy Ghost, or (which comes to the same) deny that they are felt, and what remains but a poor, lifeless shadow?”

However, Wesley also espoused the notion that inward feeling could discover spiritual disconnection. In other words, just as the effects of the Spirit’s operation could be known via intense personal devotion, the opposite could be felt through spiritual lethargy.

In his journal, Wesley recounted the experience of one such person (whose name was not recorded) who knew, by inward feeling, his lack of communion with the Spirit: “[A] Christian is one who has the fruits of the Spirit of Christ, which (to mention no more) are love, peace, and joy. But these I have not. I have not any love of God. I do not love either the Father or the Son. . . . How do I know whether I love God [?] . . . I feel this moment I do not love God; which therefore I know, because I feel it . . . I have not the fruits of the Spirit of Christ.” Since love, peace, and joy were no longer sensed, the Spirit of Christ (seemingly) ceased to be present. Given that his or her desire for God was no longer felt to enlighten the heart, he or she could no longer bear the label Christian.

Correlatively, this account echoed Wesley’s own experience on board the Samuel. En route from Georgia to England in 1738 after what seemed a failed missionary attempt, Wesley confessed to “having no such faith in Christ as will prevent my heart from being troubled; which it could not be if I believed in God, and rightly believed in him.”

Similar to the anonymous testimony above, Wesley too was convinced of his lack of spiritual intimacy by “the most infallible of proofs, inward feeling.”

Despite such emphases, Wesley also acknowledged the possibility of misguided feeling. Indeed, Thomas Maxfield and George Bell, who stirred up controversy during the 1760s, helped to solidify this dis-

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10 J. Wesley, “A Letter to the Reverend Dr. Rutherforth,” in Works [BE], 9:387. Thomas Rutherforth (1712-1771) was a man of high academic standing. In 1745, he was named Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge; and at the same time, he accepted his doctorate from said University. Later, he published Four Charges to the Clergy of the Archdeaconry of Essex (1763), which treated, among other things, the Methodist teachings on “inward feelings” and “assurances.”


tinction. According to John Tyson, the repercussions of the Maxfield/Bell controversy were massive. They shook the London society to its core, and made the Wesleys look like religious lunatics. “Their extravagant claims and experiential elitism quickly divided the Methodist Society, and soon gained a broader attention. The dispute was a public relations fiasco, occurring at just the time when Methodism had begun to clear itself of charges of ‘enthusiasm’ and ‘fanaticism.’” This served to reinforce Wesley’s conviction that inward feeling had always to be checked by the outward fruits of the Spirit germinated. Without the latter, all pretenses to direct inspiration should be treated with caution.

Again heeding the words of his mother, he claimed that inward feeling alone could not validate, at least for outside observers, one’s perception of God’s direct testimony. Internally, it served the believer as an important means of qualifying spiritual awareness; externally, it had to be accompanied by Christian practice. As such, as early as 1739, Wesley issued the following caveat to his ministerial cohorts:

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God. I told them they were not to judge of the Spirit whereby anyone spoke, either by appearances, or by common report, or by their own inward feelings... I warned them all these were in themselves of a doubtful, disputable nature: they might be from God and they might not, and were therefore... to be tried by... “the law and the testimony.”

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14 For a detailed overview and analysis of the controversy, see Henry Rack, Reasonable Enthusiast, 334-342.
16 J. Wesley, “Letters I,” Works [BE], 25:385. A early as 1734, Susanna urged him that “you must not judge of your interior state by your not feeling great fervours of spirit and extraordinary agitations, as plentiful weepings, etc., but rather by the firm adherence of your will to God.”
17 Cf., 1 John 4:1.
18 J. Wesley, “Journals & Diaries II,” Works [BE], 19:73. Wesley would repeat these sentiments to James Hutton and the Fetter Lane Society on July 2, 1739 (J. Wesley, “Letters I,” Works [BE], 25:664), and also to Bishop of Exeter, George Lavington in “A Letter to the Author of the Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists Compar’d,” in Works [BE], 11:373-374. See also J. Wesley, “The Witness of the Spirit—Discourse II,” Works [BE], 1:295. “[Let] every man who believes he ‘hath the witness in himself’ try whether it be of God. If the fruit follow, it is; otherwise, it is not. For certainly ‘the tree is known by its fruit.’ Hereby we prove if it be of God.”
In order to distinguish the marks of the Spirit’s testimony from “the presumption of a natural mind,” one needed to rely upon the Bible for guidance.19 “Trying the spirits,” according to Wesley, was a method of distinguishing between true and false inspiration. “[The] scriptures lay down those clear, obvious marks as preceding, accompanying, and following that gift.”20 Wesley urged his fellow ministers, given the possibility of false inspiration,21 “[not] to believe every spirit, but to try the spirits whether they were of God.”22 His criteria for doing so went as follows. Those who felt God’s indwelling presence, and who consequently bore the fruits of outward holiness, truly experienced the love of God shed abroad in their hearts. However, those who claimed perception of the Spirit, but whose fruit was uncharitable, should be treated with skepticism. For Wesley, the Spirit’s ministry to “our own” took shape as we embodied the principles of Scripture, especially those pertaining to holy living. Indeed, unless inward feeling was paired with outward peace, joy, righteousness, and love, “the spirits” tested were false. As Wesley stated it: “Love rejoices to obey, to do in every point whatever is acceptable to the Beloved. A true lover of God hastens to do his will on earth as it is done in heaven. But is this the character of the presumptuous pretender to the love of God?”23

The true mark of inspiration, underscored by the Scriptural witness, was outward holiness toward every “child of man.”

Hereby you shall know that you are in no delusion; that you have not deceived your own soul. The immediate fruits of the Spirit ruling in the heart are “love, joy, peace”; bowels of mercies humbleness of mind, meekness, gentleness, long-suffering. And the outward fruits are the doing good to all men, the

19At the heart of Wesley’s hermeneutics was the “analogy of faith”—the core theological doctrines of original sin, justification by faith, and Christian perfection. These functioned as Wesley’s interpretive lens for reading the Bible. For a detailed analysis of Wesley’s understanding and use of Scripture, see Scott J. Jones, John Wesley’s Conception and Use of Scripture (Nashville, Tennessee: Kingswood Books, 1995).


21See J. Wesley, “The Witness of the Spirit—Discourse I,” in Works [BE], 1:269. “How many have mistaken the voice of their own imagination for this witness of the Spirit of God, and thence idly presumed they were the children of God while they were doing the works of the devil!”


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doing no evil to any, and the walking in light—a zealous, uniform obedience to all the commands of God.\textsuperscript{24}

The direct witness of God’s Spirit to believers was evinced in love, holiness, and zealous, uniform obedience to God’s moral commands. Collectively, these were the abiding evidence of a heart re-wrought through direct experience of the Spirit’s inspiration. Indeed, just as one cannot serve two masters, true inspirants could not both perceive the indwelling Holy Spirit and subvert God’s call to righteousness. The direct witness was empirically demonstrable insofar as the spiritual fruits were habituated into the life of piety. Inward and outward holiness went hand in hand. Without external expression, so-called inspiration was false.

For Wesley, then, spiritual apprehension of the direct witness was outwardly demonstrated when faithful believers actuated the first and greatest commandment of all: to love God with one’s entire spiritual being, and to love one’s neighbour as one’s self. As such, inward feeling—when properly ordered as desire for God and love of neighbour—was the economic gift of the Spirit to humankind and the ground of our assurance in Christ. Wesley also referred to this as zeal, which, in his thinking, was always connected to saving faith: “By zeal I mean the flame of love, or fervent love to God and man; by faith, the substance or confidence of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Is this the zeal and faith of a fanatic? Then St. Paul was the greatest fanatic on earth.”\textsuperscript{25}

Faith perceiving inspiration functioned as inward affection for God, paired with the outward fruits of holy living. “[It] is the life of the soul: and if ye have this life abiding in you, ye want no marks to evidence it to yourself, but that…divine consciousness, that ‘witness of God’”\textsuperscript{26} Human agents discerned the direct testimony of the Spirit when the light of grace, the power of God, and the peace of Christ shone in upon the soul, refracting obedience and self-sacrifice. The Spirit’s witness was perceived when one’s experience of God yielded the fruits of sanctification. Direct inspiration was known by faith, insofar as the personal feeling of intense love for God (or zeal) was coupled with charity for neighbour. This, to Wesley, underlay the very foundation of faithfully experiencing the direct witness

\textsuperscript{26}Charles Wesley, “Awake, Thou That Sleepest,” in \textit{Works [BE]}, 1:146.
of God’s Holy Spirit: that “I shall love the Lord my God with all my heart, and with all my soul, and with all my mind, and with all my strength,” and that “I shall love my neighbour as myself.”

The Witness of “My Own” spirit, Perceived through Natural Faculties. What distinguished the direct testimony of the Holy Spirit from the indirect in Wesley’s pneumatology? Though the two testimonies were inextricably bound, each had unique characteristics. On the one hand, as the previous section has shown, the direct witness of the Holy Spirit was perceived by faith. It was tantamount in Wesley’s thinking to participation in the life of God through direct spiritual awareness (fides qua). The testimony of God’s Spirit was economically expressed as the feeling of love spread wide across the soul, along with the practical fruits of peace, joy, and love.

On the other hand, the witness of our own spirit was the result of our natural faculties reflecting back upon spiritual experience. This occurred as believers self-differentiated, or became physically conscious of spiritual knowledge. As Wesley explained it, “[yet] all this is no other than rational evidence: the ‘witness of our [own] spirit’ or reason or understanding. It all resolves into this: those who have these marks, they are the children of God. But we have these marks: therefore we are children of God.”

The testimony of our own spirit was the effect of physical consciousness applied to spiritual sensation. “It is plain, God begins his work at the heart; then ‘the inspiration of the highest giveth understanding.’” According to Wes-

27 See Mark 12:30-31.

28 “And as we perceive these outward Objects, so we know that we do perceive them. The mind can look inward upon itself, and reflect upon its own Perceptions.” See J. Wesley, *A Survey of the Wisdom of God in the Creation: or a Compendium of Natural Philosophy*, Vol. 1 of 2 (Bristol, 1763), 91.


30 J. Wesley, “Journals and Diaries III, 1743-1754,” in *Works [BE]*, 20. Italics mine. Wesley’s distinction between the direct and indirect witness of the Spirit—that God’s inspiration was first inwardly felt by faith, then apprehended through the conscious medium of understanding—was questioned by William Warburton in *The Doctrine of Grace: or, the Office and Operations of the Holy Spirit Vindicated from the Insults of Infidelity, and the Abuses of Fanaticism…* (London, 1763), 162-163. Responding directly to the quote excerpted above, Warburton claimed, contrarily, that “God began with the understanding; and rational conviction won the heart.” His critique of Wesley’s theology confirms the tenets of Wesley’s position as presented here.

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ley’s theology, the direct witness of God’s Spirit was experienced by way of faith, while the witness of our own spirit occurred as we became cognizant of God’s transformative operation, and reflected back upon it as such.

The “witness of our own spirit” was one of immediate consciousness, which, in Wesley’s pneumatology, was distinguishable from divine perception. The latter was experienced as direct spiritual participation in cooperation with inward feeling, which transcended rational propositions. The former, however, occurred as humans utilized their natural understanding to grasp the significance of their religious experience. In other words, consciousness—vis-à-vis the indirect witness—entailed cognizance about “having felt” the love of God shed abroad in the soul, while divine awareness, direct spiritual communion itself. Thus, the witness of our own spirit was perceived as natural reflection turned toward “the marks” of the Spirit’s testimony, authenticating peace, joy, and love already experienced by faith in the human soul.

Regarding “immediate consciousness,” Wesley explained, “you will know if your soul is alive to God; if you are saved from the pain of proud wrath, and have the ease of a meek and quiet spirit.”31 As a synonym for the ongoing process of simple apprehension, judgment, and discourse, Wesley delineated consciousness in the following theological terms:

God has made us thinking beings, capable of perceiving what is present, and of reflecting or looking back on what is past. In particular we are capable of perceiving whatsoever passes in our own hearts or lives; of knowing whatsoever we feel or do; and that either while it passes, or when it is past. This we mean when we say man is a “conscious” being: he hath a “consciousness” or inward perception both of things present and past relating to himself, of his own tempers and outward behavior.32

Consciousness was a process of inward reflection upon past and present experiences. It was the means whereby human agents understood what passed in their own hearts and lives. In terms of the indirect witness of the Spirit, consciousness allowed for rational discourse upon the experiences of faith.

While it might seem like logic chopping, to Wesley the dual testimony was theologically necessary. In order for the love of God shed

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abroad in our hearts (which was spiritually sensed by faith) to be rationally appropriated, our spirits needed, in turn, the confidence or assurance of being named children of God: “you cannot but perceive [it] if you love, rejoice, and delight in God. By the same you must be directly assured if you love your neighbor as yourself; if you are kindly affectioned to all mankind, and full of gentleness and longsuffering.” The indirect witness was an immediate response to the direct witness, through which, according to Wesley, “you undoubtedly know in your own breast if, by the grace of God, it belongs to you.” It was, so to speak, a consciousness of spiritual consciousness—a clear, personal understanding that the gift of faith had indeed been received, and that the believer had begun to actuate holiness.

It is a consciousness of our having received, in and by the Spirit of adoption, the tempers mentioned in the Word of God as belonging to his adopted children; even a loving heart toward God and toward all mankind, hanging with childlike confidence on God our Father, desiring nothing but him, casting all our care upon him, and embracing every child of man with earnest, tender affection, so as to be ready to lay down our life for our brother, as Christ laid down his life for us. . . .

The testimony of our own spirit occurred as we became aware of having been changed by God. An assurance that God had re-formed the heart through the operation of the Spirit, the witness of our own spirit acknowledged becoming children of the Father of all beings. It was, as Wesley explained, an outward “consciousness that we are inwardly conformed by the Spirit of God to the image of his Son, and that we walk before him in justice, mercy, and truth; doing the things which are pleasing in his sight.” By immediate consciousness, believers rationally grasped the experience of direct inspiration.

According to Wesley, conscience and the witness of our own spirit were also fundamentally conjoined. “This [indirect testimony] is nearly, if not exactly, the same with ‘the testimony of a good conscience toward God,’ and is the result of reason or reflection on what we feel in our own souls.” Conscience was the moral dimension of consciousness, and nec-

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ecessary for rational understanding of faith’s direct spiritual perception of God’s operation.

Conscience was an important corollary of reason. It comprised that part of our natural understanding capable of discerning between right and wrong. Facilitated by the Spirit’s gracious prevenience, it enabled men and women to distinguish goodness from evil. Wesley described it as “a faculty or power, implanted by God in every soul that comes into the world, of perceiving what is right or wrong in his own heart or life, in his tempers, thoughts, words, and actions”; and whose “main business is to excuse or accuse, to approve or disapprove, to acquit or condemn.”

Conscience, while subsisting distinctly in each person, was not morally subjective. According to Wesley, it had a definitive guide, namely, “the Word of God, the writings of the Old and New Testament.” To function properly, conscience must be shaped by the objectivity of God’s goodness as revealed in Scripture. The biblical testimony was the final, incontrovertible rule of righteousness (the norma normans) with which our moral sense must align. Conscience, when properly ordered, could never discern a “good” that contradicted the biblical witness. To Wesley, the Scriptures already contained the fullness of revealed truth.

As Richard Baxter put it, “[we] must not try the Scriptures by our most spiritual apprehensions, but our apprehensions by the Scriptures.” Wesley undoubtedly agreed, stating: “This alone he receives as his rule of right or wrong, of whatever is really good or evil.” Having a right testimony “void of offence” meant actuating the teachings of Scripture.

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39 J. Wesley, “The Witness of our own Spirit,” in Works [BE], 1:302-303. Insofar as non-believers adhered to the dictates of their conscience, they exuded some measure of divine light. However, full illumination could not occur until conscience was wedded to Scripture, the final word on moral practice in Wesley’s thought.
43 To be sure, such demanded that one be well-versed in the biblical witness. As Wesley put it, “it is impossible we should walk by a rule if we do not know what it means.” J. Wesley, “The Witness of our own Spirit,” in Works [BE], 1:304.
order for our spirit to resire its apprehension of the direct testimony of God’s Holy Spirit, to make natural sense of all that passed through our spiritual faculty, conscience had to be formed by the ultimate moral norm, the teachings of God contained in the Bible. Unless contoured by the analogy of faith (the salvific core of the biblical message), conscience would be unable to acknowledge spiritual experience as Christian.

In terms of its practical function within the human person, Wesley elucidated conscience in a threefold manner. First, it was an internal witness to personal behaviour; second, a judgment concerning the moral value of our actions; and third, an execution which elicited a particular sense of guilt or satisfaction depending upon the outcome. Conscience functioned as such when our Scripture-based ethical awareness was applied to and informed by personal experience. This required “a true knowledge of ourselves; a knowledge both of our hearts and lives, of our inward tempers and outward conversation, of our thoughts and words and works with that rule, with the written word of God.” Here, the connection between conscience and consciousness became pivotal: in order for human beings to abide by the dictates of the former, we must be actively engaged in matching our words, thoughts, and deeds with biblical principles. Men and women must be cognizant of their behavior and its imitation (or distortion) of the law and testimony.

When the threefold property of conscience, as moral framework, process of introspection, and authentication of experience was applied to direct spiritual knowledge, it functioned as the witness of our own spirit.

Strictly speaking, it [conscience/the indirect witness] is a conclusion drawn partly from the Word of God, and partly from our own experience. The Word of God says everyone who has the fruit of the Spirit is a child of God. Experience, or inward consciousness, tells me that I have the fruit of the Spirit. And hence I rationally conclude: therefore I am a child of God.

When by conscience believers sensed the marks of the Spirit in their actions (as allied with the Scriptures), then their spirits began to exude assurance of God’s love. As we perceived, introspectively, the pattern of righteousness embodied in the figure of Christ, our spirit testified to the

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work of God in our souls. In doing so, participants in the divine life became spiritually as well as physically aware of God’s restorative operation, or what Wesley called the indirect testimony. Immediate consciousness via conscience was our rational medium for apprehending spiritual experience. In this, the witness of our own spirit, which confirmed the direct testimony of God’s Spirit, found expression.

In summary, the direct witness of the Spirit (perceived by faith), along with the witness of our own spirit (or natural understanding reflecting upon divine participation), together formed the basis of Wesley’s theology of inspiration perceived. Inward feeling, when paired with the fruits of the Spirit, reflected our direct, spiritual knowledge of the divine testimony. And subsequently, when humans became immediately conscious of having felt the love of God and neighbour shed abroad in their souls—basing their sentiments upon the threefold nature of conscience (i.e., adherence to the dictates of Scripture, the process of self-introspection, and the authentication of experience)—the witness of our own spirit respired filial confidence. As Theodore Runyon expressed it, inward feeling “was [Wesley’s] designation for the sensations mediated by the spiritual senses to the ‘heart,’ the center of the psychosomatic unity of the person”—an inward consciousness of “the heart but to the reason as well.” Indeed, the Spirit’s work was dialectical, connecting human consciousness with spiritual awareness by the pneumatological gift of faith.

Wesley, in his sermon on “The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God,” likened the testimony of God’s Spirit with ours to spiritual inhaling and exhaling. It was “God’s breathing into the soul, and the soul’s breathing back what it first receives from God; a continual action of God upon the soul, the re-action of the soul upon God; an unceasing presence of God, the loving, pardoning God, manifested to the heart, and perceived by faith.” As such, the dual witness of the Spirit reflected God’s mode of activity within the economy of salvation, which fostered and facilitated our participation in the divine life.


49J. Wesley, “The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God,” in Works [BE], 1:442.
Perceptible Inspiration and Post-foundationalism

Having analyzed Wesley’s understanding of inspiration, or the witness of the Holy Spirit, we can now turn attention to its parallels with contemporary post-foundationalist thought. In historical terms, Wesley’s spiritual emphasis gave rise to the charge of “enthusiasm,” which many of his contemporaries leveled against him. Indeed, this critique attached a stigma to his pneumatology, of which he himself was thoroughly aware: “[to] men of reason you will give offence by talking of inspiration and receiving the Holy Ghost.” Wesley’s observation was validated by his exchange with John Smith, who reflected a variant of what has since been termed “foundationalism”—a characteristic of certain strands within the milieu of early-modern thought.

The “foundationalist” approach was a significant factor shaping Wesley’s philosophical background and context. Descartes’ methodology (cogito), which he arrived at by the inner light of reason, understood clear and distinct perception of the mind to be the foundation of all knowledge and the indubitable basis of all other beliefs. The Empiricists (i.e., Locke, Berkeley, and Reid) were also widely influential, founding knowl-

50 J. Wesley, “Advice to the People Called Methodists,” in Works [BE], 9:127.
51 Wesley was not concerned to correlate his understanding of the dual witness perceived by faith and immediate consciousness to Smith’s understanding of knowledge. Indeed, the two parted ways in this respect. Wesley’s theology of spiritual knowledge was nearer a medieval theory of participation—as Stephen Long suggested in John Wesley’s Moral Theology: The Quest for God and Goodness (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2005), 13—than the empiricist or rationalist approaches adopted by many of his contemporaries. This earned him the label of “reasonable enthusiast” by Henry Rack.
52 See Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context (Louisville: Westminster Press, 2001), 30. “At the heart of the foundationalist agenda is the desire to overcome uncertainty generated by our human liability to error and the inevitable disagreements that follow. Foundationalists are convinced that the only way to solve this problem is to find some means of grounding the entire edifice of human knowledge on invincible certainty.”
53 See René Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy, trans. Michael Moriarty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 25. “I am certain that I am a thinking thing. . . . And therefore I seem already to be able to lay down, as a general rule, that everything I very clearly and distinctly perceive is true.”
edge on the faculty of sensation. From their collective perspective, warranted ideas were based on sense experience.⁵⁴

Later synthesizing these two strains of thought, Immanuel Kant espoused the notion that knowledge occurred as the senses mediated data to the mind, which was pre-figured to apprehend them. Since categories like colour, shape, and size were not empirical, they existed transcendently in relation to our epistemic capacity, functioning co-operantly with the senses, and enabling the formation of ideas.⁵⁵ To Kant, unless belief was “founded” on rational certainty, it lacked warrant. All of the above (the Cartesian, Empiricist, and Kantian approaches), although assuming distinctive epistemological priorities, based knowledge on “a set of unquestioned beliefs or certain first principles” which were “supposedly context-free and available . . . to any rational person.”⁵⁶

To be sure, foundationalism still holds weight prima facie; and when juxtaposed with Wesley’s pneumatology, his approach seems insufficient. The direct testimony of the Spirit, given its pretense to supernatural participation in the life of God, ostensibly falls short of warrant because it appears to contradict a more properly basic foundationalist truth: *viz.*., that nothing exists in the mind not first apprehended by the senses, save perhaps for the categories required to discern natural truths of reason. Wesley’s emphasis upon faith as spiritual sensation flouted this axiom, and earned him the title of “enthusiast” by many of his contemporaries.

Does their theological critique still stand strong? In other words, must all rational people accept “reason” as an immutable, epistemic category universally binding on all human agents, or can rational commitments be founded upon underlying relational experiences as well? Cannot inward feeling at times be even more basic than intellection in certain cases?

⁵⁴See Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, second ed. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 556. “Locke may be regarded as the founder of empiricism, which is the doctrine that all our knowledge (with the possible exception of logic and mathematics) is derived from experience.”

⁵⁵See Roger Scruton, *A Short History of Modern Philosophy: From Descartes to Wittgenstein*, second ed. (New York: Routledge, 2001), 139. “It was Kant’s principal contribution to show that the choice between empiricism and rationalism is unreal, that each philosophy is equally mistaken, and that the only conceivable metaphysics that could commend itself to a reasonable being must be both empiricist and rationalist at once.”

In response to the foundationalist trend associated with certain strains of early-modern thought characteristic of Wesley’s philosophical context, “post-foundationalism” criticizes any epistemological strategy that presupposes the priority and unquestionable ubiquity of some pure, unadulterated, and self-sufficient reason on all “rational beings.”\footnote{Grenz and Franke explain that among its many facets, the two most significant are “coherentism” and “pragmatism.” The coherentist approach maintains “that the justification for a belief lies in its ‘fit’ with other held beliefs,” which “must form and integrative whole, and this whole must have ‘explanatory power.’” On the other hand, the pragmatist approach advocates “the truth of any belief ought to be measured according to the belief’s success in advancing ‘factual inquiry,’” or “. . . by the way [beliefs] function in the context of responsible enquiry.” See Beyond Foundationalism, 38-41.} To be sure, this shift in thinking fits well with Wesley’s pneumatology. We have already seen that for Wesley, reason (as simple apprehension, judgment, and discourse) was not the foundation of spiritual knowledge. Though an important part of what mediated the believer’s consciousness of pardon (through assurance and the indirect witness of the Spirit), one’s rational capabilities were unable to yield knowledge of the divine at work in the soul. Knowing God meant experiencing the Holy Spirit’s inspiration by the gift of faith, which became our faculty for participating in God’s life, occurring in relation to inward feeling.

In this respect, Wesley’s theology of faith and the dual witness seem to resonate with certain elements of post-foundationalist philosophy, especially Alvin Plantinga’s work in contemporary religious epistemology.\footnote{For a comparison of Wesley’s view and Plantinga’s approach, along with an analysis of the contributions made by contemporary scholars on the question, see Scott Crothers and Joe Cunningham, “Wesley’s Epistemology in Contemporary Perspective,” in Via Media Philosophy—Holiness Unto Truth: Intersections between Wesleyan and Roman Catholic Voices, L. Bryan Williams, ed. (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 171-185.} Responding to the challenge of spiritual perception, Plantinga states, “I have no doubt that perception of God or something very much like it does occur, and occur rather widely.”\footnote{Alvin Plantinga, Warranted Christian Belief (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 182.} Drawing on the work of William Alston,\footnote{See William Alston, Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1991).} he continues:

[If] there is such a person as God, there could certainly be perception of him, and indeed is perception of him. Alston’s pow-

\footnotetext[57]{Grenz and Franke explain that among its many facets, the two most significant are “coherentism” and “pragmatism.” The coherentist approach maintains “that the justification for a belief lies in its ‘fit’ with other held beliefs,” which “must form and integrative whole, and this whole must have ‘explanatory power.’” On the other hand, the pragmatist approach advocates “the truth of any belief ought to be measured according to the belief’s success in advancing ‘factual inquiry,’” or “. . . by the way [beliefs] function in the context of responsible enquiry.” See Beyond Foundationalism, 38-41.}

\footnotetext[58]{For a comparison of Wesley’s view and Plantinga’s approach, along with an analysis of the contributions made by contemporary scholars on the question, see Scott Crothers and Joe Cunningham, “Wesley’s Epistemology in Contemporary Perspective,” in Via Media Philosophy—Holiness Unto Truth: Intersections between Wesleyan and Roman Catholic Voices, L. Bryan Williams, ed. (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 171-185.}

\footnotetext[59]{Alvin Plantinga, Warranted Christian Belief (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 182.}

ful discussion shows that the usual objections to perception of God (no independent way of checking, disagreement as to what God is like, differences from sense perception, apparent relativity to the theological beliefs of the alleged perceiver, and so on) have very little to be said for them.61

The objections advanced by Wesley’s opponents were tantamount to those outlined above, which, according to Plantinga, have “very little to be said for them.”62 John Smith asserted that, since Wesley could produce no “infallible” proof of his claims to the Spirit’s dual witness, then he was either Quaker or enthusiastic. Furthermore, many of Wesley’s critics63 derided the Methodist emphasis on spiritual knowledge, suggesting that, if God really inspired believers, it ought to happen universally, and not just to those who already assented to the notion. To Plantinga, however, such claims have little steel in a post-foundationalist context, where “rationality,” “sensation,” nor any synthesis of the two can serve as the universally binding foundation of knowledge. Based upon Plantinga’s argument, Wesley’s theology of the dual witness is reasonable.

How does Plantinga understand “perception” in post-foundationalist terms? He defines it as anything involving “sensuous imagery,”64 and which fosters in the human person an awareness of some thing or event. Thus, while our perception of God does not occur in the same capacity that we perceive, say, the scent of a flower in full bloom, still, our spiritual sense faculty (of faith) functions “analogically” with respect to physical phenomena. At times, it can also be experienced as “a brooding presence.” Plantinga explains it in the following terms.

To the believer, the presence of God is often palpable. A surprising number of people often report that at one time or another, they feel the presence of God, or at any rate it seems to them that they feel the presence of God—where the “feeling” also doesn’t go by way of sensuous imagery. Many others . . . report hearing God speak to them. And among these cases, cases where it seems right or nearly right to speak of perceiv-

64 Alvin Plantinga, Warranted Christian Belief, 181.
ing God (feeling his presence, perhaps hearing his voice), there is great variation. There are shattering, overwhelming sorts of experiences had by Paul (then “Saul”) on the road to Damascus and reported by mystics and other master’s of interior life. In these cases there may be vivid sensuous imagery of more than one kind. Still, there is also a sort of awareness of God where it seems right to say one feels his presence, but where there is little or none of the sort of sensuous imagery that typically goes with perception; it is more like a nonsensuous impression of a brooding presence.65

Plantinga’s manifold description of spiritual perception, as it occurs in humans by way of “feeling” or “sensuous imagery,” compliments Wesley’s understanding of the economic experience of believers who receive the gift of faith for perception of the Spirit’s direct and indirect witness. In Wesley’s view, inward feeling rightly ordered (toward love of God and neighbor) was properly basic to spiritual knowledge within the economy of grace.

David Hempton makes the historical claim that Wesley was, “in a peculiar sense, a reasonable enthusiast, but an enthusiast for all that.”66 In philosophical terms, however, Alvin Plantinga’s work on post-foundationalism and religious epistemology provides a useful rationale for better understanding Wesley’s pneumatology. Indeed, Wesley’s emphasis on inward feeling rightly ordered, which challenged the widely held contextual notion that reason was the unshakeable foundation of all religious belief, finds a strong ally in post-foundationalist thinking.

Conclusion

John Wesley was heavily criticized throughout the eighteenth century for his pneumatology of inspiration. However, as we have seen, the post-foundationalist response to Enlightenment epistemology provides a useful apologia against his opponents’ critique. Given that knowledge must no longer be predicated upon a universal and unquestionable “reason,” which binds all rational agents, and further, that it can be built upon properly basic relational experiences as well, John Wesley’s theology of perceptible inspiration is warranted. His notion that believers could perceive the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, which earned him the label of “enthusiast,” res-

65 Alvin Plantinga, Warranted Christian Belief, 181-182.
66 David Hempton, Methodism: Empire of the Spirit, 41.
onates post-foundationalist theological thinking, and provides a much-needed resource for securing the reasonableness of religious experience.

Theodore Runyon comments: “Every Christian has the right to expect to sense the presence of God to his soul. This being touched by the Spirit of God, this participation, this koinonia, is precisely what has the power to transform, to bring new life, to renew the image of God.”67 Personal experience of the Spirit is our foundation for spiritual communion or koinonia with God. It is the birthright of every Christian, that God should “engage human consciousness” in a profoundly intimate way. To Wesley, spiritual participation was fostered by the Holy Spirit’s power and presence, which manifested God’s life in the human soul, and vice versa.

By reconsidering Methodist pneumatology as such, perceptible inspiration serves as a new trajectory for engaging in theological discussion and, when paired with the advent of post-foundationalist thought, is a useful rationale for making sense of religious experience.

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Donald W. Dayton
A TRIBUTE TO

DONALD W. DAYTON

RECIPIENT OF THE 2010 
LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD 
FROM THE WESLEYAN THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

by

Don Thorsen

Scholars generally become great through their various accomplishments and publications. However, a few of them dramatically change the way we think. Such scholars contribute to a paradigm shift, so to speak, in how we understand the world in which we live. Donald W. Dayton is a scholar who has dramatically changed the ways we view Christianity, theology, and ethics, and not just in the United States, but around the world. In addition, his influence extends beyond accomplishments within the scholarly purview of the Wesleyan Theological Society. He has impacted both church and academy, mainline and evangelical, Wesleyan and Pentecostal.

Donald Dayton’s educational background includes a Bachelor of Arts from Houghton College, a Bachelor of Divinity from Yale Divinity School, a Master of Library Science from the University of Kentucky, and a Doctorate in Christian Theology from the Divinity School of the University of Chicago. He taught at Asbury Theological Seminary (1969-1972), North Park Theological Seminary (1972-1979), Northern Baptist Theological Seminary (1979-1997), Drew University (1997-2002), and
Azusa Pacific University, where he served in the Graduate School of Theology from 2002 as Professor of Theology and Ethics and Chair of Advanced Studies until his retirement from teaching in 2004.

The scholarly accomplishments of Dayton are numerous. Early in life, he contributed to publication of the magazine *The Post-American*, later called *Sojourners*, and affiliated with Evangelicals for Social Responsibility. He was an original drafter and signer of “The Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Responsibility” (1973). Don has long manifested concern for the varieties of impoverishment from which people suffer, and advocated on their behalf. In addition to writing, he served in several editorial capacities with *Sojourners* and in more than a dozen other editorial capacities throughout his scholarly career.


Don wrote and edited several books. Among his most influential are *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage* (1976), *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (1991), and *The Variety of American Evangelicalism* (2001), edited with Robert K. Johnston. In *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage*, Don did groundbreaking historical work in promoting the social relevance of the Holiness heritage and how it served as an evangelical forerunner in the nineteenth century. *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* is a landmark study of how Pentecostalism grew out of Methodism and nineteenth-cen-
tury Holiness revivals. His expertise in Pentecostal studies has not been limited to its growth in the United States. As a result, Don became the only person to be elected president of both the Society for Pentecostal Studies (1988) and the Wesleyan Theological Society (1989), laying the groundwork for eventual joint meetings between these two societies. In *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, Don included chapters from various church traditions, which describe themselves—more or less—as evangelical. The anthology illustrates both how ‘contested’ evangelicalism is, yet how ‘family resemblances’ exist. Don’s efforts reflected years of leadership in the Evangelical Studies Group of the American Academy of Religion. Currently, he is working with Billy Abraham on a *Pentecostal Dictionary* with Oxford University Press.

In addition to his writing, Don has lectured around the world in a variety of venues. He has lectured in more than fifty colleges, universities, and seminaries. Two of his more prominent lectures occurred as plenary addresses for the Society of Biblical Literature and twice at the Oxford Institute of Methodist and Theological Studies. For more than a decade, he served on the Planning Committee of the Oxford Institute, and advocated for participation on behalf of those from the Holiness heritage. In addition, Don has participated in numerous panels, conversing with such diverse scholars as Jürgen Moltmann and Carl F. H. Henry.

Over the years, Dayton’s scholarly influence has often occurred more indirectly than directly. He influenced a number of doctoral students by mentoring their dissertations. Moreover, he helped conceive scholarly research undertaken in the Wesleyan Holiness Studies Center at Asbury Theological Seminary and the Wesleyan Holiness Study Project at Azusa Pacific University (2002-2005). Likewise, who can forget the lively debate between Don and George Marsden, and whether evangelical Christianity is best (or least) understood from a Reformed perspective?

If I may speak personally, Don made indelible contributions to my life both professionally and as a friend. He invited me to participate with him in work with the Commission on Faith and Order of the National Council of Churches, representing the Wesleyan Theological Society. I have served with him in that capacity since 2003. In fact, Don has participated in Faith and Order since 1983, promoting contributions of the Wesleyan and Holiness traditions in both the United States and internationally with the World Council of Churches. In 2007, Don gave a plenary address
at the 50th Anniversary of Faith and Order at Oberlin College, outlining the importance of Oberlin for the Holiness heritage as well as for ecumenism.

I would like to say some things about Don’s persona, that is, about the public image he projects. There is a certain aura about Don that is incomparable. I hope that this does not come as a shock to you, but some people think it is fair to say that Don is unique, one-of-a-kind, and perhaps—if I may say so—a bit quirky. Although some may consider him the quintessential stereotype of an absent-minded professor, his persona endears him to all who know and love him. Don has bought, squirreled away, given away, or sold thousands upon thousands! In fact, the largest personal collection of books at Fuller Theological Seminary came from Don!

As a young scholar, I was aware of certain pillars of scholarship in the Wesleyan and Holiness traditions whose influence extended beyond these traditions. Timothy Smith, for example, comes to mind as one whose influence impacted Christian understanding throughout the academy and beyond. Similarly, Don expanded our understanding of the Wesleyan, Holiness and Pentecostal traditions, of evangelicalism more broadly conceived, of social consciousness and advocacy on behalf of the poor, and of the need for ecumenical dialog and cooperation. He both broadened our understanding and promoted both the awareness and influence of the Wesleyan and Holiness traditions. Certainly American and worldwide Christianity will be indebted to Don’s scholarship for decades to come, and it is appropriate for us to honor him tonight for the passion of his love for God, for scholarly insight into Christianity, for ethical advocacy on behalf of those impoverished in so many ways, for the Wesleyan, Holiness and Pentecostal traditions, and for the church universal.

Let me end with a quote from another Wesleyan scholar, Howard Snyder: “Don Dayton has assisted me in my theology and writings in more ways than I can tell. From our initial animated conversation on an interurban train in the New York City area in 1966 to the present, he has been a kind of mentor. . . . He has helped me understand my own tradition, even when I haven’t fully agreed with him. He has been a door into larger discussions” (Introduction, From the Margins). I think that many of us can agree with Howard. Donald Dayton has been to us a mentor, helping us to understand our Christian tradition better, and opening doors into larger theological discussions.
THE RESPONSE OF DONALD W. DAYTON
TO RECEIVING THE WTS
“LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD”

Azusa Pacific University, March, 2010

I am deeply appreciative of this award and the presentation by Don Thorsen, a colleague who has been a good and true friend in recent years. I admit that I have wondered on occasion if I would be considered worthy of such recognition, but am surprised by its timing. We in the WTS have recently been blessed by a superabundance of Nazarene leadership. I could not have imagined that they had exhausted their list of candidates!

This award is especially meaningful because I have spent my career in semi-exile from the Holiness Movement. Denied ordination by the Wesleyans over my inability to affirm the “inerrancy” of Scripture, I have spent only 5 of my 35 years on seminary faculties within the tradition (my first 3 at Asbury Theological Seminary; the last two here at Azusa Pacific University). This has actually proved to be creative, while requiring occasionally some fancy footwork. I have not been subject to ecclesiastical authority and thus able to follow my own path and give my rather contrarian personality freer reign. And this “exile” has made it easier to be more enthusiastic about the Holiness Movement since I have not had to live in proximity to its legalistic and often provincial ethos. From this distance I have even been able to appreciate that movements that are ethically fussy about drinking, card playing, and dancing have been sensitive to slavery, the oppression of women and the poor, etc. An illuminating but difficult discovery!

My interest in the Holiness Movement was either accidental or providential. Intellectually, like many of you, on a trajectory toward greener

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theological pastures, I nonetheless rejected an offer from Princeton and instead went to Asbury Theological Seminary for my first job (comparable salary, but cheaper housing in Wilmore!). The American Theological Library Association held a meeting at Pasadena College (now Point Loma Nazarene University) and had a practice of inviting a bibliographic essay on the host tradition. My boss, Sue Schultz, couldn’t convince the Christian Holiness Association official historian, Delbert Rose (much later her husband), to spend money on the trip. She turned to me and twisted my arm, relieving me of most of my library work for about half a year. I protested that I had never read any holiness literature and had no intention of doing so. She persisted; I yielded. I left Asbury with a single shelf of holiness literature that eventually grew to over 10,000 volumes—now housed at Fuller Theological Seminary.

This attraction to the Holiness Movement gained impetus when I discovered as book editor of *Sojourners* that the Wesleyan Church (in its early abolitionism, feminism, and pacifism) had been a close historical parallel to the position that we were developing under the influence of the civil rights and anti-Vietnam War movements. This resulted in the articles that became *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage*. The rest of my intellectual journey can be seen as a struggle with the puzzles of that book. Illustrating this is my increasing rejection of the reigning “evangelical” historiography that starts with fundamentalism and privileges something like the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as the paradigmatic “evangelical” church. I am convinced that we should turn this on its head and use the Holiness Movement to explain the two-party system of American Protestantism by privileging the Christian and Missionary Alliance and the themes of its “four-fold” gospel (Jesus as Savior, Sanctifier, Healer, and Coming King) several decades earlier.

My work in the Wesleyan Theological Society has been a roller coaster ride. For many years the office of promotional secretary provided the leverage for change from the “margins.” It is hard to imagine now that nearly four decades ago the very idea of “outside speakers” was so controversial that it could be considered only by a secret written ballot—and I then set the idea back several years by proposing a Pentecostal scholar Vinson Synan who was already a member of our society. Some years ago my friend Billy Abraham chided me for my continuing involvement in such a reactionary society. I replied to the contrary that the society was at least a decade ahead of what I’d anticipated.
My involvement in the World Council of Churches and National Council of Churches has been an extension of my interest in the Holiness Movement and my efforts to create greater awareness of it in the larger church world. Far from a diluting experience, this has pushed me even closer to the Holiness Movement as I have articulated its larger significance. In this work, I have struggled with one of the most difficult issues facing the movement—whether to pursue a strategy of assimilation and reinsertion of the Holiness Movement into the classical tradition or to witness to its radical forms of witness against it. The sociological forces that we all carry favor the former. I have been increasingly drawn to the latter—not always an appreciated option, either here or there.

Finally, a word about Pentecostalism. My dissertation argued that Pentecostalism was born in the radical wing of the Holiness Movement, a thesis that flew in the face of the position of our great historian, Timothy Smith. Misunderstanding my intentions, he and the Christian Holiness Association leadership fought my work viciously, while I found more receptivity in the Society for Pentecostal Studies. My motion in our Oklahoma City meeting to send greetings upon the founding of SPS was seconded only so that it could be debated and the minutes expunged of any reference to it. I was later deeply moved when the SPS changed its constitution to invite me to be president. I accepted, assuming this would end my career in WTS. I was astounded to be immediately elected the president of WTS, so that for one week I served at the head of both societies. I planned a WTS program adjunct session that explored the historical relationship between the movements. Now we meet together every five years. This work may well have been my most important ecumenical achievement.
TRIBUTE FOR THE SMITH/WYNKOOP BOOK AWARD WINNER OF 2010
by Robert W. Wall, Seattle Pacific University

*The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley* (Cambridge, 2010),
edited by Randy L. Maddox and Jason E. Vickers

Stan Ingersol once said that this award of the Wesleyan Theological Society is named for two imaginative thinkers whose groundbreaking work centered on the most important themes of the Society (“Tribute,” *WTJ* 39.2 [2004] 253-54). The professionalism and contribution of Mildred Wynkoop and Timothy Smith fund and form the criterion the selection committee uses annually in choosing the Society’s book award recipient.

On behalf of the Society, then, I am pleased to announce that this year’s Smith-Wynkoop Book Award goes to *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley* (Cambridge, 2010), edited by Randy Maddox and Jason Vickers. This collection of seventeen studies, placed in an important series, was selected in prospect of the contribution it will almost surely make in introducing Wesley’s life and work to coming generations of students.

The two editors of this collection are colleagues and good friends of ours who are vital not only to the intellectual life of Methodism worldwide but to this Society in particular. Randy Maddox is the William Kellon Quick Professor of Theology and Methodist Studies at Duke Divinity School and Jason Vickers is Associate Professor of Theology and Wesleyan Studies at United Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. In addition to recruiting and editing each contribution to the collection, Randy wrote of “Wesley’s Engagement with the Natural Sciences” for this volume—a brilliant
piece in my opinion—and Jason contributed an equally fine survey of "Wesley’s Theological Emphases" that traces the trajectory of Trinitarian thinking in Wesley’s theological grammar. This volume is dedicated to Dick Heitzenrater whose contribution to the study of the Wesleys over a long career is a stunning intellectual achievement. His instruction and friendship have encouraged and shaped many of us in this Society.

This is the first time the Society’s annual book award has been given to the editors of a collection. In the genre of collections like this one that seeks to survey the career of someone as important and complicated as John Wesley, several conventions should stand out if the result is worthy of this honor.

(1) The volume should be comprehensive in scope. Following a brief history of Wesley studies, Maddox and Vickers have grouped the seventeen essays into four parts that locate Wesley in his social location, that trace his life and work, that describe and evaluate his extensive résumé of ministry and his theological contribution, before concluding with a series of probative excurses into various nicks and crannies of the Wesleyan legacy.

(2) Not only should a collection be comprehensive in the materials it covers, but it should be characterized by an incisive and fair criticism. The early reviews and blogs of the book seem to roundly confirm this quality. It stands as a tribute to the skills of those that Randy and Jason recruited, some of whom are in this room.

(3) The genre of a readerly “companion” like this one, as intellectually alert and even programmatic as this one is, must at day’s end be pedagogically sensitive. This book is designed, written, and edited for student learning—what a student should know that is presented in a lively prose and with suggestive comments that lead the student to Wesley with interest, not drudgery. The stated expectation of Cambridge University Press is that this book will become a standard textbook in Wesley classrooms around the world. If this expectation is realized, thousands of students will be initiated into Wesley’s contribution and legacy, warts and all, by reading this volume. Time will tell, but the folks at Cambridge have already assured me that early sales would seem to indicate that their early forecast is right on target.

(4) Unlike most textbooks that rehearse and translate the consensus of scholarship to initiate students into the discipline, this collection often—I would even suggest typically—breaks new ground in Wesley
studies. Even though intended for the classroom, I suspect this volume will find its way into the scholar’s study as well.

Of course, we all know that collections as good as this one simply don’t fall out of the sky. Good editors produce good collections. Competent, hardworking, incredibly fluent in Wesley, able to work well with a network of prima donnas, Randy Maddox and Jason Vickers have pulled together and pulled off a major contribution on behalf of the spiritual and ecclesial descendents of Wesley and for his future heirs. For this and those other reasons, the 2010 Smith-Wynkoop Book Award is given to Professors Randy L. Maddox and Jason E. Vickers for their *Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*. 
BOOK REVIEWS


Reviewed by Bart B. Bruehler, Visiting Professor of New Testament, Indiana Wesleyan University, Marion, IN.

Because of the plethora of available and even good commentaries, commentary writing has become a niche market, targeting selected audiences with particular backgrounds and/or specific interests in biblical books. At the same time, commentary writing has become more comprehensive, and many commentaries now contain not only traditional historical-grammatical exegesis but also other approaches and even theological applications of the text. The two commentaries reviewed here are early offerings in two new series that exemplify these trends. They serve clearly stated purposes well and seek to expound the message of the biblical text for a contemporary Christian audience.

The commentary on James by Blomberg and Kamell is the first published volume in the Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament series. The series introduction (written by the general editor, Clinton Arnold) outlines the audience, purpose, and design of the volumes. These commentaries are aimed at the current or former seminary student who has had approximately two years of Greek and is familiar with intermediate Greek grammar. The commentators use the following seven com-
ponents to analyze each passage: literary context, main idea, translation and graphical layout, structure, exegetical outline, explanation of the text, and theology in application. The introduction to the commentary itself deals with the outline, circumstances, and authorship of the letter of James, and the commentary ends with several indexes (scripture, subject, and author).

The analysis of each passage is visually appealing and consistent throughout the commentary. Each section begins by exploring the literary context: how the passage under consideration fits into the structure and themes of the book, followed by a brief statement of the main idea of the passage. Next, the authors present the translation in a chart. The left side provides descriptions of the thought flow, while the translation itself is bolded and indented to represent main and subordinate clauses and phrases. To take James 2:1-2 as an example: In v. 1, “Do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ” is classified as an exhortation with “in favoritism” labeled as manner. Then v. 2a states an illustration (“For if a person . . . comes into your assembly”) with an embedded description (“gold-ringed in shining clothing”), while v. 2b contains a contrast with another embedded description (“a person—poor in filthy clothing—comes in”). This is followed by a detailed outline of the passage and then the explanation of the Greek text, verse by verse. The explanation focuses on the meaning of particular words (e.g., favoritism and glory) and uses grammatical terms (e.g., qualitative genitive and third class condition) in order to clarify the meaning of the Greek text. The analysis of the passage concludes with a “theology in application” section, which develops the theological themes of parts of the passage, often linking these themes to related passages in the NT (e.g., James 2:1-2 is discussed in light of Job 34:19 and Acts 10:34 as well as the reversals in Luke 14:7-24) before offering an application of the message of the text for contemporary contexts (e.g., James considers that the poor could enter their assemblies, but this is almost unimaginable in suburban middle-class churches).

The commentaries in this series will serve as helpful examples and reminders to those who have taken or are taking intermediate Greek, but not as a textbook for an exegesis class on James (because it would do most of the students’ work for them!). The Greek analysis is generally good, though not exhaustive, and a list of grammatical terms at the end of the book would be helpful both as a reminder and clarification of various terms (e.g., perfective or consummative aorist). The focus on grammar
does not exclude historical matters, but it does seem to downplay them. The commentary contains only small bits of social and cultural information, and almost no attention is given to rhetorical structures or techniques. The graphical description of the translation meshes nicely with the categories of inductive Bible study, and thus these commentaries might be useful in Wesleyan schools that teach both inductive Bible study and exegesis. Since the authors of this series come largely from the Reformed tradition, it is not surprising that Reformed concerns do appear (e.g., perfection in 1:4 is pushed out to the eschaton on p. 50 and “lordship salvation” is discussed on p. 143). However, the authors of this particular volume offer balanced opinions on other issues of Wesleyan interest (e.g., the interplay of divine election and human responsibility on pp. 114, 252). As one who has taught intermediate Greek grammar, I value their attempt to appropriate this knowledge in the analysis and application of a biblical text. I would recommend this series to students preparing for ministry who want to continue to use their knowledge of Greek in future interpretation and preaching.

Flemming’s commentary on Philippians comes from the explicitly Wesleyan series, The New Beacon Bible Commentary, put out by Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City. The design of the commentary is simpler than the Zondervan one, and its target audience is more general. The goal of this series is to “make available to the church . . . the fruits of the labors of scholars who are committed to their Christian faith” (7). The analysis of each passage consists of three movements: behind the text, in the text, and from the text (with occasional sidebars and excurses). Similarly, Flemming states that he will discuss the text historically (behind the text), theologically (in the text), and formationally (from the text) (43-44). The commentary begins with an introduction that discusses the historical context, literary and rhetorical issues, and key themes of Philippians, but it does not contain any indexes at the end.

The “behind the text” sections consider a wide variety of matters. For example, when treating 2:1-4, Flemming discusses how this section fits into the letter and claims that it rhetorically begins the main section of the proof (probatio). On 2:5-11 (the famous Christ hymn), he addresses questions about the hymn form of the passage, its pre-Pauline history, and its connection to other ancient religious traditions. The “in the text” sections use the NIV as the reference version, although transliterated Greek is used regularly in the explanation. This section is a running commentary.
on individual verses that attends to specific words and clauses. It often cites links within Philippians and other Pauline letters and contains frequent references to other deeper studies on specific points. Flemming also adduces material from ancient church authors, especially Chrysostom’s homilies on Philippians (e.g., 56, 59, 121). Wesleyan theological perspectives appear in both the “in” and “from” the text sections (e.g., an extended comment on “saints” as “holy ones” in 1:1 on p. 48 and quotations from the Wesley brothers on pp. 61-62, 139). Flemming, given his own international context, also helpfully includes comments on the meaning and application of the text from other cultural perspectives (e.g., African commentator Abate is cited on p. 124 and other cultural perspectives on honor are discussed on p. 152).

This commentary series will also prove useful. Flemming’s treatment is less technical than the preceding example, but he includes both breadth and depth in admirably concise and insightful ways. Flemming writes for pastors and laypeople, but he has achieved the goal of bringing the fruits of biblical scholarship to a non-specialist audience. The comments in each of the three sections on any given passage are brief but to the point, and they contain a wealth of references to historical, cultural, ecclesiastical, rhetorical, theological, and international issues that even this specialist found illuminating and inviting. On a basic level, Flemming has given his reader a solid commentary on the text of Philippians from a Wesleyan theological perspective. However, he has also provided much more through his own probing applications and links to a wide range of deeper issues.

Reviewed by Richard P. Thompson, Professor of New Testament, Northwest Nazarene University, Nampa, ID.

Joel Green has been a significant voice and leader among biblical scholars who in recent decades have raised particular issues to be addressed regarding the church’s reading of the Bible as sacred Scripture. In his recent work *Seized by Truth: Reading the Bible as Scripture*, Green clarifies and furthers that particular agenda by delineating specific issues regarding the role of the Bible in the church and how the church might understand and interpret the biblical texts in the contemporary world.

The book has five chapters. The first, “Reading the Bible, Reading Scripture,” outlines the basic premises behind Green’s work. Central is the contention that the purpose behind the church’s reading of the biblical texts as Scripture has to do with the formative role of these texts for the church’s communal life and practices. The author contends that this formative role of Scripture takes precedence over skills and understandings long emphasized in biblical studies (i.e., learning biblical languages, understanding ancient cultures, etc.), not in a way that minimizes the latter but that accentuates Scripture’s place as “divine self-disclosure” (11). Although Green notes difficulties associated with overcoming the chasm that separates contemporary church readers from the ancient biblical texts, as well as three general ways (pre-modern, modern, postmodern) by which persons have attempted to navigate through these issues, he suggests that a more urgent question asks whether “we are ready to embrace the God to whom and the theological vision to which these [biblical] writers bear witness” (18). This understanding of the Bible as the church’s Scriptures suggests that this collection of sacred texts “challenges those who would be Christian by calling for a creative transformation of the patterns by which we make sense of our lives, and by which we interact with and within the world” (25).

The second chapter considers the aims and assumptions that persons bring with them to the interpretive task and that shape their readings of the Bible as Scripture. In particular, Green focuses on three aims or assumptions that potentially guide readings of Scripture. First, in the section on Christian readings of the Old Testament, the author helpfully balances the multitude of critical issues that arise when considering the role
of the Old Testament in Christian theology and the church, suggesting that a “Christian” reading of the Old Testament “has no need to assert the superiority of the New Testament over the Old, nor that the Old Testament requires the New as its hermeneutical key” (41). Instead, he asserts that the Old Testament “points beyond itself toward the fulfillment of God’s purpose at the same time that it narrates the expression of that purpose” both in God’s creation and God’s people (41). Second, some reflections on passages in the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts are offered to suggest that Scripture functions to bring about a process of conversion in her readers that includes “embracing new patterns of thinking, feeling, believing, and acting,” transformation, and reorientation in terms of the transformed life of “the community of the converted” (49). Third, Green appropriates the concept of the model reader from Umberto Eco to describe the contemporary reader of Scripture as someone who seeks to interpret the biblical text in ways similar to what that text itself presupposes. As he contends, such interpreters are “invited to think with the Scriptures, not about them” so that, rather than objectifying the text, they remain open to receiving the vision of God that the text itself might offer (59).

The third chapter explores four indispensible resources for the reading of the Bible as Scripture. First, Green asserts that the reading of Scripture must occur in the context of the church, where Scripture functions formatively to shape persons as the people of God who embody Scripture in their practices and extended life. Green argues against two extremes prominent among many contemporary church settings that fail to engage the Bible as Scripture: one that appropriates biblical quotations to support predetermined ideas or convictions; another that deals only with a biblical passage in its historical context so that there is no relevance for contemporary settings due to an “iron curtain of complications segregating ancient text from the contemporary” (71). Second, Green suggests that the reading of Scripture must be theologically fashioned in terms of nurturing the life and faith of the people of God. A significant aspect of such readings is the role of the theological tradition and setting in which these readings occur. As one from the Wesleyan tradition, Green suggests that emphases of John Wesley contribute to Wesleyan readings of Scripture, notably Wesley’s teachings about grace and the pursuit of holiness (86). Third, Green contends that the reading of Scripture within the church must be critically engaged to discern among various possible read-
ings of biblical texts. Not only should readers exercise discernment regarding the interpretations of others, but readers also need the assistance of others to ward off “the development of tunnel vision—ingrown and unself-critical faith” (91). Thus, the author employs several adjectives to describe the kind of critically engaged conversation surrounding the practice of reading Scripture: cross-cultural, canonical, historical, communal, global, and hospitable (92-93). Fourth, Green insists that the reading of Scripture must be enabled by the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church. Thus, he concludes that these resources are essential to the interpretive task of the Bible as Scripture, so that the church is “actualizing its message through incarnation within and among God’s people” (101).

The fourth chapter offers a basic outline regarding the possible methods to be appropriated in the interpretation of the Bible as Scripture. Green begins the chapter by declaring, “If we are to ‘understand’ (that is, ‘stand under’) these texts, if they are to have a peculiar, formative role in the life of those communities that regard them as Scripture, then how these texts speak is a matter of utmost importance” (103). After explaining the importance of three general approaches with regard to the careful study of the biblical text (i.e., approaches that probe behind the text, in the text, and in front of the text), Green goes on to offer ten suggestions regarding areas of study that he deems essential to a close reading of a biblical text within its various contexts, followed by a list of guidelines for discerning the validity of or assessing a given interpretation. To be sure, what is offered in this one chapter is not exhaustive. However, as Green reminds his reader, the provision of the right tools for those who read the Bible is not the only consideration, since those tools may not translate into someone skilled in using them. Thus, as important as these tools for biblical study might be, the more important question is this: “How can the church participate in forming good people so that they might read the Bible?” (141).

The final chapter, dealing with the authority of the Bible, focuses on a subject that is often considered earlier in works such as this. However, in this instance the placement of such considerations provides a useful context for pulling together the proposals offered throughout the book. Although questions about biblical authority have often polarize Christians and churches, Green offers a helpful redefinition of that authority that focuses primarily on the function of the Bible as the church’s Scriptures.
Rather than “promoting approaches to Bible reading that have to do with our mastering its data,” he contends that this revised understanding of biblical authority promotes such readings that have to do with “our being mastered by its message” (157). Following Wesley’s lead, the focus is then on the truthfulness of Scripture in terms of what Scripture does in terms of salvation (162). As Green concludes, “We come not so much to retrieve facts or to gain information, but to be formed. The Bible’s authority rests, ultimately, in its disclosure of this divine purpose” (173).

As an influential voice within the field of biblical studies and the Wesleyan tradition, Joel Green has offered an accessible consideration of biblical hermeneutics that cogently addresses the role of the Bible within the contemporary church and, in particular, those churches that consider themselves within the Wesleyan theological tradition. Because this work draws from a broad range of resources and addresses an even broader range of hermeneutical issues, some readers such as theologians and biblical scholars will undoubtedly find some finer points along the way with which to quibble or to debate. However, this would not be surprising because of the contentious nature of some issues and the relative brevity of this work (which is a positive feature of this book). Since this work focuses on the reading of the Bible as Scripture in the church setting, other readers, such as laypersons of the church and inexperienced readers of the Bible, could have benefited from more guidance regarding the methods for reading the Bible as Scripture. Nonetheless, Green has provided an excellent, insightful treatment about what it might mean for the contemporary church to recapture the role of the Bible as Scripture. May we now, as the church, read and embody Scripture as he suggests!

Reviewed by Aaron Perry, Pastor of Christian Education, Centennial Road Church, Brockville, ON.

Stanley Hauerwas’s body of work in ethics, narrative theology, and ecclesiology is well known. His more recent work, including a commentary on the Gospel of Matthew (Brazos Press, 2007) and *Cross-Shattered Christ* (Brazos Press, 2005), offers reflections on the biblical text itself. In this vein, Hauerwas has offered *A Cross-Shattered Church: Reclaiming the Theological Heart of Preaching*, a collection of sermons that exemplify the work of theology (12), describe what a “theological politics might look like” (13), and make our lives intelligible (19) by proclaiming the gospel. Hauerwas urges preachers to employ words carefully and believe God to show up in these words. This event, the sermon, is made possible because the story, God’s story, has come first.

*Cross-Shattered Church* has four sections, each with four or five sermons, and an appendix. The sections are grouped thematically (Seeing, Saying, Living, and Events), while the appendix gives the context of this book’s timing by reflecting on the Gospel of Matthew, this time of war in the USA, and Hauerwas’s overall writing career.

The first section is four sermons around the theme of seeing. People only see through believing the gospel, otherwise we are blinded by other stories, such as the Enlightenment. The story of Jesus shows that humans are not the pinnacle of history, which at times offends our modern sensibilities. Hauerwas also connects speaking and seeing. He writes, “We can only see what we can say” (40) and the “limit of our language is the limit of our world” (40-41). New sight and speech open a new world within the world. In this new world we see and speak as witnesses.

The second section, which focuses on the theme of saying, offers examples of speaking crucial elements of the Christian faith. Hauerwas’s talk of the Trinity, atonement, sacrifice, and the cross exemplifies the language that must become common for the church because it helps reveal the world created by a God who has reached into its brokenness out of friendship. It also shows us a world in which our natural desire to return to God through sacrifice (71) has been stopped through a final sacrifice of God. We are meant to see the world as cruciform.

The third section includes five sermons on living in this cruciform world. Hauerwas confronts our fear of death poignantly: “We live in a
death-denying world that seems determined to develop technologies that will enable us to get out of life alive” (87). But the cross reminds us that friendship surpasses death; in life and death, we are not alone. Following on this, in his sermon “Only Fear Can Drive Out Fear,” Hauerwas reminds us of the moment in which we are living, where the spiritual, specifically in how ministers are trained, has become overly personal. He does this with typical wit and humor: “[I]n this day few think that an inadequately trained minister may damage their salvation, but we do believe an inadequately trained doctor may hurt us” (90). That spirituality is mainly personal is a part of our modern sensibilities that tell us that being a Christian is about being a nice and good person. Instead, Hauerwas says that we are called not to be nice, but to be Christians. We are not called to make a difference, but to live in the difference Jesus has made (101). How we live as Christians is not common sense and must be reshaped as slaves of Jesus, the Christ.

The final section, which focuses on the theme of events, contains sermons Hauerwas preached at two baptisms, a marriage, and an ordination. He understands these Christian events as opportunities to proclaim the truth of our death and life in Christ, the church and her hospitality, and the priesthood of Jesus, respectively. Baptism is about dying and becoming human again. Marriage is about hospitality. Ordination is about Jesus. In many ways, while at first it feels out of place, this section is the theological work of preaching: the gospel story is preached to make visible and intelligible our broken and shattered lives. This section is the culmination of Hauerwas’s desire to describe a theological politics (13) because it centers around the church gathered to worship, hear, and reflect on God.

Hauerwas’s collection of sermons is what we would expect from Hauerwas: preaching the lectionary texts to our time with characteristic wit, poignancy, and fight. His creativity and insight are exemplified in the faithful connections he makes between lectionary texts. The sermons make profound arguments that, while often abstract, are not dense. The reader knows these are sermons that were meant to be heard.

So, how does Cross-Shattered Church connect with the Wesleyan tradition? The book, in its subtitle and structure, wrestles with its nature and place. For example, while the appendix has three significant pieces, they do not readily fit with preaching or with sermons, and the subtitle’s verb, “reclaiming,” does not capture the book’s contents. The contents do not argue for preaching to take on a theological nature, but instead exemplify theological preaching. As such, Cross-Shattered Church exemplifies how pastors and preachers may use the lectionary in a narrative style of preaching.

Reviewed by Brian Clark, Adjunct Instructor, Hartford Seminary.

Perhaps it is best to begin to describe this work by negation. First, it must be understood that *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment* is not hagiography, having no connection whatsoever with that strand of devotional literature. For that matter, it has only the most tenuous of connections with the sometimes self-referential world of Wesleyan scholarship. But neither is this book a reductionist dismissal of Methodism of the sort pioneered by E. P. Thompson and perfected by Henry Abelove, a clever attempt to stamp an alien hermeneutic on the faces of historical people.

Mack’s method is to take actual Methodists, both men and women, quite seriously as “thinkers and actors, as participants in the cultural discourse about the nature of feeling and sensibility that preoccupied so many of their contemporaries” (5). Like the title of the volume, this sentence expresses the author’s determination to portray Methodists as key participants in the Enlightenment, particularly in the emergence of the modern “self” and its subjectivity. The fact that Mack uses her study of Methodists to investigate the culture of “sensibility” might raise Wesleyan eyebrows, since that discussion is only starting to become familiar to Wesleyans through the work of younger scholars such as Joanna Cruickshank and Chris Armstrong.1

Mack sets the pace for her book in its introduction by pleading the case that the Methodists’ self-abnegation and self-discipline must not be dismissed by modern scholars as a form of self-abuse, but must be taken seriously, despite their occasional excesses, as a form of “agency.” She then distances herself from academics who have been content to conclude that, since Methodists were primarily female, Methodism was culturally feminine. Instead, she has painstakingly reconstructed how actual Methodist women thought, and how actual Methodist men thought, and what we can make of the cultural system in which both participated.

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The first two chapters of the book constitute a basic portrait of the Methodist movement; in the first, she describes Methodist culture as primarily concerned with the cultivation of right feeling and primarily expressed through evocative hymnody and systems for self-discipline. The second chapter continues that portrayal by relating Methodist conversion to those themes, with insights into the differences between the conversion narratives of male and female Methodists. She shows that, for both genders, Methodist conversions were desired as a vehicle for thoroughly reforming the affections and motivations of the repentant, and that the most highly valued mark of conversion was a new wealth of feeling for others, especially fellow Methodists.

Though the first two chapters are pithy and largely convincing, they principally serve to prepare the reader for the more robust and fascinating chapters that follow. The first of these uses the preachers’ correspondence to explore their emotional and relational lives, while contrasting it with the stoic idealism of published accounts. This chapter, “Men of feeling: natural and spiritual affection in the lives of the preachers,” is brilliant, not least because it sensitively illuminates the inner lives and intimate relationships of the preachers while refusing to be scandalized by the contrasts between that experience and the stoic ideals they espoused. Note that the gender balance of this volume neatly reverses the pattern evident in countless books on Methodism; men are given their very own, very respectful chapter.

The fourth chapter is daringly entitled, “Women in love: eros and piety in the minds of Methodist women.” It explores the emotional complexities of the attachments between Methodist women and the attachments between John Wesley and some of those women. Like the prior chapter on the emotional lives of Methodist preachers, this chapter has a great deal of realism to it, an unmistakable whiff of wisdom. Mack understands that eighteenth-century people were quite aware of the fact that they had sexual drives and desires, as well as complex emotional attachments, so there simply is no massive epistemic advantage over them to be gained by recourse to Freudian analysis. On the contrary, she realizes that the categories we so blithely assume to hold universal sway may blind us

to the nuances of historical experience, some of them quite alien to us, as are the “romantic friendships” formed between eighteenth-century people of either the opposite sex or of the same gender. The real virtue of this chapter stems from Mack’s ability to relate those emotional complexities to the religious ideals and images through which Methodists, particularly Methodist women, interpreted and experienced them.

The fifth chapter, “Mary Fletcher on the cross: gender and the suffering body,” explores the ways in which Methodists related to their own bodies and the bodies of others, torn between the contradictions of an ascetic understanding of the purgative power of pain and an Enlightenment concern with promoting their physical frames and thus their vital powers of perception and feeling. Mack also shows how men and women related to suffering differently, in part because of the need for women to attend to the sick in their own household, the society, and the larger community. The following chapter, “Agency and the unconscious; The Methodist culture of dreaming” is equally fascinating. Here Mack portrays dreams as a form of spiritual experience that were taken very seriously by Methodists as windows into the soul of the dreamer and as glimpses of the spiritual realm. She portrays the elements of Methodist culture that lent dreams salience for all Methodists, while also demonstrating the ways in which the experience of and interpretation of dreams differed between men and women and between generations of Methodists.

It is with the attempt to portray differences between generations of Methodists that Mack concerns herself in the concluding chapter. By contrasting the life and outlook of Methodist preachers John Pawson and Adam Clarke, and by sketching the differences between eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Methodist women, she illustrates her case that the eighteenth-century Methodism helped bridge the huge cultural and intellectual chasms that separate the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. Though this chapter is interesting and suggestive, it lacks the sheer weight of authority present earlier in the text. Whether or not Mack’s argument eventually carries the day in academic debates concerning the emergence of the “modern” self and the culture of “sensibility,” this book is extremely valuable to scholars of Methodism because it provides such an insightful portrayal of early Methodist culture.

Reviewed by Joel Halldorf, Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden.

For a long time, gender studies typically focused on only the feminine. The focus on women was justified given the earlier neglect, but gender studies evolved beyond merely writing a forgotten history. Along came probing reflections on the construction of femininity, expectations and assumptions about what it meant to be a woman in different eras and arenas. While stories of men were in abundance, reflections on the construction of manhood were not, but in recent years we have seen an increasing interest in this area of research. Sidenvall’s study belongs to this category of investigations, and his particular focus is the identity of male working-class missionaries in late 19th-century Evangelicalism. In other words, gender is not the only category of importance in Sidenvall’s work; he is also attentive to issues regarding class.

Sidenvall has studied the background, work, and motive for entering the missionary calling among working-class men. His attention is directed particularly at the Swedish Holiness Movement, an understudied movement if there ever was one, but his conclusions have wider implications. With an eye on studies of female missionaries, Sidenvall notes that one of the basic insights gained there—“that foreign missions opened for renegotiations and transformations of gender roles and expectations” (8)—is influential in his own study of men from the outskirts of respectable society in the Victorian age.

Sidenvall argues that among the motives for becoming a missionary was a desire to live up to the ideals of middle-class masculinity, advancing socially in order to deserve the label “self-made man.” This included independence and respectability and financial stability (not fortune since, if that had been the ideal, the missionary calling certainly was not a road worth traveling) and moral reform. If the status attained by the missionaries was reasonable in the eyes of society in general, the evangelical world ascribed them an even higher status. The missionaries were heroes, admired and considered among those who had “made it.” Sidenvall argues that a contradiction existed in the lives of these working-class missionaries between the openly stated pious motives for entering mission and the more worldly ones inspired by the gender discourse of their day.
The investigation consists of four micro-biographies of different male, working-class missionaries. Each biography focuses on a certain theme, and the lives are read through the lens of the context and social analysis described in chapter one. Sidenvall states that a benefit of his method is the ability to retain the complexity of the object studied, thereby reaching beyond generalizations. The missionaries studied are Olof Bingmark, Otto Sjöberg, Frans August Larson, and Alfred Fagerholm. Surely these men expected some recognition from their choice to devote their lives to mission work, but becoming the topic of a scholarly monograph was most certainly not one of them.

The ability to retain complexity is shown in an obvious way in Sidenvall’s mapping of the missionaries attitudes towards East Asian culture. The relationship between Christian missions and Western ideas of supremacy is a hot topic, and thus it has tended to create polarizing positions. Sidenvall gives a realistic presentation. After all, we are dealing with the relocation of one farmer, one gardener’s apprentice, one construction worker, and one blacksmith from Sweden to China and Mongolia in a time when most people had only anecdotal information of these portions of Asia, much less any knowledge of the language. The outcome of this escapes simple generalizations, even within the particular cases. One of the missionaries, Bingmark, rejects Chinese dress and hairstyle, grows hostile to the culture, and nurtures his “Swedishness” increasingly. Still, he and his Swedish wife decline to teach their children the Swedish language. Another, Sjöberg, lives close to the Chinese culture, with many personal and affectionate relations to the local population. Still another, Larson, expresses admiration of what he seems to perceive as a pre-modern culture—where, he writes, “They never suffer nervous breakdowns” (110)—but still tries to convince them to adopt the technical benefits of modernity.

Here Sidenvall’s method leads to the desired results of complexity and the rejection of simplified meta-narratives (94-95). At the same time he retains his theoretical perspective and notes that these different positions are all expressed in a gendered language where familiar models of masculinity are rehearsed. This is obvious in the above-mentioned quotation from Larson—a “real man” surely suffers no nervous breakdowns. As is always a risk, Sidenvall’s theoretical perspective sometimes makes him reach after conclusions not empirically grounded. For example, he suggests that Bingmark rejects his Chinese dress because he finds the
Swedish more manly, a conclusion not supported by the primary sources (54–55).

This reflects the general dilemma of studying culture: the givens are seldom articulated. Sidenvall attempts to venture into the fundamental assumptions of late 19th-century Evangelicalism, and at times his work is very thorough. This is particularly true in the last portrait of Fagerholm, who appears as something of a transitional figure. Fagerholm joined the Salvation Army shortly after his conversion, was recruited by the enigmatic Fredrik Franson for missions, and worked for the Christian and Missionary Alliance in China. Here he found the work physically demanding and his own preparations in terms of education insufficient. Sindenvall remarks that the hard times gave him an opportunity to claim a “colonial hyper-masculinity” (124), but instead Fagerholm reacts critically to what he perceives as a disturbing lack of organization and professionalism. He contacts the more respectable evangelical denomination—the Swedish Missionary Society—and offers his services, something that gives him access to education as well as a fixed salary.

Sidenvall views Fagerholm’s attitudes in light of changing ideals in the evangelical world. The Victorian masculine ideals of hard work, family life, and personal autonomy were giving way to more modern ones. Manliness was now connected to organization, bureaucratization (“scientific management”), efficiency and management skills. The enthusiasm of holiness radicalism was increasingly left behind. Soon, however, Pentecostalism appeared, and Sidenvall closes his study with the suggestion that this movement might be interpreted as a reaction against the increasing professionalization in the evangelical world at large.

Sidenvall offers helpful interpretative frameworks and conclusions regarding Evangelicalism in general and its radical holiness branches in particular. Among the benefits of this study is its conciseness: 189 pages including index, bibliography, and appendices. At times, however, one could have wished for a few more pages devoted to a clearer articulation of conclusions and arguments, and a somewhat greater generosity in the footnotes, especially since Sidenvall uses many sources difficult to access. Sometimes, sources that exist only as “copy with the author” are referenced, and here direct quotations in the footnotes would have been welcomed (e.g., 105, n 37). Other times, the reader is left only with curiosity. I would have liked to know why exactly Fagerholm perceived Franson as “squeamish” (123). Nonetheless, these are marginal remarks about an insightful and carefully presented study.

Reviewed by Jeffrey T. Barker, Associate Professor of Practical Theology, Eastern Nazarene College, Quincy, MA.

Each week as congregations rehearse the Christian Story liturgically, they retell the story of God’s creation, humanity’s fall, and God’s redemptive act in Christ. The Christian Story erupts from the biblical narrative shaping and influencing the congregation’s shared life together. In low sacramental traditions the sermon often functions as the apex in this storytelling. Yet, ironically, Tucker believes the act of preaching often fails to tell the Christian Story well. Pushed to the side, story is replaced with persuasive argumentation, proving or supporting the preacher’s thesis or with a series of unrelated illustrations in service to other points. According to Tucker, these sermonic formats are empty forms masquerading as narrative preaching or storytelling. Tucker desires much more for both the preacher and the listener and believes “that you can greatly improve your preaching by sharpening your storytelling skills” (p. xiii).

An often unexamined question among preachers (and even educators) is: Am I communicating in ways that allow the listener to both comprehend and hold the ideas presented? This book invites the reader, even a seasoned preacher, to examine one’s form of communicating and preaching. Even if one has discovered and owned his/her preaching voice, Tucker still believes it necessary for the preacher to engage in self-examination of his/her sermon delivery. This text, designed primarily for preachers, invites the reader to a specific process of reflection so as to improve one’s preaching.

Before exploring the author’s thesis, it is critical to define two terms which may breed confusion for the reader. Two terms—narrative and storytelling—demand clarification, as both are included in the title and subtitle. For Tucker, narrative preaching or storytelling (he uses these terms interchangeably) shapes and delivers the sermon in story form despite the genre of the biblical text. Jesus the Storyteller becomes the model exemplar throughout the text. With this clarification in place, the reader is able to consider the author’s thesis: preaching can be greatly improved by sharpening storytelling skills.
In *The Preacher as Storyteller*, Tucker leads the reader through three basic moves: the power of story, the process of storytelling, and a journey with storytellers. In the first, Tucker demonstrates the power of story for both preacher and listener and illustrates how one engages in good storytelling. In doing so, he addresses basic objections to storytelling before turning his attention to considering a method for effective narrative preaching or storytelling. The second section invites the reader to learn the basic narrative plot and then to develop and narrate stories in ways that provide handles for listeners to hold onto the sermon’s message. The final section explores lives and sermons of well-known storytelling preachers. Tucker brings us alongside homiletical giants such as Beecher, Spurgeon, Moody, and others, allowing the reader to step into these biographical narratives. Spending time with each of these preachers creates space for the reader to imagine how he/she might stand in the same narrative preaching or storytelling stream as these homiletical giants. In these three simple moves, Tucker tells well the story of telling the story. That is, using the power of story, Tucker narrates a new way of life for the preacher. His method matches his content, showing “the how” of storytelling through telling stories.

Anytime someone considers the relationship between the content and the mode of communication, there is the fear of the loss of content in delivery, a basic objection Tucker addresses in the text. Time and again, he assures the reader that storytelling neither replaces biblical and theological content nor serves as a sideshow to content. Rather, narrative preaching or storytelling challenges the preacher to allow the listener to find him or herself in the story so as to be open and hospitable to that which may both invite and challenge.

Obviously, the book is written to and for preachers. One who preaches regularly will find the practice exercises included at the end of each chapter a great assistance in examining the strengths and weaknesses of one’s preaching. The exercises also serve to reinforce the content of a given chapter. A professor of preaching will find the exercises helpful in giving safe space for young preachers to find their preaching voices. Finally, Tucker challenges all educators to examine their mode of content delivery in the classroom. Might the art of storytelling be utilized even by theologians and historians? Tucker would say “yes”!

It seems Tucker invites the reader to consider the need to be a bi-lingual preacher, translating biblical and theological beliefs and concepts
into a language grasped by the listener. Whether one has been teaching or preaching for 5 years or 25 years, Tucker implores the preacher to engage in a process of sermon examination so as improve one’s preaching and, ultimately, to tell the Christian Story well. In doing so, those in the congregation will find their place in God’s Story as they gather together each Sunday.

Reviewed by Ted A. Campbell, Associate Professor of Church History, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX.

Jason Vickers takes very seriously the challenge to present John Wesley in the light of several perplexities that have troubled Wesley’s interpreters. One is the perplexity of whether we should interpret Wesley as meaning, at least historically, precisely what he says. Another is the perplexity of how Wesley related to the age and the culture in which he functioned. A third of these perplexities, perhaps the one that has proven most difficult for interpreters, is the question of what unites or holds together John Wesley’s theological outlook, on the one hand, and his political and moral thought, on the other. Vickers approaches this third perplexity by answering the second perplexity, that is, by carefully placing Wesley in the context of the eighteenth-century Church of England. In doing so he substantially advances our historical understanding of John Wesley.

Vickers follows some of the best contemporary scholarship on eighteenth-century (Georgian) Anglican culture in arguing that there was strong coherence in the Church of England following the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the Toleration Act of 1689 on two key principles: (a) the more traditional or conservative principle of obedience to the Crown, and (b) the newer and more liberal (in his age) principle of constitutional and parliamentary limitation or restraint of the Crown. The consistent conjunction of these ideas in Georgian Anglicanism has been demonstrated by such contemporary scholars as J. C. D. Clark and William Gibson, and it contradicts a great deal of conventional scholarship that represented the eighteenth-century Anglican Establishment as severely divided between Tory clergymen still holding on to a belief in the absolute divine right of the monarchy, on the one hand, and Whig clergy who were able to justify the 1688 Revolution’s parliamentary abrogation of divine right, on the other. Clark, Gibson, and others show that the great majority of Anglican clergy—and Vickers shows that this included John Wesley—had come to terms with the parliamentary restraint on the monarchy. It is especially important for United States interpreters to understand this,
since North Americans have a tendency to believe an element of our own founding narrative that describes British monarchy as an absolute and unrestrained monarchy, even in 1776.

Vickers is no doubt correct in seeing Wesley as embracing this typical Georgian conjunction of obedience to hierarchical authority (especially the Crown) and constitutional restraint of the monarchy. But despite this, Wesley was not “Mr. Facing Both Ways” on these issues, and Vickers shows that, when Wesley explicitly stated his political views, he unabashedly affirmed the conservative principle of “passive obedience” to the Crown and to traditional hierarchical authorities, and he did not affirm as clearly the Whiggish principle of constitutional and parliamentary restraint of the monarchy. Wesley was thus like other politicians and clergy who could remain committed to one side or the other of this cultural and moral divide while also affirming the Georgian conjunction of these principles.

Conservatives of Wesley’s age had come around to an affirmation of constitutional restraint on the monarchy in the decades following the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Vickers shows, following the scholarship of Theodore Weber, that this was in fact the case with John Wesley, whose particular political persuasion Weber and Vickers describe as “Tory constitutionalism” (Vickers’ expression) or “organic constitutionalism” (Weber’s expression). That is to say, Wesley, while affirming the legitimacy of the House of Orange and the Hanoverian monarchs, and thus the principle of restraint enshrined in the Glorious Revolution, continued to lean toward the conservative affirmation of passive obedience to the Crown. Vickers’ work goes beyond Weber’s in showing the consistency of this point of view with more recent scholarship (such as that of Clark) that gives a very broad context in which this portrayal of Wesley’s political thought makes very good sense.

To what extent, then, does Vickers’ work resolve the perplexity of reconciling Wesley’s theological and political/moral views? It certainly places the question in a much more adequate historical framework than earlier scholarship has done, and in this sense it is a convincing case. But there are points at which Vickers’ account strains to make his case for consistency. In an early instance in the book, he sees Susanna Wesley’s taking leadership of a group in the Epworth community as involving only a unique “application of the principle of subordination” (10) rather than undermining that principle. Granted, we can define the term “subordina-
tion” in a different way than Anglicans had done, did her actions not contradict the specific historic meaning of “passive obedience” to the monarchy and the traditional social and ecclesiastical hierarchy?

A more serious test might be the ordinations of 1784. Were they consistent with the “Tory constitutionalism” in the society and the Church that Vickers describes? Only, I would say, if one can grant some of Wesley’s rarified distinctions, such as his claim that in ordaining for America he did not invade the right or prerogative of Anglican bishops. But he did. Anglicans in North America remained under the authority of the Bishop of London, even after the American Revolution. John Wesley violated specific canons of the Church of England governing ordinations, and he violated the provisions of the BCP ordinal. In justifying his actions, he did not claim to follow Anglican precedent or church law, but instead appealed to the biblical meaning of *episkopos*, the example of the early church, and the pragmatic needs of the American Methodists for ordained clergy to celebrate the sacraments.

Did not his actions in this case, and more importantly, his stated justifications of his actions imply that ancient precedents and pragmatic concerns could overturn conventional hierarchical authorities? Would this count as a case of a distinctive “application” of the principle of subordination and passive obedience? Not, I think, if one means specifically obedience to the Crown and the hierarchy of the Church of England, and not if this in turn implies obedience or subordination to the laws (canons) and liturgy of that Church. Charles Wesley’s famous objections to the ordinations reveal Charles’ sense that his brother had in fact usurped the role and authority of the bishop: “Hands on himself he laid and took / an apostolic chair. . . .”

There are, of course, many cases where Wesley acted and justified his actions on pragmatic or idealistic or scriptural grounds, and I would see many of these cases standing in tension with the general political and theological orientation that Vickers describes. Sometimes, I think, American interpreters of Wesley (I include myself) really do work a little overtime trying to make him thoroughly consistent. Nevertheless, Vickers’ argument for Wesley’s general theological and political orientation stands, even if it stands in tension with instances of Wesley’s more pragmatic or idealistic reasoning. This book presents a fine argument in a small scope, and it very substantially advances our understanding of John Wesley against his own very specific theological and political context.

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The name of Francis Asbury stands for American Methodism just as surely as that of John Wesley represents the British origins of the movement. Wesley, of course, appointed Asbury, sending him (among others) to America as a traveling preacher. An important difference between these two “fathers,” however, appears in the historical record of Asbury’s extraordinary success at exercising authority within the increasingly democratic and egalitarian American setting, even as Wesley’s influence in the new republic was diminishing. Indeed, Asbury’s influence upon the shape of American Methodism during the revolutionary period was unsurpassed, even by those whose names (e.g., Peter Cartwright, Thomas Coke, and William McKendree) are equally familiar to students of American religious history.

The record of Asbury’s success has long been obscured in biographies intent on “bending” his legacy (405) to a particular design, portraying him as “the patron saint of decency and decorum” (W. W. Sweet) or as “a kingpin at conferences who ruled with an iron hand” (L. C. Rudolph). In American Saint, John Wigger offers a balanced and accessible biography based on the author’s careful scholarship of revolutionary-era American Methodism (see his Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). In American Saint, Wigger documents the social, familial, and spiritual dynamics that account for Asbury’s success and offers solid answers to perennial questions. Given Wesley’s anti-revolutionary stance and the widespread animosity toward Methodist preachers, how did the fledging American movement survive the Revolution and thrive thereafter? Given Asbury’s disdain for politics and his aversion to controversy, how did he manage opposition and forestall schisms? In sum, how were democracy and episcopacy reconciled through Asbury’s administration?

Chapter 1 describes the crucible of Asbury’s early spiritual formation, including his limited education, his apprenticeship in a society of artisans advancing their estates through personal industry, and his father’s
undisclosed moral failure. Both Frank (as he was then called) and his mother, Elizabeth, became converts to Methodism as she invited evangelical speakers of all stripes into their home. This was little more than a decade after the convening of the first Methodist Conference (June, 1844), and the couple exemplified the social and moral transformation for which Methodism would become known.

Chapter 2 describes Asbury the “young preacher” who, by age 16, prayed and exhorted at class meetings, and by 23 was admitted to Wesley’s Conference and assigned to a challenging circuit. He soon volunteered to preach in America, and his departure likely was hastened by his mother’s overweening attachment to him following the death of his sister (42, 45).

In Chapter 3, “The Promise of Discipline,” Asbury begins the American mission that will engage him for the rest of his life. Arriving in Philadelphia (at age 26) to a rising tide of American prosperity, Asbury was unimpressed by the extravagant city churches to which he was invited to preach. He was, moreover, dismayed at his fellow missionaries’ disinterest in organizing class meetings, and the lack of “a circulation of preachers to avoid partiality and popularity” (48). In Asbury, Wesley had a preacher “fixed on the Methodist plan” and “determined to make a stand against all partiality.” Of those Wesley sent to the colonies, Asbury alone felt the call of the unconverted masses scattered throughout the countryside and understood that America’s westward growth would soon outpace the Methodist movement.

Southern Methodism (chapter 4), Asbury soon recognized, was likely to follow an entirely different path from the northern church, thus threatening to fragment the movement from the outset. While Wesley’s other preachers stayed in the cities, Asbury preached throughout the countryside before heading south. There he recognized significant cultural differences and took a fresh approach. While others’ “ideas about itinerancy and discipline . . . (were) becoming less distinctively Methodist over time,” Asbury’s vision for the Church grew alongside his new sense of identity and purpose. In England he had been Frank, the apprentice; here in America he was Francis, one “capable of providing definition and direction to a movement that had drifted from its course” (55).

The next two chapters describe Methodism under siege, both from without and within. When the Revolution arrived (chapter 5), there was no doubt of Wesley’s opposition to the American quest for independence.
Most itinerants returned to England and membership in the Methodist congregations fell by half. Seeing the war as a mere distraction from eternal matters, Asbury adopted a neutral stance, refusing to take the Maryland oath of loyalty (to continue preaching), but also refusing to quit the country. Afterward, he traveled perpetually, rebuilding the connection (107). Ultimately, as Wigger shows, the war worked to Methodism’s advantage, accelerating the “process by which ordinary Americans became less deferential, less willing to accept traditional notions of hierarchy and patronage, more inclined to think of themselves inherently the equal of anyone else” (108). Asbury’s appreciation of the situation was behind his success.

The “other revolution” (chapter 6), Asbury’s next great challenge, was the sacramental controversy—the problem of whether American Methodist preachers could baptize or preside over the Lord’s Supper when they had not been ordained. Southern preachers had contemplated self-ordination, a step which could have permanently separated southern Methodism from Wesley and the movement’s historical connections (113). Avoiding controversy or a show of power, Asbury worked behind the scenes to reach a compromise. Through his relentless travel and preaching, he solidified his influence over the preachers in both the North and South.

The next few chapters set the stage for the founding event of American Methodism, the Christmas Conference of 1784. Instead of relying on Wesley’s appointment, Asbury looked to his election by the gathered American conferences as the basis of his authority; in rapid succession he was ordained deacon, elder, and superintendent. When Wesley later appointed Whatcoat Superintendent, Asbury was “promoted” to bishop, outraging Wesley and embittering relations between them (163).

The first half of the book (nine chapters) focuses on the period beginning with the birth of American Methodism and continuing through the explosive growth of the 1780s. Subsequent chapters describe the balance of Asbury’s career, during which he faced challenges such as the attrition of itinerates due to marriage, schisms prompted by ambitious preachers, and irreconcilable differences over slavery. In the face of sickness, hardship, and impossible odds, Asbury remained steadfast: “I have one rule, not to do things in great haste; another, not to act at a distance when I can come near” (234).

Wigger’s narrative details Asbury’s intellectual and devotional life in relation to his ministry, with an eye toward concerns that Wesleyans will
appreciate. Biographical sketches of Asbury’s contemporaries include Richard Allen, Devereux Jarratt, Jesse Lee, James O’Kelly, Robert Strawbridge, and many others. Wigger supersedes the traditional leadership typology—charismatic, intellectual, or autocratic—with his insightful characterization of Asbury as an *American Saint* (3-4). The title captures the humility and determination of a minister who constantly denied himself in order to glorify God, and the resulting biography offers a case study in identity construction, the paradigm for which is found in Daniel Walker Howe’s *Making the American Self* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1997). The resulting biography demonstrates the vitality and social integrity of Methodism in revolutionary-era America, through a sustained illustration of it in the life and motivations of its chief exponent. In our day when skeptics view evangelical religion as antithetical to authenticity, the value of such a *life* is not easily exaggerated.
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