

# ***Wesleyan Theological Journal***

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## EDITORIAL NOTES

The future is in God's hands, of course. But what is and can be known about it? What of millennial dreams and prophetic calendars and charts? What of the presumed signs of our times? How should life today be impacted by the hope of tomorrow? These and related issues comprise the complexity of Christian eschatology.

The Wesleyan theological tradition has been rather modest in its apocalyptic speculations and claims. Soteriology has been on center stage. Hope has been seen as central for enabling the present engagement of believers as Kingdom representatives, as covenant partners with God. With hope central, but not supplanting soteriology, and with an appropriate mystery maintained, the tradition of the Wesleys has judged Christ as focal and love as key. Note, for example, the essay of Jerry McCant who argues that, in often-misunderstood Corinthian passages, Paul's concern is not eschatological speculation, but inversion of false criteria of apostleship evoked by a gnosticizing Corinthian eschatology.

Future anticipation is proleptic, anchored in the Jesus of history. Jesus is the primary hermeneutic for reading the Hebrew past and the future of all creation. The good news is less that Jesus is coming again, though he clearly is, and more that he already has come and now is working out the victory already won. To be eschatological Christians is to be both expectant about *then* and responsible about *now*. Lyle Dabney seeks to explain how the work of Jürgen Moltmann is helpful to the Wesleyan tradition in this regard.

The twenty-ninth annual meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society convened at Southern Nazarene University in Bethany, Oklahoma, in November, 1993. It addressed the theme "Wesleyan Theology and Eschatology." The essays in this issue are selected from the many presentations

made at this meeting, including the presidential address by Susie Stanley. Special thanks go to Dr. David Bundy and Dr. D. William Faupel, members of the Editorial Committee, who assisted with the difficult selection process.

With the publication of Jürgen Moltmann's *The Theology of Hope* (1964), much attention has been drawn to the crucial interaction of the *already* and the *not-yet* of Christian faith. May these present articles further enhance insight into the eschatological issues and inspire incarnation of their current implications. As Michael Lodahl puts it, John Wesley's approach "encourages us to do what we can to *serve* the present age, indeed to *preserve* it, rather than to flee it or hope for its soon demise."

B. L. C.

# **“TELL ME THE OLD, OLD STORY”: AN ANALYSIS OF AUTOBIOGRAPHIES BY HOLINESS WOMEN**

by

**Susie C. Stanley**

Autobiographies “draw us as surely as we are drawn to the pages of *People* magazine in the dentist’s waiting room.”<sup>1</sup> The person making this statement, however, apparently had not read some holiness autobiographies! Fortunately, another scholar observes: “There is less concern now with prescriptive definitions of a ‘true’ or ‘good’ autobiography.”<sup>2</sup> Many holiness autobiographies would be disregarded if literary merit were the sole criterion for determining their value.

Autobiographical theory explores issues such as a psychological analysis of the self, the subversiveness of women’s autobiographies, silences in and fictional dimensions of autobiography, and differences between autobiographies written by men and those written by women. This article focuses on the subversive nature of women’s autobiographies by examining the writings of six women holiness preachers: Mary Still Adams, Mary Lee Cagle, Mary Cole, Sarah Cooke, Mary A. Glaser, and Alma White.

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<sup>1</sup>Margo Culley, “What a Piece of Work Is ‘Woman’! An Introduction,” in *American Women’s Autobiography: Fea(s)ts of Memory*, ed. Margo Culley (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 3.

<sup>2</sup>Estelle C. Jelinek, *The Tradition of Women’s Autobiography: From Antiquity to the Present* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986), 4.

Another concern for readers of autobiographies is the argument over the death of the author, an argument being waged among literary theorists. Michel Foucault asks: "What matter who's speaking?"<sup>3</sup> Mary Still Adams seemed to be speaking of the death of the author long before this phrase entered the vocabulary of literary criticism. She wrote: "I have also prayed that the sketches and incidents be so clothed with the power of the Holy Ghost that the writer may be lost sight of in the things written."<sup>4</sup> While Foucault and others argue for anonymity, in this study the author must be identified because I am investigating women who challenged woman's sphere. Men were not and are not expected to conform to societal expectations which would confine them to the role of husband or father. The sex of the author is critical.

As the canon has expanded to include autobiographies of women, the tendency has been to establish an exclusive list of literary classics. Margo Culley advises scholars to "resist the temptation to establish a canon of 'great books' by women and to stop there."<sup>5</sup> Estelle Jelinek lists three prominent types of women autobiographers in the late nineteenth century: writers, pioneers who traveled West, and feminists and reformers.<sup>6</sup> Spiritual autobiography should be included as a fourth category. A preliminary bibliography of Wesleyan/Holiness women clergy lists over seventy-five autobiographies. The canon is incomplete without their inclusion. While many would not qualify based on literary merit, the books provide important information about women who rejected the confines of woman's sphere by preaching.

Phebe Davidson in her 1991 dissertation examines spiritual autobiographies written by women, including African American

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<sup>3</sup>Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 138. He is quoting Samuel Beckett (*Texts for Nothing*, trans. Beckett [London: Calder & Boyars, 1974], 16) whom he cites on page 115. For a brief critique of the author's "death," see Liz Stanley, *The Auto/biographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/Biography* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 16-17.

<sup>4</sup>Mary Still Adams, *Autobiography of Mary Still Adams or, "In God We Trust"* (Los Angeles: By the author, 1893), 4.

<sup>5</sup>Margo Culley, "Women's Vernacular Literature: Teaching the Mother Tongue," in *Women's Personal Narratives: Essays in Criticism and Pedagogy*, ed. Leonore Hoffman and Margo Culley (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1985), 16.

<sup>6</sup>Jelinek, *Tradition of Women's Autobiography*, 97.

evangelists, but she is unaware of the writings of white women evangelists. She speculates: “Very probably the spiritual narratives of white women are buried somewhere—in odd attics and library archives that no one has gotten around to exploring.”<sup>7</sup> This presentation represents an effort to bring some of these primary sources out of the attics or archives and add autobiographies of holiness women to the canon. Since stories by several nineteenth-century African American holiness women have been reprinted and incorporated into the canon, I have omitted them from this analysis.<sup>8</sup>

My purpose is two-fold: to introduce more holiness women’s autobiographies into the canon of women’s autobiography and to challenge Virginia Brereton’s assertion that the doctrine of holiness mitigates against women’s quest for equality and autonomy. Brereton claims in her book on women’s conversions: “Nor is it difficult to comprehend the disgust which holiness teachings would elicit in those who have worked for and called for greater autonomy and self-reliance for women.”<sup>9</sup>

Carolyn Heilbrun bemoans the fact that, contrary to the experience of men, women have no “alternative stories” to function as scripts for them to follow.<sup>10</sup> She argues that men have had access to stories told by

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<sup>7</sup>Phebe Davidson, “Workings of the Spirit: Religious Impulse in Selected Autobiographies of American Women.” Ph.D. diss. (Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 1991), 294.

<sup>8</sup>Several African American women’s autobiographies have been reprinted. For instance, for the autobiographies of Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw and Julia Foote, see William L. Andrews, ed., *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women’s Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 1986; *Spiritual Narrative: Maria W. Stewart, Jarena Lee, Julia Foote and Virginia W. Broughton* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Frances Smith Foster, “Neither Auction Block nor Pedestal: The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee, A Coloured Lady,” in *The Female Autograph: Theory and Practice of Autobiography from the Tenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Domna C. Stanton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 126-151; and Amanda Smith, *An Autobiography: The Story of the Lord’s Dealings with Mrs. Amanda Smith, The Colored Evangelist* (Chicago: Meyer & Brothers, Publishers, 1893; reprint, New York: Garland Publishing, 1987). Davidson considers Lee and Smith (Davidson, “Workings of the Spirit,” 219-246, 251-292).

<sup>9</sup>Virginia Lieson Brereton, *From Sin to Salvation: Stories of Women’s Conversions, 1800 to the Present* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 67.

<sup>10</sup>Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman’s Life* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988), 39.

other men that offer many possibilities for imitation. Holiness women are exceptions to Heilbrun's generalization in that they had alternative stories written by women such as Madam Guyon, Lady Maxwell, Hester Ann Rogers, and Mary Fletcher. The fact that Madam Guyon's and Hester Ann Rogers' autobiographies remain in print witnesses to their ongoing influence.<sup>11</sup> They continue to serve as alternative stories for holiness women.

Guyon (1648-1717) was a French mystic associated with Quietism. She emphasized a religion of the heart and engaged in an itinerant ministry, sharing with others her understanding of the holy life. John Wesley reprinted her autobiography.

Wesley instructed his followers to write journals, so it is not surprising that many of them left extensive journals, some of which were published after they died. Spiritual autobiography played an important role in Methodist class meetings and worship since exhorters centered on their religious quest, offering the opportunity to formulate an oral account of their lives.

Maxwell, Fletcher, and Rogers were contemporaries of John Wesley and worked with him in various capacities.<sup>12</sup> Lady Maxwell (c.1742-1810) founded a school, operated two Sunday schools, and counseled clergy. She also arranged public worship services, a duty generally conducted by men. Hester Ann Rogers (1756-1794), who was known for her piety, did not preach, but she did lead Methodist classes and bands and called on the sick. Mary Bosanquet Fletcher (1739-1815) was a school mistress who later performed a joint ministry with her husband at Madeley. Besides leading classes and bands, she also preached. She continued her ministries for thirty years after her husband died. Twenty editions of her journal had been printed by 1850.

The autobiographies of Madame Guyon and those women who worked with John Wesley provided alternative stories for holiness women, stories of women who engaged in public ministries. They also played an important role in their spiritual growth. Mary Cole mentioned reading the autobiographies of Mary Fletcher and Hester Ann Rogers,

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<sup>11</sup>Allegheny Publications (2161 Woodsdale Road, Salem, Ohio 44460) advertised *Autobiography of Mrs. Hester Ann Rogers and Madame Guyon-Autobiography* in its June 1993 catalog.

<sup>12</sup>Biographical information on Maxwell, Rogers, and Fletcher is from Earl Kent Brown's sketches of these women in *Women of Mr. Wesley's Methodism* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1983), 116-154, 199-217.

while Sarah Cooke was “wonderfully helped” by reading the lives of these two women.<sup>13</sup> Cooke also listed the life of Lady Maxwell among the books she had read and sprinkled her writing with quotations from Guyon.<sup>14</sup> She expressed dismay when her autobiographies of Fletcher and Guyon were among her possessions lost in the Chicago fire of 1871.<sup>15</sup>

Cooke highlighted the spiritual value of autobiographies: “In traveling, I often meet with Christians of deep experience who received their first religious light, especially on holiness, through the lives and writings of . . . Mrs. Fletcher, Mrs. H. A. Rogers and others. . . . I know of no books, outside of the Bible, like these autobiographies.”<sup>16</sup>

Glaser credited an unnamed autobiographer for spiritual guidance: “I had no one to instruct me in the way of holiness, but I had a book given me to read the experience of a good Christian woman, and while reading it, I was convinced I was living beneath my Christian privileges.”<sup>17</sup>

Women were not defensive about writing their life stories because there were precedents within their religious tradition. They addressed an audience who fostered this activity and recognized the importance of autobiographies. Writers such as Adams did not attempt to justify their autobiographical work: “I have no apology to present for offering this sketch of my life-work to the people.”<sup>18</sup> Adams appeared to be unaware of the subversive implications of her undertaking. She was not defensive because she was merely doing what others had done. Feminist scholars define women’s autobiography as subversive activity which challenges the boundaries established by society to confine women’s activities.<sup>19</sup> Cagle illustrated the subversive nature of her writing by adding her sermon “Woman’s Right to Preach” at the end of her story.

In the following pages, I will focus briefly on the authors’ spiritual journeys and their experience as women preachers, concentrating on their

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<sup>13</sup>Mary Cole, *Trials and Triumphs of Faith* (Anderson, Ind.: Gospel Trumpet Company, 1914), 68; and Sarah A. Cooke, *The Handmaiden of the Lord, or Wayside Sketches* (Chicago: T. B. Arnold, Publisher, 1896), 37.

<sup>14</sup>Cooke, *Handmaiden of the Lord*, 49, 53, 65, 158, 197 and 284.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>17</sup>Mary A. Glaser, *Wonderful Leadings* (Allenton, Pa.: By the author, 1893), 14.

<sup>18</sup>Adams, *Autobiography*, 3.

<sup>19</sup>Leah D. Hewill, *Autobiographical Tighropes* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 3; and Culley, “What a Piece of Work,” 9.

successful efforts to challenge the restrictive sphere that society sought to impose on them. The appendix includes a brief synopsis of the lives of the six women I am considering.

## Conversion

Each woman provided an account of her conversion, often recording the conversation that occurred at the time. Their ages at conversion ranged from ten (Adams) to twenty-three (Cooke), with the other four being in their teens. Cole and Cooke were converted through the efforts of siblings while others experienced conversion in a church setting, either a regular service, a revival, or a camp meeting. Cole and White specified the date of their conversions, and two recorded the names of the revivalists under whose preaching they were converted. White is the only one of the six who chronicles a search of several years before experiencing conversion.

These women actively sought conversion, reflecting their Arminian heritage with its emphasis on the freedom of the individual to respond to God's call to salvation. This represents a shift from the spiritual narratives of Puritan women who played a passive part in their conversions, believing that God predestines the elect.<sup>20</sup>

## Sanctification

Following conversion, the women pursued the possibility of sanctification, a second distinct work of grace. Like conversion, the quest for sanctification required the seeker to play an active role. Referring to her experience in the third person, Phoebe Palmer wrote: "she had been but a co-worker with God in this matter."<sup>21</sup> Basing their understanding of sanctification on Palmer's theology of holiness, Adams and Cooke used Palmer's "altar" terminology with reference to their own consecration preceding sanctification.<sup>22</sup> The person who counseled Adams shared

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<sup>20</sup>Narratives of Puritan women were generally edited by clergy and published after the women died. Ann Taves, "Self and God in the Early Published Memoirs of New England Women," in *American Women's Autobiography: Fea(s)ts of Memory*, 57.

<sup>21</sup>Phoebe Palmer, *The Way of Holiness with Notes by the Way: Being a Narrative of Religious Experience Resulting from a Determination To Be a Bible Christian* (New York: Lane and C. B. Tippet, 1845, 2nd ed.; reprint, Salem, Ohio: Schmul Publishing Co., 1988), 14.

<sup>22</sup>Adams, *Autobiography*, 67; and Cooke, *Handmaiden of the Lord*, 40, 259.

Palmer's view of how sanctification could be achieved: "The altar sanctifies the gift, and if you have complied with God's requirements, God will and has done his part."<sup>23</sup> Cooke had read Palmer's *Entire Devotion* while Cole mentioned having read *Faith and Its Effects*, also by Palmer.<sup>24</sup>

Cole's account of her experience also follows Palmer's dual emphasis on consecration and faith: "I simply consecrated all a living sacrifice, and reckoned myself dead unto sin and alive unto God through our Lord Jesus Christ. I met the conditions and believed that the work was done."<sup>25</sup> While Cagle "at once sought and obtained the blessing" within three days after "she got the light on holiness,"<sup>26</sup> White spent at least ten years as a seeker before finally claiming the experience by faith. Like Palmer, White testified that no feeling initially accompanied her sanctification.<sup>27</sup> Along with consecration and faith, Cole followed Palmer's admonition to testify and shared her experience with others shortly after she had claimed it.<sup>28</sup>

### Call to Preach

Several of the women related sanctification to their subsequent ability to preach. For White, sanctification enabled her to overcome her natural shyness and the "man-fearing spirit" which constrained her when she considered preaching before her sanctification.<sup>29</sup> Cagle's process of consecration included the willingness to preach. She had felt called to preach earlier in life, but with sanctification the call "was stronger than ever before."<sup>30</sup>

Likewise, in her examination of three African American holiness women preachers (Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw, and Julia Foote), Liz Stanley stresses the importance of sanctification in legitimizing their "entirely

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<sup>23</sup>Adams, *Autobiography*, 67.

<sup>24</sup>Cooke, *Handmaiden of the Lord*, 259; and Cole, *Trials and Triumphs*, 68.

<sup>25</sup>Cole, *Trials and Triumphs*, 41.

<sup>26</sup>Mary Lee Cagle, *Life and Work of Mary Lee Cagle: An Autobiography* (Kansas City, Mo.: Nazarene Publishing House, 1928), 21. For the most part, Cagle wrote in the third person.

<sup>27</sup>Alma White, *The Story of My Life and the Pillar of Fire*, 5 vols. (Zarephath, N.J.: Pillar of Fire, 1935-1943), 1:410, 2:206.

<sup>28</sup>Cole, *Trials and Triumphs*, 42.

<sup>29</sup>White, *Story of My Life*, 1:354.

<sup>30</sup>Cagle, *Life and Work*, 21.

deviant and unwomanly behavior: public preaching and thus taking on a role preserved for a male church hierarchy.”<sup>31</sup> Adams viewed sanctification as preparation for preaching. Equating the experience of Jesus’ followers at Pentecost with sanctification, she quoted Acts 1:4: “And I did not want to go out without being wholly equipped for the warfare. Therefore I made up my mind to do as Christ had commanded his disciples to do, ‘tarry at Jerusalem until endowed with power.’”<sup>32</sup> She received “the joy and power of the Holy Ghost” when she was sanctified.<sup>33</sup> Other women also spoke of the power of the Holy Spirit or the power of God which enabled them to preach.<sup>34</sup>

Glaser’s preaching focused on her testimony of healing. She reported that her healing occurred on 22 August 1883 after sixteen months of illness; and that on “that memorable night” God spoke to her: “Yes, you are healed, you are to obey my voice in all things; you are to go where I command you, and speak what I give you to speak.”<sup>35</sup> She believed God caused her sickness as the means of “crucifying me to become conformed to His own will.”<sup>36</sup> Glaser reported: “But if I would shrink from duty, I

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<sup>31</sup>Liz Stanley, *Auto/biographical I*, 112; see also 113-114. Likewise, Andrews highlights the relationship between sanctification and preaching for these three women. They traced their self-reliance to their sanctification experience which, to them, offered “ample sanction for acts that many, especially men, would judge as rebelliously self-assertive and destructive of good order in the church” (Andrews, *Sisters of the Spirit*, 14).

<sup>32</sup>Adams, *Autobiography*, 66-67.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 5. Brereton speaks of power in the context of pentecostalism (Brereton, *From Sin to Salvation*, 95). However, she claims that power “is a word seldom emphasized in the narratives in connection with the experience of conversion or holiness” (70). For information on the relationship between sanctification and power, see Susie Stanley, “Empowered Foremothers: Wesleyan/Holiness Women Speak to Today’s Christian Feminists,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 24 (1989): 103-116; and Susie Stanley, “What Sanctification Means to Me: ‘Holiness Is Power’” in *Sanctification: Discussion Papers in Preparation for the Fourth International Dialogue on Doctrinal Issues* (Anderson, Ind.: Anderson University School of Theology, 1989), 17-24.

<sup>34</sup>For instance, see Cooke, *Handmaiden of the Lord*, 22.

<sup>35</sup>Glaser, *Wonderful Leadings*, 54-55. For many women, the call to preach was related to personal illness. Examples include Margery Kempe, Jarena Lee, and Amanda Smith (Davidson, “Workings of the Spirit,” 271).

<sup>36</sup>Glaser, *Wonderful Leadings*, 48. Glaser believed that “sin always lies at the root of sickness” (70). White believed that physical problems sometimes were a message from God trying to show her something (White, *Story of My Life*, 3:66).

soon began to lose strength of body.”<sup>37</sup> She was convinced her continued good health depended on her willingness to tell others about her healing.

Churches in the holiness movement are among those that value a divine call to ministry. Cole experienced her call when she was about twenty-two. However, it was seven years before she began preaching.<sup>38</sup> As a child and young adult she was sickly. She reported being healed at age twenty-five but did not explain the four-year delay before she entered evangelistic work.

White believed she was called to preach within a week of her conversion, but she assumed her ministry would take place on the mission field.<sup>39</sup> It was not until after her sanctification that she inaugurated her public ministry, eventually founding the Pillar of Fire.

While Cagle professed that God had called her to ministry when she was a child, she initially expected, like White, that she would serve as a missionary since this was the only outlet for women’s ministry in her church. In her early twenties, she was reclaimed for Christ, and at that time “the call came clear and plain,” but it was a call to preach in the United States rather than a call to the foreign mission field. She preferred the missions option: “To go as a missionary would have been a summer vacation, compared to preaching the gospel at home, for all the people opposed it then.”<sup>40</sup>

In the meantime, she married Robert L. Harris, an evangelist, and traveled with him. When her husband was on his deathbed, she bargained with God that she would preach if God healed him. “God seemed to speak back in thunderous tones. ‘Whether I heal your husband or not, will you do what I want you to do?’ And then came the most bloody battle of all her life—it raged hot and long.”<sup>41</sup> She finally answered yes. Her husband subsequently died, and she became co-pastor of the church he had founded in Milan, Tennessee, before initiating her evangelistic ministry and founding numerous other churches.

God called Cooke to the ministry as she was walking across the Madison Street bridge in Chicago:

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<sup>37</sup>Glaser, *Wonderful Leadings*, 117.

<sup>38</sup>Cole, *Trials and Triumphs*, 50-52, 54.

<sup>39</sup>White, *Story of My Life*, 1:161.

<sup>40</sup>Cagle, *Life and Work*, 21.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, 24.

The Lord in His tender compassion spoke to me in these never-forgotten words: “Lift up your voice like a trumpet, lift it up and be not afraid. Say unto the people, behold your God.” No doubt, from that hour, has ever rested on me about woman’s speaking in the churches; no doubt about my own call from His own Spirit to go forth in His name and preach the gospel.<sup>42</sup>

Like Cooke, Cagle and Glaser never doubted their call to ministry.<sup>43</sup> Adams, however, initially tested her call. If the call was valid, she asked that one person respond to her sermon. Six people came to the altar for salvation following her message, so for Adams the matter was settled.<sup>44</sup>

### **Opposition to Preaching**

Each woman experienced opposition to her preaching. In some cases, family members raised objections. Cagle’s brother-in-law said that if she preached his children would never call her Aunt again.<sup>45</sup> White’s husband often opposed her preaching, but it was generally due to the content of her sermons rather than the act of preaching itself.<sup>46</sup>

Women spoke of opposition in general terms and also provided specific examples. The Methodist church in her hometown refused Cagle the use of its pulpit, so Missionary Baptists offered her their building. She reported that “as usual, she had to preach on ‘Women’s Right to Preach.’”<sup>47</sup> The phrase “as usual” reveals that this was a common sermon topic. Cole, too, encountered repeated disapproval of her preaching, at least in the early years of her evangelist work: “At nearly every meeting I had to explain the Scriptural teaching on this subject.”<sup>48</sup> White also spoke frequently on women in ministry. Glaser reported finding prejudice everywhere. Her strategy was to “leave it all with the Lord as there is a day coming when these things will be made right.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Cooke, *Handmaiden of the Lord*, 34.

<sup>43</sup>Cagle, *Life and Work*, 24; and Glaser, *Wonderful Leadings*, 143.

<sup>44</sup>Adams, *Autobiography*, 99.

<sup>45</sup>Cagle, *Life and Work*, 21.

<sup>46</sup>For two examples, see White, *Story of My Life*, 1:429, 2:64-65. Kent White questioned his wife’s interpretation of Scripture.

<sup>47</sup>Cagle, *Life and Work*, 61.

<sup>48</sup>Cole, *Trials and Triumphs*, 85.

<sup>49</sup>Glaser, *Wonderful Leadings*, 145.

Women often faced hostility in churches where they preached. One Sunday morning, Adams filled Rev. Marshall's pulpit at his request. Entering the sanctuary, she discovered the Bible and a large hymnbook were on a small stand in front of the chancel instead of at their usual location on the pulpit. The church board had moved the books to indicate their displeasure at their pastor's choice of a woman supply preacher. Adams recorded her response to the incident:

However, I being ignorant of the animosity to our sex, gathered up the ponderous books, and took my place in the pulpit. It was not an hour until I had delivered them my message, and the Lord had so blessed us they did not mind if I was a woman. I will add, if God did cause Aaron's rod to bud and bloom in the hand of Moses, he used me on that day to the opening of the eyes of the blind.<sup>50</sup>

Cooke spoke of one occasion where a man heckled her during her sermon at a soup kitchen in Chicago. Afterward, she passed him as she walked down from the platform and he spoke to her, judging her "a first-rate preacher."<sup>51</sup> He had changed his mind after hearing her preach.

Cagle and Cole encountered rumors intended to discredit their ministry. In Cagle's case, the male ministers in one city spread falsehoods seeking to terminate a revival she was leading. She claimed that "if one-hundredth part that was told on her had been true, she should have been in the penitentiary instead of preaching the gospel." In situations such as this one, she relied on the promise of Isaiah 54:17: "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper: and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord."<sup>52</sup> Rumors which circulated in Anson, Texas, spread the lie that she had robbed the United States mail, run a house of ill-fame and given away her four children.<sup>53</sup> Cagle reported that it would be impossible to give away her children since she was childless! Regarding Cole, the rumor circulated that she was one of the James Boys, the famous outlaws, disguised as a woman.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Adams, *Autobiography*, 147.

<sup>51</sup>Cooke, *Handmaiden of the Lord*, 129.

<sup>52</sup>Cagle, *Life and Work*, 80.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>54</sup>Cole, *Trials and Triumphs*, 106.

## Challenging Woman's Sphere

The women were well aware of the fact that their preaching defied the prevailing attitude that woman's proper place was in the home. Their public activities undermined the social construction of gender based on essentialist claims that women either by "nature" or by "God's design" could not preach. Women preachers escaped the culturally-constructed sphere which had been designed to confine all women, including them, to the home. Several women attributed opposition to the devil. Cole claimed: "The devil tried to carry out his design to defeat the Lord's plan in regard to me."<sup>55</sup> White observed: "Meanwhile, the enemy kept busy in the churches. The pastors said it was a woman's place to stay at home and look after husband and children."<sup>56</sup> Adams recalled the diabolical temptation she faced when she left two children with their father while she went to a preaching engagement:

The tempter came to me like a flood, saying, "what a fool you are to keep preaching against all odds;" there was not an argument in all his devilish mind which he did not use. He spoke of our poverty and of my leaving my children without a mother's care, suggesting that in all probability they would be dead upon my return home. The more he tempted me the more I looked through faith to God, who then and there turned into a present help in time of need, and filled my soul with power.<sup>57</sup>

God gave her power to combat the temptation to conform to woman's sphere and stay home.

When Adams received calls to preach, she did not stop to ask about leaving her seven children: "Oh! no, but I answered at once, 'here Lord I am, send me.'"<sup>58</sup> If a trustworthy person was not available to watch them, she took her children with her. They never disturbed anyone while she preached. In the fall of 1868 Adams' baby daughter Mattie was deathly ill. When a doctor arrived, Adams left her in his care and went to preach before a congregation of several thousand. After the sermon, she saw her husband in the audience holding the baby. Since he looked happy, she assumed, correctly, that the baby was out of danger.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 52.

<sup>56</sup>White, *Story of My Life*, 2:30.

<sup>57</sup>Adams, *Autobiography*, 133.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 150-151.

Glaser was understandably defensive about her situation. Her husband previously had abandoned her. Members of her church and others were unsympathetic when she was “called to leave her family to go to work for the Master.”<sup>60</sup> Likewise, her children questioned her decision to leave home to carry out the work God had called her to do.<sup>61</sup> When her oldest daughter wrote that the youngest child, Ellie, who was twelve, was so homesick for her mother that she cried, Glaser’s heart ached:

All I could do was to take it to the Lord in prayer and lay my burden at his feet. I wrote to them as comfortingly as I could, and told them to be reconciled to the will of God. I prayed that they might see and understand that it was the Lord’s will to leave them, to give all the honor and praise to Him. He did not answer my prayer.<sup>62</sup>

Along with the belief that her ministry was God’s will, Glaser justified her long absences from home on the pragmatic grounds that God blessed her labors. She also argued that she was unable to perform housework due to ill health, but her physical problems disappeared when she engaged in ministry.<sup>63</sup>

While all the women challenged the notion of woman’s sphere by preaching, White expanded the argument by contending that women should take an active role in the political arena as well as in the religious realm. She celebrated the passage of suffrage for women in 1920 and supported the Equal Rights Amendment when it was first introduced in Congress.<sup>64</sup> White defined “religious and political equality for the sexes” as part of her church’s creed<sup>65</sup> and preached against the chains which kept women “in political and ecclesiastical bondage.”<sup>66</sup> Sermon titles on this topic included “Emancipation of Woman” and “Woman’s Place in Church and State.”<sup>67</sup> She argued:

Should not old traditions and customs be forgotten, and every effort put forth in this the dawning of a new era to place

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<sup>60</sup>Glaser, *Wonderful Leadings*, 31. She recorded criticism in several other places (97-98, 105, 120-121, 139, 151).

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, 93, 120.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, 138, 152.

<sup>64</sup>White, *Story of My Life*, 4:236-237 and 5:329.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, 5:229.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, 5:276, 301.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*, 5:32 and 5:86.

woman in her intended sphere, that she may help to start society on the upward grade? Women can never be made to feel their responsibility until they share in the ministry of God's Word, and take their places in the legislative bodies of the nations.<sup>68</sup>

Janet Wilson James has referred to several holiness women preachers, including White, as "traditionalists in their concept of woman's place."<sup>69</sup> White's explicit rejection of any ideology which seeks to limit women's activities disqualifies her as a traditionalist. Furthermore, their public speaking, in itself, counteracts the claim that other holiness women preachers were "traditionalists." Their preaching flagrantly challenged the traditional notion that woman's place was in the home.

Women vindicated their preaching by appropriating arguments based on Scripture. Cole and Cooke offered abbreviated versions while Cagle appended her standard sermon on the topic at the end of her autobiography.<sup>70</sup>

Holiness individuals previously had established the Scriptural basis for women preachers.<sup>71</sup> Women relied on this tradition. Defenses for the preaching of women listed Pentecost as the precedent for women's ministry.<sup>72</sup> The women tackled 1 Tim. 2:12 and 1 Cor. 14:34, verses often quoted by opponents of women preachers in their attempt to keep them

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<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 5:132-3; see also 5:144.

<sup>69</sup>Janet Wilson James, "Women in American Religious History: An Overview," in *Women in American Religion*, ed. Janet Wilson James (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1980), 21. Phoebe Palmer, Catherine Booth, Mary Cole and Amanda Smith were other holiness women whom Wilson James classified as "traditionalists."

<sup>70</sup>Cole, *Trials and Triumphs*, 85-87; Cooke, *Handmaiden of the Lord*, 174-177; and Cagle, *Life and Work*, 160-176. White sprinkled references throughout her autobiography (White, *Story of My Life*, 2:237, 4:208, 5:125-128, 5:146, 5:277, and 5:284-5). Adams is the only woman in the sample who does not provide a Biblical defense for women preachers in her autobiography.

<sup>71</sup>Phoebe Palmer, *The Promise of the Father; or, A Neglected Specialty of the Last Days* (Boston: Henry V. Degen, 1859); reprint, Salem, Ohio: Schmul Publishers, n.d.; and Catherine Booth, *Female Ministry: Woman's Right to Preach the Gospel* (n.p., 1859; reprint, New York: Salvation Army Supplies Printing and Publishing Department, 1975).

<sup>72</sup>Cooke, *Handmaiden of the Lord*, 174; Cole, *Trials and Triumphs*, 86; Cagle, *Life and Work*, 161, 169-171; White, *Story of My Life*, 3:236; and Glaser, *Wonderful Leadings*, 62. This was the only Scriptural defense that Glaser provided.

from preaching.<sup>73</sup> Cole referred to one discussion where “the Lord helped me successfully drive these opposers out of their false positions and to show them they were misusing the Scriptures.”<sup>74</sup>

Many leaders in the holiness movement endorsed women’s preaching, so women did not face insurmountable barriers to preaching as did women in most mainline denominations. This supportive atmosphere played a positive role in making it possible for women to “hear” and respond to God’s call to preach because they were in an environment which affirmed that God could call women to preach. Most holiness believers challenged the ideology of gender prevalent in their society. While they may have accepted the essentialist conceptions of gender which supported the view that differences between the sexes were “God-given” or “natural,” they rejected the prevailing belief that because of those differences only men could preach.

## Conclusion

Brereton acknowledges that God’s authority competes with male authority, but she does not recognize the potential of God’s authority effectively undermining male authority.<sup>75</sup> Glaser realized that potential when she asked: “Are we to obey man rather than God? I tell you nay.”<sup>76</sup> Cole likewise contended: “But if you are certain of the leadings of the Lord, even if God does not make it plain to others, you may do as God bids you with certainty of success.”<sup>77</sup>

Brereton claims that holiness teaching “has also accentuated the kinds of character traits that if embraced would keep women docile and yielding. The sanctified person—like the converted person, only more so—is supposed to be unassertive, selfless, serene, and slow to complain.”<sup>78</sup> While some of the adjectives may be applicable to some sanctified women, docile and unassertive hardly describe the women I have examined. Cole’s behavior at a camp meeting in Kansas is illustrative.

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<sup>73</sup>Cooke, *Handmaiden of the Lord*, 175-176; and Cagle, 174-175.

<sup>74</sup>Cole, *Trials and Triumphs*, 85-86.

<sup>75</sup>Brereton, *From Sin to Salvation*, 93.

<sup>76</sup>Glaser, *Wonderful Leadings*, 104. The Biblical source for Glaser’s position is: “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

<sup>77</sup>Cole, *Trials and Triumphs*, 191.

<sup>78</sup>Brereton, *From Sin to Salvation*, 93.

Rather than announcing who would preach ahead of time, all the preachers sat on the platform. Whoever felt led to preach would stand and walk to the pulpit at the appointed time. On this particular occasion, Cole noticed that another preacher whom she felt should not preach made a move toward the pulpit. She recalled that, at this point: “It came to my mind that if I wanted to obey the Lord and to keep my promise I must act quickly. I asked the Lord to exercise his control and to give me the needed opportunity to obey. He did, and I preached the sermon that day.”<sup>79</sup> To do so, she had to race across the platform and beat the other pastor to the pulpit.

Brereton’s description of the character traits of holiness teaching does not hold true for Cole or the other women in this study. They were not docile or unassertive. Likewise, these six women undermine her claim that holiness teachings work against women’s autonomy and self-reliance. On the contrary, these women, empowered by the Holy Spirit, broke through the invisible barriers of woman’s sphere and asserted authority in the public arena by preaching. For this reason, if for no other, they deserve to be added to the canon of women’s autobiography.

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<sup>79</sup>Cole, *Trials and Triumphs*, 191.

# COMPETING PAULINE ESCHATOLOGIES

## An Exegetical Comparison of 1 Corinthians 15 and 2 Corinthians 5

by

**Jerry W. McCant**

No one ever accused Paul of being “simple” or easy to understand! Indeed, as early as the second century, it was the opinion of some that in Paul’s letter “There are some things in them hard to understand . . .” (2 Pet. 3:16). “Hard to understand” writings of Paul do not get easier when they are eschatological.<sup>1</sup> Käsemann comments that when Paul wrote to the Corinthians, the resurrection of Christ was “regarded as the starting point of all theology.”<sup>2</sup>

This essay is a response to the so-called “competing Pauline eschatologies” of 1 Cor. 15 and 2 Cor. 5, or more precisely 2 Cor. 4:13-5:10. The common concern of these passages is the “body,” the understanding of which is the major alleged difference between the two passages. Scholars have described these differences in terms of conflict, contradiction or developed Pauline eschatology. Methodologically the exegesis of this essay relies on rhetorical criticism.

Few New Testament texts have been subjected to more diverse interpretations than 2 Cor. 5. There are at least three distinguishable lines

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<sup>1</sup>Little has changed since Moule commented: “Everybody knows that the relation between Paul’s beliefs about life beyond death and those of his contemporaries is obscure and hotly disputed.” C. F. D. Moule, “St Paul and Dualism: The Pauline Conception of Resurrection,” *NTS* 12(1966): 106-123.

<sup>2</sup>Ernst Käsemann, *NEW TESTAMENT QUESTIONS TODAY* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press), 137.

of exegesis. Scholars disagree radically as to the source of Paul's ideas in this passage, the relationship of 2 Cor. 5 to 1 Cor. 15, and the basic subject in 2 Cor. 5. There appears to be no unanimity regarding 2 Cor. 5 as Pauline eschatology. This scholarly presupposition needs to be re-examined.

### **Promise of Rhetorical Interpretation**

Most New Testament scholars assume that 2 Cor. 5 presents a different eschatological perspective than 1 Cor. 15. They disagree in their explanations of whether it is a significant theological development or merely an aberration. A majority of scholars consider 1 Cor. 15 to be more traditionally Jewish and 2 Cor. 5 more Hellenistic. However, there is no scholarly consensus as to the source of Paul's ideas in 2 Cor. 5 or its relationship to 1 Cor. 15. So far as I know, no one has sought a rhetorical interpretation of 2 Cor. 5. Rhetorical exegesis of these two passages provides evidence that their differences reflect contrasting rhetorical situations, not competing eschatologies.

A rhetorical situation is an exigency in which one is, or feels, compelled to offer a response. It is a "complex of persons, events and relations presenting an actual or potential exigency which can be completely or partially removed if discourse introduced into the situation can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about a significant modification of the exigency."<sup>3</sup> But Paul, like Søren Kierkegaard, knows that "in all eternity it is impossible for me to compel a person to accept an opinion, a conviction, a belief. But one thing I can do: I can compel him [sic] to take notice."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>This concept was first promulgated by Lloyd F. Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," *PHILOSOPHY AND RHETORIC* 1(1968):4. He observes that a particular discourse comes into existence because of some specific condition or situation which invites utterance. The situation controls the rhetorical response in the same sense that the question controls the answer and the problem controls the solution (6). What Bitzer means by "exigency" is a situation under which an individual is called upon to make some response. The response made is conditioned by the situation and in turn has some possibility of affecting the situation, and in turn has some possibility of affecting the situation or what follows from it (1-14).

<sup>4</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, *THE POINT OF VIEW FOR MY WORK AS AN AUTHOR* (New York: Harper & Row; Torchbooks, 1962; written in 1848 and published in Copenhagen in 1859), 35. To the above statement, SK adds: "In one sense this is the first thing; for it is the condition antecedent to the next thing, i.e. the acceptance of an opinion, a conviction, a belief. In another sense it is the last—if, that is, he [sic] will not take the next step."

Since the late nineteenth century numerous Pauline scholars have considered 2 Cor. 5 to be a hellenized adaptation of Paul's earlier Jewish-apocalyptic eschatology.<sup>5</sup> Development proponents refer to a transition from a futurist to a realized eschatology.<sup>6</sup> Three stages of development have been hypothesized: (1) Paul's earliest view, reflected in 1 Thess. 4:13-5:11, was a Jewish view of a physical, bodily resurrection at the Parousia, on the last day; (2) Subsequently Paul moved to a position assuming the natural (*psyckikon*) body to one assuming a spiritual (*pneumatikon*) body on the day of the resurrection (cf. 1 Cor. 15); (3) His final view, the hellenized eschatology of 2 Cor. 5, assumed the transition from the physical to the spiritual was to occur at death rather than at the Parousia.<sup>7</sup> Scholars who deny development in the Apostle's theology within the extant letters generally suggest that Paul simultaneously held "both Jewish and Greek concepts without any thought of their essential inconsistency."<sup>8</sup>

This essay attempts to show that the Hellenistic elements of 2 Cor. 5 express the eschatology of Paul's Corinthian opponents, which he exploits in order to challenge their misunderstanding of his apostolic ministry. In 2 Cor. 1:3-7:16 Paul is concerned exclusively with a defense of the legitimacy of his ministry.<sup>9</sup> Paul thought the Corinthians should be the

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<sup>5</sup>Otto Pflleiderer, *PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY: ITS LITERATURE AND DOCTRINE DESCRIBED IN HISTORICAL RELATIONSHIP*, tr. W. Montgomery (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1906).

<sup>6</sup>Cf. R. H. Charles, *THE DOCTRINE OF A FUTURE LIFE*. (London, 1913): 437ff; A. Plummer, *SECOND CORINTHIANS* (Edinburgh, 1915): 153; W. L. Knox, *ST. PAUL AND THE CHURCH OF THE GENTILES*. (Cambridge, 1939):128ff; J. Lowe, "An Examination of Attempts to Detect Developments in Paul's Theology," *JTS*, 42(1941): 121ff; J. A. T. Robinson, *JESUS AND HIS COMING*. (London, 1957): 101, 160f; R. F. Hetlinger, "2 Cor. 5:1-10," *SJT* 10 (1957): 174ff; M. J. Harris, "2 Corinthians 5:1-10: Watershed in Paul's Eschatology?" *TB* 22(1971): 32-57.

<sup>7</sup>"The two diverse strains in Paul's conception of resurrection" come from Hellenistic Judaism. W. D. Davies, *PAUL AND RABBINIC JUDAISM*. (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1967); first ed., (1948):319. Also see R. H. Charles, *FUTURE LIFE*, 453; R. F. Hetlinger, "2 Cor. 5," 192, thinks 2 Cor. 5 represents only a "temporary aberration" caused by recent afflictions in Asia (2 Cor. 1:8-9) and in Phil. 4:6, Paul resumes his earlier parousia hope.

<sup>8</sup>Otto Pflleiderer, *PAULINISM*. (London, 1891), 1:264; J. Lowe, "An Examination of Attempts," 129ff.

<sup>9</sup>Ernst Käsemann, "Die Legitimität des Apostels," *ZNW* (1942):33-71. See also Johannes Munck, *PAUL AND THE SALVATION OF MANKIND* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1977), 168-195; J. Munck, "La Vocation de IvV' Apotre Paul," *STUDIA THEOLOGICA* 3(1950):96-110; J. Cambier, "Le Critère paulinien de l'apostolat en 2 Cor. 12:6s," *BIBLICA* 43(1962), 481-518.

letter of commendation for his apostleship (2 Cor. 3:2), but they failed him (2 Cor. 12:7). Refusing to consider himself inferior to the “super apostles” (2 Cor. 11:5; 12:11), Paul defends his ministry by inverting the Corinthian criteria of apostleship, standing it on its head, and then ironically supports his, and, he believes, God’s criteria.

Scholars have suggested a variety of opponents responsible for Paul’s troubles at Corinth, ranging from Judaizers to Gnostics, originating inside or outside the church. Methodologically, any definition of his opponents rests on the assumption that Paul responds apologetically to specific accusations and/or allegations against his person, office, and/or message. Often called “mirror reading,” this interpretive method reconstructs a picture of the situation that produced the letter by reversing the data in the letter; i.e., Paul supposedly denies what his opponents assert and vice versa. But, if Paul’s rhetoric, not outside opponents, shapes apparent “charges” against him, we may never know whether there were actual opponents or precisely what they believed.

Second Cor. 1:3-7:16 is a defense speech, but it is a philosopher’s apologia and not a rhetorical apologia. It is a “dialogue” between Paul and the Corinthians about the nature of the true apostolate—Paul’s apostolate. “It is not possible to simply conclude from the words of the defense that there must have been a corresponding accusation.”<sup>10</sup> The “charges” accurately reflect only Paul’s perception of his opposition in Corinth. That the apologia is intended for the Corinthians is clearly evident after an even cursory reading of the speech.<sup>11</sup> However the

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<sup>10</sup>Hans Dieter Betz, *PAUL’S APOLOGY: II CORINTHIANS 10-13 AND THE SOCRATIC TRADITION*, Protocol of the 2nd Colloquy, Ed. Wilhelm Wuellner (Berkeley: Center for the Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture, 1975), 3.

<sup>11</sup>Already in the proemium (1:3-7)/thanksgiving (1:3-11), Paul says his affliction and consolation are for the Corinthians (1:6). He does not want them to be “ignorant” of his sufferings in Asia (1:8). The Corinthians help him by their prayers (1:11). He writes to them only what they can read and understand (1:13). He and they share a reciprocal “boast” (1:14). Because he loved the Corinthians, Paul did not visit them before going to Macedonia (1:15-22) contrary to his previously announced plans (1 Cor. 16:1-9). He declined “another painful visit” to Corinth (2:1) because he desired to “spare” them (1:23). Paul says that the motive of his “painful letter” was love (2:3-4). Pain for Paul is also pain for the Corinthians (2:5) and the Corinthian majority have punished the offender and he should now be forgiven (2:6-8). Paul’s “painful letter” was to test Corinthian obedience (2:9). The Corinthians should have been the only “letter of recommendation” Paul needed (3:1-3). Sensing their restricted affection for him, Paul pleads, “Open wide your hearts also (6:13; 7:2). Paul does not wish to condemn them (7:3); he boasts in pride about them (7:4, 14-15) and has “complete confidence in them.”

“opponents are characterized—Gnostic, gnosticizing, Judaizers, pneumatics, etc.—the only opponents even remotely suggested in this apologia are the Corinthians.”<sup>12</sup>

### The Rhetorical Situation of 1 Cor. 15

Except for chapters 1-4 and 9, 1 Cor. is epideictic rhetoric of the negative type: invective.<sup>13</sup> In epideictic oratory “the speaker turns educator.”<sup>14</sup> Forensic oratory (i.e., *apologia*) in chs. 1-4 and 9 is saturated with irony<sup>15</sup> and sarcasm. There seems to be some “bad blood” between the church and Paul; some of the people are opposed to Paul.<sup>16</sup> First Corinthians is the Apostle’s response to a report from “Chloe’s people” (chs. 1-6) and subjects about which the Corinthians have written to Paul (chs. 7-16). Major issues

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<sup>12</sup>Already I have demonstrated that Paul’s only opponents in his apostolic apologia in 2 Cor. 10-13 are the Corinthians. See Jerry W. McCant, “Paul’s Thorn of Rejected Apostleship,” *NTS* 34 (1988):553-58. Since no one to my knowledge questions that 2 Cor. 8-9 was meant for the Corinthians, it may be safely assumed that the only “opponents” in 2 Cor. are the Corinthians.

<sup>13</sup>In epideictic the basic argument involves the question of a change of attitude or deepening of values such as the honorable and good, or in a Christian context, belief and faith. Invective is the negative form of epideictic; encomium is the positive form (cf. 1 Cor. 13). Aristotle characterized epideictic as “praising” (encomium) and “blaming” (invective). If a preacher inveighs against some group for irreligious or immoral actions and the congregation has no power to act against them, invective is being practiced. George A. Kennedy, *NEW TESTAMENT INTERPRETATION THROUGH RHETORICAL CRITICISM* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 87, however, thinks that with the exception of 1:13-17 and ch. 9, 1 Cor. is deliberative rhetoric. Also Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Rhetorical Situation and Historical Reconstruction in 1 Corinthians,” *NTS* 33 (1987): 36-40 argues that 1 Cor. is deliberative. But, Wilhelm Wuellner, “Greek Rhetoric and Pauline Argumentation,” in W. R. Schoedel and R. Wilken, eds., *EARLY CHRISTIAN LITERATURE AND THE CLASSICAL INTELLECTUAL TRADITION*, in Honorem Robert Grant; *THEOLOGIE HISTORIQUE* 53 (Paris:Éditions Beauchesne, 1979): 177-188, argues for epideictic, relying on the work of Chaim Perelmann and L. Olbrechts Tyteca, *THE NEW RHETORIC: A TREATISE ON ARGUMENTATION*, tr. J. Wilkinson and P. Weaver (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1969): 48ff. Also see Burton L. Mack, *RHETORIC AND THE NEW TESTAMENT* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 56.

<sup>14</sup>Perelmann and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *THE NEW RHETORIC*, 51.

<sup>15</sup>See Karl A. Plank, *PAUL AND THE IRONY OF AFFLICTION* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 33-70.

<sup>16</sup>Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *HOW TO READ THE BIBLE FOR ALL IT’S WORTH* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), 50.

to be resolved include: apostolic ministry (chs. 1-4 and 9); incest, lawsuits, marriage and sexuality (chs. 5-7); meat sacrificed to idols (8:1-11:1); worship (11:2-14:40); the resurrection (ch. 15); and the collection for Jerusalem saints (16:1-4). The rhetorical exigency to which Paul offers a fitting response is the uncertainty of his apostolic ministry. The basis for his defense rests on the conviction that in the cross God has claimed those things which are foolish, weak, and ignoble so that they no longer signify powerlessness, but the divine power to bring life out of death.

Paul's famous chapter on the resurrection of the dead is "a perfect example of rhetorical argumentation."<sup>17</sup> Like most of 1 Cor., ch. 15 is epideictic. Paul becomes educator as he writes about the resurrection of the dead. His "speech" on the resurrection is in the form of a diatribe, with the possible exception of 15:1-11.<sup>18</sup> The "speech" begins (15:1-2) quite sermonically,<sup>19</sup> reminding<sup>20</sup> the Corinthians of his gospel, which he had preached and they had accepted. Thus, he establishes *ethos* and their basis of agreement with a hint of invective and *insinuatio*.<sup>21</sup> The narration

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<sup>17</sup>Burton L. Mack, RHETORIC, 56. My analysis of 1 Cor. 15 relies on Mack, 56-59. However, I disagree with his conclusion that 1 Cor. 15 is deliberative rhetoric.

<sup>18</sup>Cf. George A. Kennedy, CLASSICAL RHETORIC AND ITS CHRISTIAN AND SECULAR TRADITION FROM ANCIENT TO MODERN TIMES (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 6th printing, 1987), 125-32. Hans Conzelmann, 1 CORINTHIANS, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975):80, says 15:5-58 is "loose diatribe style." Paul set out not from fact, but from proclamation and faith. Proclamation is a kind of diatribe (i.e., *keryssein*). Diatribe has emerged finally and essentially as epideictic in character, according to S. K. Stowers, THE DIATRIBE AND PAUL'S LETTER TO THE ROMANS, SBL Dissertation Series (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1961). On 15:1, Jeremias has observed that "The following address, *adelphoi*, is a style of preaching," "Flesh and Blood," 151.

<sup>19</sup>There is no consensus on the question of whether Paul's discussion responds to the report from "Chloe's people" (1:11) or to a letter(s) from Corinth. The formula "Now concerning" (*peri de*), probably indicating a response to their letter at 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1,12, is missing at 15:1. It may have come from Paul's own sense of their need for instruction on this topic.

<sup>20</sup>*Gnōrizein*, "to make known," must be understood in the sense of a "reminder," since they have already received this information from the Apostle. This "to make known" does not indicate a first-time instruction.

<sup>21</sup>"Unless you have believed in vain" (v. 2) indicates the possibility of their rejection of the gospel; it is explicitly stated in v. 12. On *insinuatio* see RHETORIC TO HERENNIUS, 1:9-11.

in vv. 3-11 traces his gospel to tradition (“delivered. . . .received”)<sup>22</sup> and creed (vv. 3b-5a).<sup>23</sup> With a forensic touch, he calls witnesses as “proof” of Christ’s resurrection,<sup>24</sup> adding himself as a witness and reaffirming his apostleship (vv. 8-10) already established in chs. 1-4 and 9. He attributes his apostolic accomplishments to the grace of God, thus avoiding the odium of *periautologia* (v. 11).<sup>25</sup>

Only when the reader reaches v. 12 does Paul’s *stasis* of fact (basic issue of the case) become clear.<sup>26</sup> “Some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead” and the *stasis* continues through v. 19. *Stasis* in vv. 3-19 reveals a series of hypothetical consequences in the form of a *sortes* (i.e., an interlocking chain of syllogisms)<sup>27</sup> pushing the Corinthian position *ad absurdum*, ending with *pathos* (v. 19).<sup>28</sup> With invective and irony, Paul argues that the logical consequence of their position is that they have no gospel, faith, forgiveness, and no hope for their beloved dead, and thus no purpose in life.

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<sup>22</sup>This formula is generally understood to refer to the traditioning process.

<sup>23</sup>Generally considered to be credal language: Christ died for our sins; Christ was buried; Christ was raised on the third day; Christ appeared to. . . . Cf. 1 Cor. 2:2 to appreciate that the essence of Paul’s gospel is the death and resurrection of Jesus.

<sup>24</sup>G. A. Kennedy, NT INTERPRETATION, 7, says: “When a doctrine is purely proclaimed and not couched in enthymemes I call the technique radical Christian rhetoric.”

<sup>25</sup>According to Plutarch, “On Praising Oneself Inoffensively,” 542E-543A, and Paul (1 Cor 1:31; 2 Cor 10:17, based on Jer 9:24), boasting is inoffensive if the success is attributed to God.

<sup>26</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, KERYGMA AND MYTH, ed. H. W. Bartsch, tr. Reginald H. Fuller (London: SPCK, 1953) 1:39, has criticized this “one passage where St. Paul tries to prove the miracle of the resurrection by adducing a list of eyewitnesses” as “a dangerous procedure.” In THEOLOGY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, tr. Kendrick Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1951), 1:295, he says that Paul gave the list of witnesses “because he was forced to it by his gnosticizing opponents.” Note that “Some of you say,” clearly indicates the diatribe style.

<sup>27</sup>Paul’s argument rests upon this “If . . . , then. . . .” which is a *sortes*. On *ei* with the indicative of reality in the “logical reasoning of Paul,” see F. Blass and A. Debrunner, A GREEK GRAMMAR OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, tr. and rev., Robert W. Funk (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1961; first edition by Blass, 1896), ¶ 372(2b).

<sup>28</sup>Compare Paul’s pathetic (i.e., *pathos*) note: “If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied” (1 Cor 15:9) with “For if there were this life only, which belongs to all men, nothing could be more bitter than this” (2 Baruch 21:13) in R. H. Charles, THE APCORYPHA AND PSEUDEPIGRAPHA OF THE OLD TESTAMENT (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1973; first edition, 1913).

After emphatically declaring “Christ has been raised,”<sup>29</sup> Paul states the proposition for argumentation: Christ is “the firstfruits of those who are asleep” (15:20).<sup>30</sup> Argumentation commences with the Christ-Adam paradigm and is amplified<sup>31</sup> by chronologizing a series of eschatological events (another *sorites*) in vv. 21-28.<sup>32</sup> Seeking to provide further support for his doctrine of the resurrection of believers,<sup>33</sup> Paul poses two rhetorical questions about baptism for the dead<sup>34</sup> and fighting with “wild

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<sup>29</sup>There seems to have been no denial of the resurrection of Christ in Corinth. Walter Schmithals, *GNOSTICISM IN CORINTH: An Investigation of the Letters to the Corinthians*, Tr. J. E. Steely (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971; original, 1956), 156, says the heretics would have conceded at least the resurrection of Christ. Cf. H. Conzelmann, 1 Cor., 265. The Corinthians did not deny life after death, but the resurrection of the *body* as indicated by Paul’s 10 references to “body” (*soma*) in 1 Cor. 15:35-45.

<sup>30</sup>“Sleep” in v. 20 is a euphemism for death. There is no basis whatever for a doctrine of “soul sleep” in the Pauline letters. See D. E. Whiteley, *THE THEOLOGY OF ST. PAUL* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 262-269 and Ronald Cassidy, “Paul’s Attitude to Death in II Corinthians 5:1-10,” *EQ* 43 (1971):216.

<sup>31</sup>Amplification is a rhetorical technique for expanding on what one wishes to say. Modern rhetorical theory calls it pleonasm, a term derived from the Greek rhetorician Phoebammon. In *RHETORIC TO HERENNIUS* 4:52 it is called *frequentatio*. In Quintillian (8.4.27) it is *syathroismos*. Epideictic tends toward amplification. The technique of amplification involves developing the subject (*ergasia*), repetition of basic ideas several times in different words, illustrating what it means and relating the subject to the experience of the audience.

<sup>32</sup>*Sorites* is an interlocking chain of syllogisms and takes the “If . . . then. . .” pattern; *sorites* seeks to amplify the proof. See Burton L. Mack, *RHETORIC*, 57.

<sup>33</sup>H. Conzelmann, 1 *CORINTHIANS*, 265: “The Christological character of the proof has the result that the question of dead Christians can be dealt with, not that of the dead as such.” Paul does not mention the resurrection of non-believers, two resurrections (that idea is reserved for Revelation), an intermediate state or a “general resurrection.” Cf. Ernst Käsemann, *NTQ*, 34; J. Hering, *THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PAUL TO THE CORINTHIANS* (London: Epworth, 1962), 166; C. K. Barrett, *THE FIRST EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS*, Harper’s NT Commentaries (New York and Evanston, 1968), 362-364.

<sup>34</sup>On baptism for the dead, see D. E. H. Whiteley, *THE THEOLOGY OF ST. PAUL*, 173-174; A. T. Lincoln, *PARADISE NOW*, 36, says Paul’s argument is *ad hominem*. Also see A. T. Robertson and A. Plummer, *THE FIRST EPISTLE OF ST. PAUL TO THE CORINTHIANS*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1971 ed.), 361-363. Concerning the paragraph encompassing vv. 29-34, Gordon D. Fee, *THE FIRST EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 761, says “It is pure *ad hominem*. In this same section Paul poses three rhetorical questions.

animals” in Ephesus (vv. 29, 32).<sup>35</sup> With anaphora (vv. 29, 32), Paul raises his last question with a quotation from the Epicureans (v. 32)<sup>36</sup> and a proverb from the pagan poet Menander (v. 33).<sup>37</sup> This section ends with considerable invective and *pathos*, exhorting the Corinthians to cease sinning and pejoratively adds with invective, “I say this to your shame” (v. 34). This whole paragraph is saturated with pleonastic *pathos*. Clearly, Paul’s appeal is to faith, not “proofs.”

The balance of 1 Cor. 15 deals with the *fact* of the resurrection of believers in vv. 12-34 framed by *hoti* (“that” in v. 12) and its *mode* in vv. 35-58 framed by *pos* (“how” in v. 12).<sup>38</sup> All that follows v. 35 shows that the important question is “With what kind of body do they come?” (v. 35). The real Corinthian problem is the body.<sup>39</sup> Paul expresses his disdain for the question with a sarcastic “You fool!” (v. 36)—*ad hominem* and invective.

Analogy is the major rhetorical technique. In vv. 36-38 Paul argues from the analogy of the seed, which dies before it lives, that a “naked” (*gymnos*) seed is sown, but God gives it another body. He amplifies the seed analogy into analogies of different kinds of bodies in vv. 39-41. In vv. 40-49 antithesis continues the discussion, contrasting the pre-resurrection and post-resurrection body: perishable/imperishable; living being/life-giving spirit; earthly/heavenly. The importance of the two-Adams analogy (vv. 21-28) is indicated by its reiteration in vv. 45-50.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Cf. A. J. Malherbe, “The Beasts of Ephesus,” JBL 37(1968):71-80, and R. E. Osborne, “Paul and the Wild Beasts,” JBL 85(1966):225-230. Fee, FIRST CORINTHIANS, interprets it metaphorically.

<sup>36</sup>C. K. Barrett, FIRST CORINTHIANS, 367, finds the quotation in Isa. 22:13 in a different context; likewise, Robertson and Plummer, FIRST CORINTHIANS, 363. See Prov 7:21; Wisd. 8:18; Origen, Hom 31 in Luke, who thinks Paul borrows heathen words and “hallows them.”

<sup>37</sup>Menander, THAIS 218. C. K. Barrett, who thinks this may be a proverb Menander found or that which Menander said had become proverbial, believes that Paul probably had *not* read THAIS.

<sup>38</sup>Joachim Jeremias, “Flesh and Blood Cannot Inherit the Kingdom of God,” NTS 2(1956):151-159.

<sup>39</sup>A. T. Lincoln, PARADISE NOW, 38, observes that “Paul gets to the heart of the Corinthians’ difficulty with the resurrection of the dead and indeed the heart of many of their problems, namely the place of the body.”

<sup>40</sup>Paul uses Gen. 2:7 quite freely, expands it with the adjective “first” (added because Paul needs another name to balance with Christ, whom he intends to describe as the “last Adam.” With *psychikon* he intends to describe Adam with a natural body. See 1 Enoch 46:1ff; 4 Ezra 123:ff.

“What I am saying” (v. 50) signals the conclusion of the argument. The address “brothers and sisters” (v. 50, NRSV) and the proclamatory nature of the conclusion shows that it is still diatribe and epideictic.<sup>41</sup> Proclamation describes the eschatological resurrection of believers. A rising crescendo of pleonastic antitheses declares the Pauline eschatological mystery (v. 51). With climactic and ringing oratory Paul personifies and triumphantly mocks death with the citation of Scripture. This technique and the entire conclusion is *radical Christian rhetoric*. Against the Corinthians, Paul argues for a somatic (*soma*) resurrection, albeit a “spiritual body” (*soma pneumatikon*) and he does not define the latter for the reader. Paul concludes with a thanksgiving (v. 57), exhortation (v. 58), and *pathos*: “You know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain!”

### The Rhetorical Situation of 2 Cor. 4:13-5:10<sup>42</sup>

Virtually all interpreters<sup>43</sup> seem to agree that 2 Cor. 4:13-5:10 is an integral part of an apostolic apology. There a basic consensus that the apology includes at least 2:14-7:4.<sup>44</sup> Yet, scholars consistently fail to take

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<sup>41</sup>J. Jeremias, “Flesh and Blood,” 154, notes that in vv. 50-54 Paul employs chiasmus. He also thinks that “flesh and blood cannot enter the Kingdom of God” (v. 50) speaks of the transformation of the living at the Parousia and not of the resurrection of the dead.

<sup>42</sup>While I accept full responsibility for what follows, I gratefully acknowledge my indebtedness to G. A. Kennedy, NT INTERPRETATION.

<sup>43</sup>For examples see R. Bultmann, THE SECOND LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985; German original, 1976), 16. He believes Paul defends the “apostolic office.” “His person is at issue only insofar as he is the bearer of the apostolic office.” C. K. Barrett, THE SECOND EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS, The Anchor Bible (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1984); Frank G. Carver, “II CORINTHIANS,” BBC (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1968); W. G. Kümmel, INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT, tr. Howard Clark Kee (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 17th ed, 1975); Helmut Koester, INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972).

<sup>44</sup>R. Bultmann, SECOND CORINTHIANS, 61ff, W. G. Kümmel, 281; Marion Soards, THE APOSTLE PAUL (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 89; H. Koester, 1:127; C. K Barrett, SECOND CORINTHIANS, 95ff. Some scholars exclude 6:14-7:1 since they see it as an interpolation. G. A. Kennedy, NT INTERPRETATION, and F. Carver, “II CORINTHIANS,” 490, identify the beginning of the unit as 1:7 and 1:12 respectively. Ralph Martin, 2 CORINTHIANS, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word Books, 1986), 43ff, ends the unit at 7:16 as does Kennedy. Only Carver concludes the unit earlier than the consensus, at 6:10. Thus, all agree that the passage under consideration here falls entirely within the apology.

this context seriously in their interpretations of the passage. Journal articles routinely ignore the apologetic nature of 2 Cor. 5:1-10; eschatology seems to be their only interest. The rhetorical situation and the ironic character of the text are also ignored. I am suggesting that consideration of the rhetorical exigencies, the irony and the judicial rhetoric employed effectively, resolve the question of “competing eschatologies” in 1 Cor. 15 and 2 Cor. 4:13-5:10. This approach also helps to explain some of the ambiguities of the eschatological language in 2 Cor. 4:13-5:10.

Apparently the Corinthians had questions about Paul’s behavior (1:12). Paul hopes they can understand his defense (1:13). He is not undependable, fickle or dishonest (1:17ff). He admits that instead of going to Corinth, he had written an angry letter, which Titus delivered (2:3-4). This “sorrowful letter” responded to Paul’s reception in Corinth during his intermediate visit (between 1 and 2 Cor.), when an unnamed person seriously offended him (2:5-11). Although the exact nature of this offense is never described, Paul acknowledges that in response to his letter, the majority (but not everyone!) had agreed to punish the offender.

Nevertheless, lingering questions about Paul’s integrity demand a reply. Did Paul have something to hide? Was he weak and fragile (4:7-9, 16-17)? He responds that he always bears in his body “the death of Jesus” and paradoxically “so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in [his] body” (4:10).<sup>45</sup> With antithetical irony he adds, “So death is at work in us [i.e., me] but life in you” (4:12). Suspicions or charges had necessitated self-commendation (3:1-3; 4:2; 5:12). Paul’s perception is that the Corinthian complaint concerns his “outward appearance” (5:12) and perhaps his mental stability (5:13). Was Paul’s ministry a hindrance to others (6:3; cf. 7:2)? Was he not only weak in body (6:4-5), but also in character (6:6-10)? Did he really *not* love the Corinthians (6:11-13)? Paul admits that he is an “afflicted apostle,” “disputes without and fears within,” (7:5) and he has been “downcast” (7:6).

There can be little doubt that 2 Cor. 4:13-5:10 is situated within an accusatory context. Paul had promised to visit Corinth (1 Cor. 16:5-9), but did not exactly keep that promise. Instead, he paid an unannounced visit which turned out badly and then he did not see them on the promised

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<sup>45</sup>This “charge” (real or perceived) is similar to the one made in 2 Cor. 10:10. S. Corates responded to just such a “charge” in the Platonic version of his APOLOGY; Plato, THE LAST DAYS OF SOCRATES, tr. Hugh Frederick (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 45.

visit. Their primary complaint was that he had refused to go to Corinth and instead had written a “painful letter” that had caused them great grief. Apparently going back on his promise was “the bone of contention at Corinth.” The Corinthians interpreted the letter as being overly severe. Paul was both undependable and insensitive to their feelings. Paul explains the canceled visit but he knows that his apostolic integrity is the more important issue. His credibility as an authentic apostle is the more important threat and the one that demands defense.

This situation is precisely what caused the Corinthians to say Paul’s letter was heavy and burdensome (*baros*), yet also forceful and effective (*ischyros*), “but his bodily presence is weak” (2 Cor 10:10).<sup>46</sup> What finally invalidates Paul’s apostolate in the minds of the Corinthians is his “weakness” (*astheneia*). An authentic apostle is filled with the Spirit and the *pneuma* is characterized by “power,” not “weakness.”

Careful analysis of Paul’s language of affliction reveals his deepest convictions, what he assumes to be self-evident truths. These perceptions shape his understanding of the Corinthians.<sup>47</sup> In virtually all of his letters Paul engages “affliction language” to interpret human life and the gospel that empowers life. Nowhere is this language more persistent than in his Corinthian correspondence. Converging vectors of Paul’s theology of the cross, his own concession to weakness, and his perception of the world-alienating religion in Corinth mean that his language of affliction is at the center of the controversy. “Throughout the correspondence this language participates in the persisting conflict over Paul’s authority and the nature

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<sup>46</sup>V. Furnish, II CORINTHIANS, 468, observes that “In this citation Paul himself has provided us with the earliest documented assessment of his letters.” For comments on Paul’s letters from a later period, see Polycarp’s letter to the Philippians (3:2) and 2 Pet. 3:15-16. Edwin A. Judge, “Paul’s Boasting in Relation to Contemporary Professional Practice,” ABR, 16(1968):41, notes the apocryphal correspondence between “Paul” and Seneca (3rd century) and from the fourth and fifth centuries, Gregory of Nyssa, AGAINST EUNOMIUS I, 253B (NPNF, second sermon, V. 37); Jerome’s Commentary on Gal. 2:4; Chrysostom, ON THE PRIESTHOOD, 5.5-6 (NPNF, first sermon, IX.66-67) and Augustine, ON CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE, IV.vii, discussed on 38-40.

<sup>47</sup>The language of affliction, grounded in his theology of the cross, permits the reader to discover the lens through which Paul sees life and its reality. This language so pervades his letters that almost any aspect of Paul’s theology must consider it. “Affliction” language is so fundamental to Pauline thought that it is not simply another theological topic in the Pauline Compendium, but the very ground on which he “does” theology. See Karl A. Plank, IRONY OF AFFLICTION, 4.

of the conflict, which, at every turn, calls into question the power and implications of his gospel.”<sup>48</sup>

In apologetic discourse Paul typically concedes some form of weakness or limitation. He concedes that he did not fulfill his *promised* visit (1:16-21); that he hurt the Corinthians (2:2); that he experienced distress, anguish and tears (2:4); that he had no credentials (3:1-3); that he was incompetent (3:4-5); that his gospel is veiled (4:3); that his body was analogous to a clay pot (4:7); that he is an “afflicted” apostle (4:8-11); that death was at work in him (4:11-12) and that his outer nature is wasting away (4:16). These concessions are not simple candor; admissions of weakness reflect real or perceived accusations at Corinth. Concession is a form of “anticipatory refutation” and conscripts allegations for one’s own defense.<sup>49</sup> The Apostle concedes weakness as “evidence” designed to trap his opponents and invert their criteria of apostleship.<sup>50</sup>

Perhaps the one point about which there is no dispute is the difficulty of 2 Cor. 4:13-5:10.<sup>51</sup> Many attempts in commentaries, doctoral theses,

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<sup>48</sup>Chaim Perelman and L Olbrechts-Tyteca, *THE NEW RHETORIC: A TREATISE ON ARGUMENTATION*, tr. J. Wilkinson and P. Weaver (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1961), 501.

<sup>49</sup>On the rhetoric of concession Perelman observes: “Each time a speaker follows the interlocutor onto his own ground he makes a concession to him, but one which may be full of traps. One of these is to recognize that the opponent’s position cannot be invalidated, and to give up opposing it at a certain level, while pointing out at the same time the little importance of that level” (*THE NEW RHETORIC*, 489).

<sup>50</sup>There are various opinions on the delimitation of this pericope. I follow Kennedy, *NT INTERPRETATION*, 90, who believes the rhetorical unit is 4:13-5:10. A. T. Lincoln, *PARADISE NOW*, 59, places the limits around 4:16-5:10. R. Martin, *2 CORINTHIANS*, 97, makes 5:1-10 the unit, but says “in the first section [5:1-5] Paul continues (*gar*, “for”) the exposition begun in 4:7.” R. Bultmann, *2 CORINTHIANS*, 130, delimits to 5:1-10 and thinks 5:1-5 is a digression “since the apostolic office is not in view here.” V. Furnish, *II CORINTHIANS*, 252ff, makes 4:7-5:10 the pericope, and notes that it is part of the apologia. F. Carver, *II CORINTHIANS*, 535, places the limits at 4:7-5:10 but later notes that the chapter division at 5:1 is “purely arbitrary,” because “this paragraph [5:1-10] belongs more to what precedes than to what follows.” C. K. Barrett, *2 CORINTHIANS*, 149ff, treats 5:1-10 as a unit, but sees it as a digression illustrating “the relative unimportance of the earthen vessel. Almost all journal articles treat 5:1-10 as the unit for exegesis, with very little reference to what precedes it.

<sup>51</sup>A. T. Lincoln, *PARADISE NOW*, 59.

monographs, and journal articles have sought to resolve its complexities.<sup>52</sup> The history of research on this passage is strewn with speculative hypotheses, but so far as I can determine, no one has analyzed it rhetorically.<sup>53</sup> Hopefully this paper will help to bridge the gap.

C. K. Barrett is aware that Paul's primary intention here is not to define eschatology, but he thinks of it as "a sketch of the pattern of Christian existence in general" and illustrates "the unimportance of the earthenware vessel" in 4:7.<sup>54</sup> Günther Bornkamm believes that in this passage Paul uses eschatology to affirm that Christians "live by something they are not yet, something that still awaits them."<sup>55</sup> While he provides no rhetorical analysis, A. T. Lincoln has observed that this passage should not be seen simply as "an eschatological crux but as part of the apostle's prolonged digression in 2:14-7:4." As "an apology for his office [this digression] plays its role in the argument by setting out the sufferings and rewards of that office."<sup>56</sup>

Some commentators have suggested that in 2 Cor. 5 Paul suffers from "an unconscious ambiguity of thought."<sup>57</sup> Such "breaks" actually function ironically to create a "disparity of understanding"<sup>58</sup> or "cognitive dissonance" to push the readers to reorient their way of thinking and

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<sup>52</sup>For a history of the exegesis of this passage, see F. G. Lang, 2 KORINTHES 5, 1-10 IN DER NEUREN FORSCHUNG (Tübingen:, 1973), 9-161; M. J. Harris, THE INTERPRETATION OF 2 CORINTHIANS 5:1-10 AND ITS PLACE IN PAULINE ESCHATOLOGY (Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Manchester, 1970).

<sup>53</sup>G. A. Kennedy, NT INTERPRETATION, 90, who certainly knows the rhetorical character of this passage, unfortunately restricts his remarks on such a difficult text to saying it comes under the heading of "sincerity." Given the difficulty of the passage, it is surprising that Kennedy does not provide a rhetorical analysis. One would hope for more!

<sup>54</sup>C. K. Barrett, SECOND CORINTHIANS, 149.

<sup>55</sup>Günther Bornkamm, PAULUS (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1969), 230. He thinks believers "*von dem Leben, was sie noch nicht sieht sind, was aber ihrer wartet.*"

<sup>56</sup>A. T. Lincoln, PARADISE NOW, 59. Rhetorically 2:14-7:4 is *not* a digression, *but rather it is the central part (i.e. "the body") of the apologia; everything in 1:3-7:16 constitutes a Pauline apologia.*

<sup>57</sup>W. D. Davies, PAUL AND RABBINIC JUDAISM, 317. He also thinks Paul's experience in Asia (1:8) forced him to think about death and the beyond and thus 2 Cor. 5 is not characteristically eschatological.

<sup>58</sup>J. A. Cuddon, A DICTIONARY OF LITERARY TERMS (Garden City: Doubleday, 1977), s.v. "irony."

consider another perspective. These breaks in consistency are not simple mistakes.<sup>59</sup> Paul did not make a mistake or write sloppily, but used literary mechanisms by which he hoped to break the Corinthians' bondage to familiar patterns of thinking.

Contextual interpretation is essential if one wishes to understand the Pauline letters. Too often interpreters have treated this passage, especially 5:1-10, as an eschatological soliloquy and sought to interpret it in isolation from the rest of the letter, with unfortunate results. No portion of any text has meaning apart from the whole, but only in some context that locates it in a specific sphere of discourse.<sup>60</sup> Only in context does a text become perceptible and particular. The context of 2 Cor. 1:3-7:16 is apologetic, i.e., judicial rhetoric (implicit accusation and explicit defense) which is further located in the context of the irony of affliction. Although Paul does not play the role of a "fool" (*aphron/eiron*) here as he does in 2 Cor. 11-12, he is indeed the ironic self-deprecator.<sup>61</sup> Under the heading of sincerity, the rhetorical unit (4:13-5:10) is eschatological irony.<sup>62</sup>

That the rhetorical unit begins at 4:13 and *not* at 5:1 is indicated when Paul in the first sentence raises the topic of the resurrection for the first time (4:13-14). As in 3:4, 12 and 4:1, 7, the participial form of the verb "to have" in 4:13 provides the transition to a new line of argumentation. *Echontes* is best construed by "we also have" and should be understood causally, i.e., "Because we also have the same spirit of faith

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<sup>59</sup>Richard A. Lanham, *A HANDLIST OF RHETORICAL TERMS* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 61.

<sup>60</sup>R. Bultmann, *SECOND CORINTHIANS*, 130, and C. K. Barrett, *SECOND CORINTHIANS*, 149 treat 5:1-10 as a digression. A. T. Lincoln, *PARADISE NOW*, 65-66, perhaps correctly, thinks of v. 3 as parenthetical and v. 7 as an "aside." R. Martin, *2 CORINTHIANS*, 97, can't imagine why Paul included 5:2-4 in this letter. He notes that Paul speaks of being clothed, then intrudes ideas of being unclothed, naked. He correctly says that 5:6 is an anacolouthon (109).

<sup>61</sup>Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, *THE NATURE OF NARRATIVE* (New Haven: Yale University), 240-241.

<sup>62</sup>Such breaks as one finds in this passage act as hindrances to comprehension and so force the readers to examine their habitual orientation. If one tries to ignore such breaks, or to blame them as faults in accordance with classical norms, one is in fact "attempting to rob them of their function." Wolfgang Iser, *THE ACT OF READING: A THEORY OF AESTHETIC RESPONSE* [Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1978], 18).

. . . we also believe.”<sup>63</sup> Somewhat ironically, into this context of apostolic suffering Paul weaves the theme of “apostolic boldness” (cf. 2:14; 3:4, 12; 4:1, 13, 16; 5:6, 8). Paul continues his defense with the first direct Biblical quotation in this letter. His assurance in the face of adversity is like the psalmist who also wrote in a threatening time: “I believed and therefore I spoke” (Ps. 116:10).

Verses 13-18 are inextricably related to 4:7-2 where Paul has engaged in ironic concession.<sup>64</sup> He concedes weakness analogous to “clay pots,”<sup>65</sup> but declares that the “jar” holds the precious “treasure” of the gospel and his apostleship. With this concession, the trap is set for him to declare his apostolic ministry valid as a bearer of the gospel. The treasure comes in a clay pot “so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us” (4:7, NRSV). Always he carries the “death of Jesus” in his body so that, ironically, “the life of Jesus may also be made visible” in his body (4:10), i.e., in his “mortal flesh” (4:11). A final concession is made with biting irony, perhaps even sarcasm: “Death is at work in me, but life in you” (4:12).

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<sup>63</sup>Archibald T. Robertson, A GRAMMAR OF THE GREEK NEW TESTAMENT IN THE LIGHT OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH, 4th ed. (Nashville: Broadman, 1934), 1134.

<sup>64</sup>Both Plato and Aristotle used *eironeia* to describe the self-depreciation of the *iron* in contrast to the self-appreciating *alazon*. Cf. Plato, REP, 337A; Aristotle, EN, 1124b, 30; RHET, 1379b. *Eironeia* is first recorded in Plato’s REPUBLIC. Applied to Socrates, it meant a smooth, low-down way of taking people in. For Demosthenes, an *iron* was a citizen who evaded responsibility by pretending unfitness. Theophrastus said an *iron* was evasive and noncommittal, conceals enmities, pretends friendships, never gives a straight answer. Cf. D. C. Muecke, IRONY, Critical Idiom Series, 13 (London: Methuen and Co), 14. Irony is virtually as old as speech itself according to Wallter J. Ong, INTERFACES THE WORD (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 287. *Eiron* is related to *eiros*, “to say or to speak,” or perhaps more closely to the Ionic *eiromai*, “to ask questions.” G. G. Sedgwick, OF IRONY, ESPECIALLY IN THE DRAMA (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1935), 7. The *iron* wore a mask of goodwill, which concealed enmity. He was a grinning fox, a scoundrel not to be trusted. It was precisely with this sense of disdain that the epithet *iron* was hurled at the man who came to typify and later to dignify the term: Socrates. Paul D. Duke, IRONY IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL (Atlanta: John Press, 1985), 8. Modern examples of the *iron* include characters such as Br’er Rabbit, Charley Chaplin, and Columbo. Examples of the *alazon* include characters like Barney Fife, Donald Duck, and at times, Matlock.

<sup>65</sup>On the interpretation of “clay pots,” see V. Furnish, II CORINTHIANS, 278; R. Bultmann, SECOND CORINTHIANS, 112; H. Windisch, DER ZWEITE KORINTHERBRIEF, 141ff; W. D. Davies, PAUL, 313.

“Clay pot” is a transparent metaphor referring to Paul’s weak, transitory body, and the “treasure” is clearly the gospel, to which he ties his apostolic ministry. The antithesis contrasts the Apostle’s “appearance” and his actual apostolic status (cf. 2 Cor. 10:10). Somewhat atypically, he mentions the human name of Jesus six times in 4:10-14. Not only is the apostle afflicted, but ironically his weakness allows the display of the incomparable power of God (cf. 3:5; 4:7; 12:9b; 13:4). The gospel which the apostle preaches is “God’s power” (Rom. 1:16) present in “the word of the cross” (1 Cor. 1:18, 24) demonstrating that “God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong” (1 Cor. 1:27; cf. vv. 26-31).

Paul concedes weakness, vulnerability, and suffering in order to demonstrate that they, in fact, characterize his apostleship. This line of argument shows that the Apostle does not believe his autobiography must be one of glory, but one of death and life. In his ministry the afflictions are the work of the death and life of Jesus. Apostolic affliction is the presentation of the passion and resurrection of Jesus and they are fully consonant with an apostle who preaches “Jesus and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). Afflictions provide apostolic credentials (cf. 3:1-3) *rather than invalidating them.*

Affliction means that the death and life of Jesus function in Paul’s ministry. Because, like the Psalmist, he has believed, the Apostle can speak. What he speaks is the gospel (the treasure in clay pots in 4:7). He also defends his apostleship even if death “is at work” in him. Somewhat ironically for a “dead man,” Paul’s boldness to speak is based on his knowledge “that the one who raised Jesus will also raise us with Jesus” (4:14). The dying apostle’s ground for confidence/boldness is Jesus’ resurrection, which guarantees his own resurrection. This declaration is precisely the point of 1 Cor. 15.

Nothing in 2 Cor. 4:13-5:10 even insinuates that the Corinthians have accepted a Pauline view of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15). Quite the contrary is the case. Paul is not concerned to educate them about the true nature of the resurrection of believers. Nevertheless, in the words of Kierkegaard, his “resurrection language” compels them to “take notice.” He hopes it will precipitate a reorientation of their conception of apostolic ministry to that a weak and dying apostle will be resurrected by God’s power.

In 4:15 Paul emphasizes that he is concerned only for the faith of the Corinthians. This concern is a theme throughout the apology (cf. 1:15, 17, 24; 3:2-3; 4:5, 12, 15; 7:3; 8:6). Paul will not allow the Corinthians to

forget that his afflictions, which they so eagerly depreciate, have all been for their sake.<sup>66</sup> Paul was willing to suffer for Jesus' sake (4:11), for the Corinthians' sake (4:15), and for the sake of the glory of God (4:15).<sup>67</sup>

Because of the unfortunate and unwarranted placement of a chapter division after 4:18, many interpreters miss the vital connection of 4:16-18 to 5:1-10. Actually 5:1-10 belongs more to what precedes than to what follows.<sup>68</sup> Paul continues to defend his apostleship and affirms that the hardships experienced have enhanced and validated his ministry. Apostolic boldness is possible because Paul's theology of ministry is grounded in his understanding of the cross and his conviction that an apostle, like the Lord, is called to be a suffering servant, always serving in the shadow of the cross. What Paul says in 4:16-5:10 must not be interpreted as a "detached theological soliloquy." Instead it is to be understood as an integral part of an apostolic response to a critical misunderstanding of apostolic ministry.

At 4:16 Paul resumes his affirmation of apostolic boldness with a verbatim repetition of 4:1 (cf. 3:12 and 4:13). From the context, especially 4:2-7, 10-13, 16, it is certain Paul is not expressing courage in the face of death. Rather, despite many afflictions and the false perceptions of the Corinthians regarding his weakness, he is bold concerning his apostolic status. Antithetical irony<sup>69</sup> and eschatological language aid in Paul's continued *apologia*. Antitheses used by Paul include: outer/inner (4:16); transient/eternal (4:17); trifling/abundant (4:17); momentary light affliction/heavy eternal glory (4:17); seen/not seen (4:18); temporary/eternal (4:18); earthly/heavenly (5:1-2); tent/building (5:1); destructible/indestructible (5:1); naked/clothed (5:2-4); mortality/life (5:4). With antithetical irony Paul is able to command attention, depend on reciprocal interpretation of the elements, and create a sense of expectation that will urge assent to his position.

Jean Héring comments that, if one disregards the context, 2 Cor. 4:16-18 could have been written by Philo or any other Platonist.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>With this argument, Paul is employing *anastasis*.

<sup>67</sup>For this insight I am indebted to my colleague, Frank Carver, II CORINTHIANS, 540.

<sup>68</sup>F. Carver, II CORINTHIANS, 542.

<sup>69</sup>K. Plank, IRONY OF AFFLICTION, 77-80.

<sup>70</sup>Jean Héring, LA SECONDE ÉPÎTRE DE SAINT PAUL AUX CORINTHIENS, Commentaire de Nouveau Testament, Vol 8 (Paris: Delachaux and Niestle, 1958, ET, 1967), 45. See P. E. Hughes, PAUL'S SECOND EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 154ff.

Bultmann thinks these verses are evidence of a Gnostic vocabulary.<sup>71</sup> Both Martin and Barrett find parallels in Hellenistic literature.<sup>72</sup> With all the antitheses, irony, ambiguity, and Gnostic/Hellenistic language, one might suppose interpreters would seek a new avenue of understanding rather than trying to reconcile Paul's eschatology and linguistic usage with what he writes elsewhere. If the language and concepts are consistent with Gnosticizing Corinthianism, one should explore the possibilities of the rhetorical use of irony. Perhaps Paul ironically is giving the reader Corinthian eschatology in order to invert their criteria for apostleship and encourage them to accept him as their apostle.

Antitheses in 4:16-18 certainly possess attentional novelty. If allowed, the antithetical elements will be mutually interpretive. All of the antitheses (including the ones in 5:1-10) can be subsumed under the contrast of the seen/unseen of 4:18. On the one hand, what can be seen is Paul's outer, transient, present, temporary, and earthly affliction. On the other hand, what cannot be seen is inner, eternal and heavenly reality. That Paul wanted a reorientation of apostolic criteria is confirmed by his ironic antitheses. Thus, exhaustive analysis of each antithesis destroys the intended rhetorical effect. Paul's singular point in all of the antitheses is that the Corinthians have misjudged him on the basis of his appearance by failing to reckon with God's reality.

This persistent antithetical pattern creates cognitive dissonance. In each antithesis the Corinthian view, as perceived by Paul, is contrasted with the Apostle's view. The Corinthians evaluate apostleship on the basis of outward appearance; Paul's judgment is based on "things not seen." His principle of apostolic ministry is revealed in the words: "We walk by faith, not by sight" (5:7). His inversion of apostolic criteria based on appearance may suggest his familiarity with the Socratic apologetic tradition.

Paul can hardly deny the obvious facts of his mortal existence. Deterioration of the outer person is an ongoing process (4:16). The "outer person" is wasting away, but the "inner person" is constantly being "renewed." This antithesis raises questions of the source of such apparently

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<sup>71</sup>R. Bultmann, *SECOND CORINTHIANS*, 124-129. Walter Schmithals, *GNOSTICISM IN CORINTH*, 259-275, finds Gnostic ideas throughout 5:1-10. He comments that Paul becomes a Gnostic to the Gnostics, in order to win the Gnostics, 273.

<sup>72</sup>R. Martin, *2 CORINTHIANS*, 91-92; C. K. Barrett, *SECOND CORINTHIANS*, 145-146.

anthropological dualism, which is otherwise completely foreign to Paul. Furnish thinks this language has been “influenced by the widespread anthropological dualism of the ancient world,”<sup>73</sup> but Bultmann traces it to Plato, Stoicism, Plotinus, and Gnosticism.<sup>74</sup> In Hellenistic and particularly in Stoic literature, the physical body is often described as a container for the “mind” or “soul.”<sup>75</sup> The *exo anthropos* is the bodily and earthly “container” for the *eso anthropos*, the “true” person.

As much as Paul shared the Hellenistic view of human mortality, his intention in 4:16 has nothing to do with a contrast of the “mortal body” and “immortal soul.” The term “soul” (*psyche*) appears only at 1:23 and 12:15 in this entire document, and in these two instances there is no contrast of the body and soul. In Gnosticism, the “inner person” is an absolutely supernatural, transcendent entity. Paul’s concept of the self is shaped by neither Hellenistic nor Gnostic dualism. That he was not a dualist is proven by his insistence on a somatic resurrection. In both 1 Cor. 15 and 2 Cor. 4:13-5:10 Paul opposes a Gnosticizing eschatology. But in the latter, Paul’s major concern is neither eschatology nor Gnosticism; the eschatological language is the servant of an *apologia*. Here, as with all of the antitheses, his principal defense is “we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen . . . for we walk by faith, not by sight” (4:18; 5:7).

“This slight momentary affliction (v. 17) must surely be Paul’s greatest understatement (cf. 4:8-9; 6:4-10; 11:23-29)! The use of “affliction” modified by “insignificant” or “trivial” is an oxymoron intended to trivialize the Corinthian criteria for apostleship. Similarly, his hyperbolic antithesis, “eternal weight of glory beyond all measure” (in English, “to the nth degree”) further diminishes the effects of criticism against him as an afflicted person, not worthy of apostleship.

Although English translations begin a new sentence with v. 18, the Greek clause is dependent on what has preceded. It explicates what precedes while preparing for and introducing what follows. This

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<sup>73</sup>V. Furnish, II CORINTHIANS, 261.

<sup>74</sup>R. Bultmann, SECOND CORINTHIANS, 124.

<sup>75</sup>Marcus Aurelius III.3; VIII.27; X.38; XII.1-3. CorpusHermeticum, 17; Cicero, TUSCULAN DISPUTATIONS, I.XXII.52; Philo, ON DREAMS, I.26; EVERY GOOD MAN IS FREE, III; ON HUSBANDRY, 9; ON NOAH’S WORK AS A PLANTER, 42; THE WORSE ATTACKS THE BETTER, 22-23; 2 ESDRAS 4.10-11; 7.88; Gos. Phil. II.3, 63 (NHLE), 1138; Seneca, TO MARCIA, X.3; MORAL EPISTLES, LXXI, 26-27.

construction lends support to my hypothesis that “things seen” versus “things not seen” is the focus of the antithetical irony in 4:16, 5:10. What Paul literally says is: “We do not see the things that can be seen, but we see the things that cannot be seen.” However it is handled by interpreters, this statement is at once oxymoronic, paronomasiacal, ambiguous, paradoxical, antithetical, and ironical. Paul is saying that he does not focus his attention on “the things that are seen.” Rather, as an apostle, he aims for a higher goal: “things that are not seen,” things “eternal.”

Few New Testament texts have been severed from their context as violently as 2 Cor 5:1-10. Such practice ignores several important factors: (1) the introductory “for” (*gar*) connects 5:1-10 inextricably to 4:17-18 just as it connects 4:17-18 with 4:16; (2) the structure of 5:1 continues that of 4:13-18; (3) the first person plural persists in 5:1-10 (and for most of 4:13-15) and all of the antitheses are eschatological; (4) all of the antitheses are concerned with the “seen” and “unseen;” (5) in all of the antitheses, Paul concedes to the “seen;” (6) “eternal” (*aionia*) in 4:18 is repeated in 5:1. Surely these data confirm that 5:1-10 is as much a part of the apostolic *apologia* as anything that precedes or follows and that 4:13-5:10 is a rhetorical unit. Paul’s concern in this rhetorical unit is with the consequences of the Corinthian eschatology: the Corinthians could not reconcile a “weak” apostle” with the “power” of the Spirit in Paul.

Eschatological apologetic with antithetical irony, supported with metaphorical language and “For we know” (5:1 introduces the reason for concentrating on the as yet unseen heavenly realities). Here, as in 1 Cor. 15:44, Paul is concerned only to contrast the earthly body with the eternal heavenly body. The parallel between 5:1 and 4:18 explains that the “temporary” in 4:18 refers to the earthly, tent-like house in 5:1. The “things not seen” (4:18) refers to the “house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” in 5:1. Paul’s present body that is “being destroyed” stands in contrast to the permanent, eternal “building.” Note that the contrast is not between a disposable container and its enduring contents. Paul’s analogy presumes no Hellenistic/Gnostic anthropology or eschatology.

Paul’s argument proceeds in vv. 2-4, rhetorically refining and amplifying his argument. He amplifies his thought by adding that in the “earthly house” (his body) he “groans” because he longs to be “clothed” with his “heavenly dwelling” (spiritual body). This produces a hopelessly mixed metaphor; the antithesis is between the “tent” and the “heavenly building.” Although we do not normally clothe ourselves with buildings, the metaphor is clear; it is adequately clarified by its context.

While the Apostle “groans” in his earthly tent, he longs to be clothed with his “heavenly garment.” Because he lives by the “unseen,” not by the “seen” (4:18), by “faith” and not by “sight” (5:7), and because God has given the Spirit as a “down payment” (*arrabon*; 5:5), Paul has hope. Perhaps the Corinthians claim to possess already what Paul only longs to have. Paul continues to live with the tension of the “already . . . not yet.” He still lives in a collapsing tent. But, this evidence testifies for him, not against him. The concession becomes a challenge to the criteria by which the evidence is to be evaluated. The ironic vision does not relieve his suffering, but it does take the fear out of the affliction!

If 5:1 is crucial for understanding 5:1-10, then 5:3 must be most difficult verse in this passage for interpretation. If one adopts the textual variant *ekdusameno*i (“we have taken it off”) rather than *endusameno*i (“we have put it on”) in 5:3, the verse essentially repeats the point of 5:1. The tent in which Paul “groans” in 5:2 is the deteriorating tent in 5:1. The “house not made with hands” (5:1) is the “heavenly dwelling” (5:2). Thus, according to 5:3, by being thus clothed, he will not be naked. From 4:16 Paul has been saying the same thing repeatedly, changing metaphors, adding new words and refining the topic. This is the technique of amplification or *expolitio*. With pleonastic style he bombards the Corinthians with a plethora of metaphors, conceding his weakness and inverting the criteria by which the Corinthians have judged his apostleship.

Even as Paul concedes that he is being “stripped naked” (5:3a), he is confident that he will not be found “naked” (5:3b). Some commentators see in Paul’s mention of nakedness a fear of a disembodied intermediate state.<sup>76</sup> Other scholars think it is simply an “afterthought,”<sup>77</sup> a “spasm of unbelief,”<sup>78</sup> or a reference to the shame and guilt of judgment.<sup>79</sup> All of

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<sup>76</sup>R. Martin, 2 CORINTHIANS, 106. Oscar Cullmann, IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL OR RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD.

<sup>77</sup>A. Plummer, SECOND CORINTHIANS, 147.

<sup>78</sup>C. F. D. Moule, ST PAUL AND DUALISM, 21.

<sup>79</sup>E. E. Ellis, “II Cor. v.1-10,” especially pp. 220-221. That nakedness, shame, and judgment are all related to *gymnos* is not in question. Ellis has demonstrated that well. But the entire context of this passage, both the concession and the future, are related to the body and especially 5:1ff. Adam “heard the sound” of God and hid because he was “naked” (Gen. 3:10). Israel, “naked” of virtue, is clothed with God’s covenant blessing (Ezek. 16:7f). Sheol is naked before God (Job 22:6). See Ezek. 16:37, 39; 23:26, 29; Isa. 20:2-4; Micah 1:8. Because the Laodicean church is “poor, blind and naked,” it is counseled to buy clothes so that “the shame of your nakedness does not appear” (Rev. 3:17-18). See Oxyrh. Pap. 655: “He himself will give you your garment. His disciples say unto him, when will you be manifest to us, when shall we see you? He says, “When you shall be stripped and not be ashamed.”

these explanations read too much into the text and ignore the context. Paul expresses no interest at all in an “intermediate state.” He *never* says *when* the “shift” or “transformation” from the tent to the building is to take place. His *only* concern is to affirm, in the face of suspicion, the legitimacy of his apostleship. Eschatology is *not his major concern*.

In explicit apologetic, polemical form, 2 Cor. 5:4 reiterates the argumentation of 5:2-3. Here Paul posits a reason for his “groaning”—he is burdened (*baroumenoi*) with the afflictions of a weak and dying body. Having already conceded that he expects to die, Paul now concedes even more: “I do not want the body to die; what I want is a new body. As in 1 Cor. 15:53-54, he declares the “necessity” for the “perishable” to be clothed with “imperishability” and the “mortal” with “immortality.” Paul believes the resurrection will happen as a great transforming event “in a moment, the twinkling of an eye” (1 Cor. 15:51-52).

Paul concludes this phase of his argument with v. 5 where the antithetical irony is present but less obvious. He explains the reason for the certainty expressed in vv. 1-4. His hope is not phantasy or illusion; it is confirmed by God through the gift of the Spirit as a “down payment” (*arrabon*). Despite his weakness, Paul triumphantly trusts that God who has “prepared” him for “this very thing,” mortality being swallowed up by life (5:4). That is, God has “prepared” or “equipped” him for immortality.<sup>80</sup> His frail tent cannot invalidate his apostleship; the Spirit validates his apostleship and he is intimidated neither by adversities nor by adversaries.<sup>81</sup>

In the following paragraph (5:6-10), Paul abandons the metaphors “tent,” “house,” “building” and “clothing.” Now he uses plain rather than symbolic speech and for the first time in this passage he explicitly mentions the “body.” Symbolic language in 5:1-5 clearly refers to the body, but the term itself is not used. In 5:6-10 “body” (*soma*) is used five times, indicating a new style of argumentation that is less sensitive to the

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<sup>80</sup>W. Bauer, GREEK LEXICON, s.v. *katergazomai*, 3. Epictetus (III.xxiv.63f) uses the word in this way.

<sup>81</sup>W. Schmithals, GnosticisM IN CORINTH, 266, suggests that 2 Cor 5:5 allows us clearly to recognize the fundamental contrast that separates Paul from the Gnostics. “For them the *Pneuma* itself is life, for which reason they also long for the liberation from any *soma* which restrains the *Pneuma*. For Paul the *Pneuma* is God’s initial gift to the person who has laid hold in faith upon the life promised to him, a pledge that God will actually give him eternal life if he walks “in the Spirit” (Gal 5:25). Thus the *Pneuma* is not *zoe* itself, nor is *zoe* already a possession. The life is rather a free gift of God which is still awaited.

Corinthian disdain for the body. A similar pattern of argumentation may be observed in 1 Cor. 15, where “body” is conspicuously absent in vv. 12-34, but appears ten times in vv. 35-45.

Beginning with v. 6, Paul introduces new imagery that will govern the argumentation in vv. 6-10: “at home” and “away from home.” Because of his assurance through the *arrabon*, he remains confident “whether he dies soon or lives till the Lord returns.”<sup>82</sup> To be “at home” in the body in 5:6 is synonymous with living in the “tent” of 5:4 and the “earthly, tent-like house” of 5:1 (cf. 4:10-11). Paul adopts Corinthian slogans in order to correct their use and encourage a reorientation of their world view. Paul is not interested in “location,” whether on earth or in heaven, as the Corinthians are. His interest is in the orientation of their lives. For the Apostle, it is not their “place of residence,” but their “home address,” i.e., what claims their loyalty.<sup>83</sup>

Paul’s “correction” in 5:7 assures the validity of this interpretation. What Paul affirms here is synonymous with the “seen” and “not seen” in 4:18 as well as with “the earthly tent-like house” and God’s house . . . eternal in the heavens” in 5:1. A polemical edge is detectable when Paul, in his explanation, avers that as an apostle he “conducts his life” on the basis of faith and not on the basis of outward appearances.

Gnosticizing Corinthians tended to neglect the simple fact that the Eschaton had not yet arrived (cf. 1 Cor. 4:5, 8; 2 Tim. 2:17-18). If my hypothesis is correct, that eschatological language in this passage serves an apologetic function, Corinthian reservations about Paul’s apostolic status are quite easily explained. Paul conceded his weaknesses but argued that he did not conduct his apostolic life on the basis of “things seen.” On the contrary, an afflicted apostle is following the pattern of the crucified Christ; his ministry has been conducted in the shadow of the cross.

Now, Paul reverses the order of “being at home” and “being away from home” (v. 8). Throughout the history of the exegesis of this passage, “away from the body” (v. 8) has been assumed to describe the intermediate state.<sup>84</sup> Ellis rejects this view and rightly so. Paul’s interest here

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<sup>82</sup>A. Plummer, *SECOND CORINTHIANS*, 150.

<sup>83</sup>V. Furnish, *II CORINTHIANS*, 303.

<sup>84</sup>As early as Clement of Alexandria, *STROMATA*, iv, xxvi and Tertullian, *de resur. carnis*, XIII and in the consensus of modern opinion. E. E. Ellis, “II Corinthians V.1-10,” 222 states: “In view of the influence of Greek philosophy from a very early period one would expect the exegesis to take this direction.”

is neither to affirm nor to deny such a doctrine. On this subject, as on many others, Paul is silent and remains a “reverent agnostic.” His concern is to invert the false criteria of apostleship evoked by a Gnosticizing, Corinthian eschatology.

Certainly bodily existence is not incompatible with life in Christ in the Apostle’s thought (cf. 5:7; Gal. 2:20). Nevertheless, his resolve is to orient himself “toward” (*pros*) the Lord and “away from” the concerns of the body. By thus transforming the Corinthian slogan, alluded to in v. 6, from a metaphor of “location” to one of “direction” (cf. Phil 3:13), Paul essentially de-eschatologizes the slogan. The “already . . . not yet” dialectic, with which Paul always struggles, is in evidence here. He is “already on the road, but he is not yet home.”<sup>85</sup>

Not until 5:9 does Paul complete the idea begun in v. 6. His confidence (v. 6) is justified by the “down payment” of the Spirit’s presence that his salvation will be finalized (v. 5). The Apostle is resolved to conduct his apostleship on the basis of “faith” and not on “sight” (v. 7). He is determined to orient his life in the direction of the Lord and away from the body (v. 8). Such determined resolve emerges from his deep desire to “please the Lord” (v. 9) so that he will be prepared to appear before the judgment seat of Christ (v. 10).

The “home place” metaphor of the Corinthians (v. 6) is adopted so that he can criticize and nullify its significance. In v. 8 Paul de-eschatologizes the imagery, only to jettison the imagery entirely in v. 9. The Pauline apostolate is committed only to the gospel and not to its own welfare, as he has always claimed (cf. 2:17; 4:2, 5, 15). That his apostolic ministry might be judged pleasing to the Lord is Paul’s highest ambition and driving motivation.

An ethical concern “to please the Lord” (v. 9) persists with a forward glance to the “judgment seat of Christ” (v. 10). Introducing the judgment motif serves only to strengthen the polemical character of this entire passage. “All of us,” including Paul along with the Corinthians, will be laid bare, “naked” (*gymnos*) for all the world to see their true character. Throughout this apology, Paul’s attention has been focused on the body, especially the afflictions and infirmities of his own body. Although he has relativized and de-eschatologized their somatic obsession, polemical irony must strike once more: “All of us will be judged on precisely the basis of the deeds done through the instrumentality of the body” (5:10).

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<sup>85</sup>V. Furnish, II CORINTHIANS, 303.

At the judgment “Paul’s gospel will receive its vindication and those who oppose him can expect eschatological ruin.”<sup>86</sup> In the context of this eschatological *apologia*, what is at issue is the Corinthians’ attitude toward the apostolicity of Paul, not their particular eschatological opinions.

### Concluding Remarks

Eschatologies in 1 Cor. 15 and 2 Cor. 4:13-5:10 do not compete, contradict, or stand in tension with one another. Nor does 2 Cor. 4:13-5:10 represent a radically developed Hellenistic eschatology. Fascinating questions of modern curiosity-seekers are not on Paul’s agenda. Eschatological speculation seems to have been neither his vocation nor his avocation. On many such esoteric issues Paul consistently remained a “reverent agnostic.”

Most of the interpreters seem to have read Paul with assumptions of plain rather than symbolic speech. Even when they concede the apologetic context of 2 Cor. 4:13-5:10, their exegetical focus remains on eschatology. They ignore the rhetorical context of both passages. Efforts to find competing eschatologies in 1 Cor. 15 and 2 Cor. 5 have further complicated and hindered the exegetical process. Only when the two very different rhetorical contexts are taken seriously can one hear what Paul intended to say in each of these passages.

Gnosticizing Corinthians seem to have had a problem with the body, a problem reflected in both 1 Cor. 15 and 2 Cor. 4:13-5:10. In 1 Cor. 15 Paul is dealing with, and seeking to correct, an over-realized eschatology that forced Paul to argue for the resurrection of the body, albeit a “spiritual body” (*soma pneumatikon*), which he neither defines nor explains. On the other hand, 2 Cor. 4:13-5:10 is a rhetorical unit within an apostolic *apologia* where Paul finally de-eschatologizes Corinthian slogans in defense of his apostleship and the gospel he preaches. Thus, 1 Cor. 15 is clearly eschatological, but 2 Cor. 4:13-5:10 uses eschatological language in the service of an *apologia*. Paul’s eschatology may be deduced from this passage, but the function of the text is apologetic.

The man of “one book,” John Wesley would be quite comfortable with Paul’s views. Wesley, like Paul, refrained from useless eschatological speculations and, like Paul, remained a “reverent agnostic” on

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<sup>86</sup>C. J. Roetzel, JUDGMENT IN THE COMMUNITY, NovTSup (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 175. Cf. also 1 Cor. 4:2-4.

eschatological matters. Wesleyans have generally avoided dogmatic eschatological pronouncements. Reformed theologians, who believe God knows the beginning from the end (not unlike Augustine’s “eternal now”), can be more certain on eschatology. Wesleyans, on the other hand, with their views of freedom and grace, have generally understood the future to be more open. As a people of *one book*, Wesleyans would do well to follow Paul’s example of moving ever “toward the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8), seeking to “please the Lord” (v. 9) in preparation for appearing before “the judgment seat of Christ” (v. 10).

His “irony of affliction” allows Paul to concede the truth of the Corinthian “charges” that he is a weak, afflicted, and suffering apostle. Paul accepts and embraces his weakness, believing that in doing so he is imitating Christ. Rather than invalidating his apostleship, it is the *sine qua non* for apostolic service. Thus his view of ministry is grounded in the cross and becomes essentially Christocentric. Wesleyan theology, as I understand it, is essentially Christocentric. Modern “Wesleyans” would do well to develop a more Christocentric theology of ministry—the minister as a suffering servant who is never very far from the cross.

Paul’s “ironic vision” sets the afflicted free, not from suffering, but from the fear of its assumed meaning, the expectation that affliction and weakness drive away the presence of God and the communion of human beings. The “ironic vision” frees one from the dread that in our dying we are alone, cut off from God and life.<sup>87</sup> Truly apostolic ministry, in Pauline understanding, is always lived out in the shadow of the cross. When weakness is not only conceded, but embraced, it has the power to bind both the apostle and the people to the irony of the cross. The way of irony and the way of the cross are one way!

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<sup>87</sup>K. Plank, *IRONY OF AFFLICTION*, 94.

# WESLEYAN RESERVATIONS ABOUT ESCHATOLOGICAL “ENTHUSIASM”

by

Michael Lodahl

In one of the classes I teach annually my students and I study John Wesley’s *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*. The repeated reading of this fascinating little volume has had the effect of pushing a certain question to the surface of my thinking: Why did Wesley show so little sympathy and have so little patience with eschatological fervor, which he tended to identify with “enthusiasm”?

Eschatology is not a prominent theme in *A Plain Account*. In his strictures against enthusiasm, however, Wesley occasionally deals with eschatological issues. These issues come to prominence in section 22. There Wesley writes:

About the same time [1762], five or six honest enthusiasts foretold the world was to end on the 28th of February. I immediately withstood them, by every possible means, both in public and private. I preached expressly upon the subject. . . . I warned the society, again and again, and spoke severally to as many as I could; and I saw the fruit of my labor. They made exceeding few converts. . . . Nevertheless, they made abundance of noise, . . . and greatly increased both the number and courage of those who opposed Christian perfection (1966, 69-70).

What strikes me about this brief excerpt is that Wesley does not tell us on what grounds he opposed these enthusiasts or why he was so

adamant about his denying the validity of their prediction. Undoubtedly one reason was the pastoral motivation of desiring to avoid the unpleasant task of having to “pick up the pieces” of shattered hopes, and even faith, after a failed prediction. At the end of Wesley’s account, however, we find a theological clue that shall be pursued more thoroughly later in this paper. These eschatological enthusiasts stimulated opposition to “Christian perfection.” Wesley’s concern for protecting and promulgating this doctrine of perfection may provide a key for understanding his reservations about eschatological fervor.

In 1788 Wesley wrote a letter to Christopher Hopper reflecting the traditional Wesleyan reservation about eschatological “enthusiasm.” It read:

My dear Brother, I said nothing, less or more, in Bradford church, concerning the end of the world, neither concerning my own opinion, but what follows: That Bengelius [Johann Albrecht Bengel] had given it as his opinion, not that the world would then end, but that the millennial reign of Christ would begin in the year 1836. I have no opinion at all upon the head: I can determine nothing at all about it. These calculations are far above, out of my sight. I have only one thing to do—to save my soul, and those that hear me (1978, 12:319).

Particularly here we catch Wesley’s typical impatience with speculative matters. In fact, his dismissal of Bengel’s date-setting has the same tone one finds in his journal when he responds to a lecture he had heard concerning the possibility of life on other planets: “I know the earth is [inhabited]. Of the rest I know nothing” (1978, 2:515). Wesley tended to dismiss speculation, especially as it touches on sensationalistic matters, as being unimportant, even delusive in that it occupies the mind with issues not rooted in soteriology. How different this is from our modern-day apocalypticists, ranging from the traveling evangelists with their detailed charts to the Hal Lindseys,<sup>1</sup> all of whom trade on human curiosity and fear addressed by their endtime scenarios. They thereby encourage their hearers to *reserve* a place in a future age. Wesley teaches a different attitude, one which is concerned that preoccupation with eschatology may cloud the issues central to salvation. Perhaps one could suggest that Wesley’s approach encourages us to do what we can to *serve* the present age, indeed to *preserve* it, rather than to flee it or hope for its soon demise.

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<sup>1</sup>See, for instance, Lindsey’s bestselling *The Late Great Planet Earth*.

In what follows I offer a theological rationale, arising directly from the Arminian-Wesleyan tradition, for Wesley's usual reticence to engage in eschatological sensationalism. I do not argue that Wesley had in mind all that I shall say, but I hope to demonstrate that suspicions against traditional eschatological fervor are inherent in his understanding of the divine-human relationship and are applied appropriately to all that I suggest.

### **Perfecting Grace in This Life**

The obvious place to begin is with the recognition that eschatology is, in fact, at the very heart of Wesley's doctrine of entire sanctification. It is, to be sure, a *realizable* eschatology, since Wesley insists that it is possible in this life to be brought to a perfection of love for God and neighbor. Theodore Runyon spoke helpfully of this perfection: "This doctrine is distinctive from notions of sanctification in other Christian traditions in that it expects the finite equivalent of eschatological fulfillment (i.e., entire sanctification) as something which can happen in history rather than beyond it" (2). By differing with those who taught that Christian perfection occurs only after death, at the point of death, or perhaps immediately prior to death, and by holding out for the possibilities of divine grace to perfect us in love in this life, Wesley was making room for an eschatological hope that could become more than a hope, but rather a gracious reality in the here and now.

The Wesleyan insistence upon the possibility of entire sanctification *in this life* testifies not only to the transforming power of God's love and grace, but also to the potential of this present world to become an arena of authentic goodness and love, or what the Hebrew prophets called *shalom*. One might even surmise that the same impatience Wesley showed toward those who testified of being in the "state" of perfection, because they tended to rest in a past experience, he might extend toward those who tend to look ahead to some future moment of eschatological perfection. The crucial nature of the "now" before God—"that we need not stay another moment . . . that 'now,' the very 'now is the accepted time . . . now is the day of this 'full salvation'" (1966, 34)—was obscured by moments either remembered or anticipated, moments other than the "now" of sanctifying grace and human responsibility.

Wesley took a certain delight in quoting Augustine's words, "He who made us without ourselves will not save us without ourselves,"

because this sentiment runs counter to much of the rest of Augustine's decidedly unilateral soteriology which, at its most logical extreme, embraced an unmitigated predestinationism. Wesley also delighted in these words precisely because he so thoroughly agreed with them. The God who created us without our aid<sup>2</sup> is, for Wesley, not interested in redeeming us apart from our cooperation.

But does not eschatological doctrine, particularly (though not only) as it is flavored by apocalypticism, continually veer toward the idea that God indeed will, and must, "save us without ourselves"? Obviously I here mean "save us" in a larger, cosmic sense, by God intervening in human history and essentially putting an end to the historical process. To the extent that eschatology concerns itself with what God is going to do to put an end to history, specifically in the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ, then it seems that we do believe that God will "save us without ourselves." And to the extent that many traditional eschatological scenarios either imply or encourage a certain hopelessness about the project of history, do they not to that extent mitigate against Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection as a realizable eschatology? Obviously the post-millennialism that was popular among Christians in the late 19th and early 20th centuries placed emphasis upon human cooperation in history toward God's eschatological telos, but few of us are officially or intentionally post-millennial anymore, and even in that endtime scenario Christ's coming presumably brings about the end of history. But what if the real "end" of history is the gracious (re)creation of human beings to become, "in this life," lovers of God and neighbor?

Indeed, it is precisely this kind of vision that surfaces in Wesley's sermon entitled "The General Spread of the Gospel." After surveying the world as he knew it, and admitting that, humanly speaking, the prospects for winning the world to Christian faith were not encouraging, Wesley nonetheless insists that "the loving knowledge of God, producing uniform, uninterrupted holiness and happiness, shall cover the earth; shall fill every soul of man" (1978, 6:279). But such will not come about by God acting irresistibly because

then, man would be man no longer: his inmost nature would be changed. He would no longer be a moral agent, any more

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<sup>2</sup>Of course, if one thinks of creation more in terms of God's ongoing activity, the fact is that God creates each of us with the procreating aid of others. Hence, even the act of creation becomes a partnered, synergistic labor of God.

than the sun or the wind; as he would no longer be endued with liberty—a power of choosing, of self-determination . . . . [How] can all men be made holy and happy, while they continue men? . . . As God is One, so the work of God is uniform in all ages. May we not then conceive how he will work on the souls of men in times to come, by considering how he does work now, and how he has wrought in times past? (1978, 6:280).

The pattern of divine activity that Wesley finds in human experience, “God’s general manner of working,” is that of gracious assistance, not force. It is an enlightening and strengthening of human understanding and affections, not their deletion or destruction. This gracious synergism provided Wesley with a model not simply for divine-human interaction, but for the entirety of the God-world interaction. “Now in the same manner as God has converted so many to himself without destroying their liberty, he can undoubtedly convert whole nations, or the whole world; and it is as easy to him to convert a world, as one individual soul” (1978, 6:281).

Writing out of this optimism of grace, Wesley predicts the triumphal spread of the gospel from one nation and people to another as God gradually renews the face of the earth until the vision of the Revelator is fulfilled and “the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!” Today we tend not to share Wesley’s naive-sounding optimism, but do we have good reason to reject his interpretation of God’s mode of activity as persuasion and gracious enablement in contrast to a unilateral, manipulative, apocalyptic inbreaking of history?

Wesley’s insistence on human cooperation with divine grace raises profound questions about our understanding of the role and importance of human activity in the direction(s) history takes. It stands in direct contrast to notions of absolute sovereignty, whether understood on the individual or the cosmic level, notions that view God bringing about (or soon to bring about) divine intentions unilaterally. Of course, it is apocalypticism that is most insistent on the notion of divine foreclosure. It also is apocalypticism that provided the eschatological milieu for Christianity in its birth pangs, provides much of the traditional Christian doctrine concerning endtimes, and is a common expectation of many Christians filling today’s pews.

Thus the question is worth asking again: How does belief in the return of Christ, particularly as framed in terms of an apocalyptic

conclusion to human history, fit with Wesley's understanding of divine-human interaction as the dynamic and purpose of history? Can we not, indeed ought we not interpret the idea of synergism in categories that are larger, more encompassing and more cosmic than simply an understanding of the individual's relationship to God? Indeed, is it consistent or coherent to insist upon synergism on the level of individual spiritual experience and yet hold to an eschatological hope of unilateral divine intrusion on the historical or cosmic level?

### **Pannenberg and Apocalypticism**

Probably no contemporary theologian has used as comprehensively and creatively the apocalypticism of Christianity's historical roots as has Wolfhart Pannenberg. Pannenberg, with his characteristic emphasis on the future, argues that God's reality and lordship will become evident only in the end of all things. But God has proleptically revealed the divine self as the God of history in Jesus' resurrection, which is the fulfillment of the Jewish apocalyptic hope of resurrection as well as the promise of future resurrection. Pannenberg argues that Jewish apocalyptic hopes were anchored in the symbol and hope of the resurrection of the dead as the *sine qua non* of final judgment, the end of the world, and God's self-vindication (1968, *Revelation*).

Pannenberg insists that to understand any event is to see it within its own contexts of tradition, expectation or meaning. This has important implications for what he has to say about Jesus' resurrection and its significance. If one interprets Jesus' resurrection from within the prevailing worldview of apocalypticism in first-century Palestinian Judaism, then "resurrection from the dead" implies the end of the world, the final judgment, and the full revelation of God. No wonder the early Christians expected Jesus' imminent return! The day of the Lord was already inbreaking. The fact that their expectation went unfulfilled, and is yet unfulfilled two millennia later, is not lost on us. Thus, Pannenberg's claim that "with the resurrection of Jesus, the end of history has already occurred" (1968, *Jesus*, 142), while almost a cliché among theologians of hope, suffers from oversimplification and a failure to understand the ongoing, interwoven processes of history and nature as the realm of God's covenantal activity with humanity and all of creation. I agree with Paul van Buren when he writes:

Perhaps we must say that in the resurrection of Jesus something about the end has been shown us; but to say it "has

already occurred” is to sweep all following history, including the history in which we now live, into the bin of insignificance. This is a high price to pay for protecting the importance of the history of Jesus as revelation. Surely it can be done in some other way (143).

Further, I believe that it is precisely Pannenberg’s apocalyptic reading of history that comes into conflict with the Wesleyan eschatology of a perfect love for God and neighbor that is realizable in this life. The latter has much more in common with the prophetic understanding of history than the apocalyptic. In the words of D. S. Russell:

In the prophetic writings, . . . the triumph of God is seen within this present world-order; but in the apocalyptic writings the emphasis comes to be laid not so much on [God’s] judgment within time and on the plane of history, as on his judgment in a setting beyond time and above history. Instead of acting through human agencies [or what we are calling synergism], God is seen here to act directly, intervening personally in the affairs of the world (95, bracketed comment added).

Jewish apocalypticism, then, tended toward a denial of the world and of the real significance of human activity within history. It anticipated the full revelation of God in terms of the vengeful, sword-bearing messiah who would eliminate Israel’s oppressors and establish justice and peace throughout the earth. But the one whom Christians acknowledge as God’s messiah, God’s uniquely anointed one, did not (and I argue does not and will not) fit the description of the world-conquering apocalyptic lord. Christian theological tradition often has not seen the profound implications of its own central claim that it was in a suffering servant, a humble Jewish peasant, that God has visited and is redeeming creation. Christians have tended traditionally to castigate the Jews of Jesus’ time for not perceiving his messiahship, while making the same mistake in maintaining and anticipating an apocalyptic eschatological scenario.

The doctrinal position of the Wesleyan Theological Society is that “our Lord Jesus Christ . . . will personally return in power and great glory.” The paradox is that the Society also believes that our Lord Jesus Christ is the paradigm for how God reveals the divine character in all of human history and how God works in covenantal partnership with human beings. If God has revealed the divine character and intentions in the man Christ Jesus, then we can say confidently that God chooses to come to us,

to labor toward God's own ends for history, in and through human cooperation. I suspect that apocalypticism, born as it inevitably is in historical contexts of extreme suffering and oppression, is a religious expression of the desire to be rid of human responsibility for history. Is it possible that the revelation in Christ, rather than validating the apocalyptic understanding of history as Pannenberg has tended to argue, is actually a judgment and negation of apocalypticism?

The Wesleyan message of perfect love for God and neighbor in this life provides an optimism about the possibilities of grace in human existence, societies, and history that belies any apocalyptic despair. The fact that, for Wesley, Jesus is the great model and exemplar of such love supports my contention that what God reveals to us in Christ, both about God and about ourselves, is a direct challenge to apocalyptic scenarios that write off history. The synergism of grace underlying Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection points to the validity and importance of history.

One may object by insisting that the apocalyptic vision does indeed reflect God's intentions for creation, and that the Wesleyan interpretation of history as offered here is incorrect. I offer a threefold response. First, it is obviously the case that, to this point in our history as human beings on this planet, the apocalyptic vision is not correct and in fact has led many sincere believers into profound disappointment and even disillusionment. Second, if the apocalyptic vision does turn out to be correct and is vindicated at some future moment in time, all arguments for or against really will not matter. Third, the popular Christian fixation on apocalyptic scenarios tends often to be self-defeating, in that people so engaged often disengage themselves from responsibility in this life and world.

This third point deserves development. A Korean Christian sect that believed the widely-publicized prediction that Christ would return on October 28, 1992, provides a tragically fitting example. Shortly before midnight of October 28, four of the sect's followers committed suicide in anticipation. Others sold their homes and all their goods and gave the money away, leaving them with nothing for themselves and their families. On the other hand, the person committed to a covenantal cooperation with God for the redemption and healing of others and the world as a whole is the person who is truly ready for whatever future God brings. One is reminded of Jesus' parable of the talents, in which the stewards are praised who actively and responsibly invest the master's property. The one who stewed over the imminent return of the demanding master,

hiding in the ground the one talent entrusted to him, is chastised and punished.

### **Creation and Eschatology**

Eschatological anticipations of a divinely-ordained closure to the processes of history seem to exist in tension with, if not contradiction to, the Biblical doctrine of creation as offered in Genesis. If the created order is God's "other" called into existence and sustained by God, whose "otherness" finds its highest expression in intelligent beings of moral agency, then such considerations cannot be alien to God's original intention in creating. The question of why God created the world is one of the great issues of theology. Whatever view one takes, it is difficult to sustain if one also believes that God shall, at some future point, undo or foreclose this project of creating that which is other than (and sometimes even opposed to) God's own self. What would have been the point? Jose Migeuz-Bonino has framed the dilemma well:

Is God a substitute subject for men in historical action, or is he the where-from and the where-to, the pro-vocation, the power, and the guarantee of an action that remains fully human and responsible? If he is a substitute subject — however much we may try to explain it away—history is a meaningless game and man's humanity a curious detour (62).

Again, is it not the case that most eschatological scenarios do indeed crown God as the "substitute subject" *par excellence*, whose foreclosure on the processes of human action and responsibility in history renders those processes null and void? What then becomes of God's venture to create? In response to such a consideration, I argue that a thoroughly Wesleyan eschatology does posit an "end" for creation and history, but fundamentally in the sense of an inner telos: God's end is that human beings, those creatures fashioned to image God and thus to be God's representatives in the world and in history, would join God in covenantal relationship and cooperation toward the redemption and healing of creation. God's creative activity is an ongoing task. While humanity as a whole has not thus far done an effective job of contributing to the wellness or *shalom* of creation, there is no reason to assume that God is yet ready to give up on the project of covenantal freedom and responsibility *vis a vis* human beings.

It is noteworthy that Scripture tells a powerful story of a time early in the human saga when God nearly did give up on the project of human

freedom and responsibility. In the words of Genesis, “Then Yahweh saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, . . . and Yahweh was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart” (6:5, 6). Yet God chose to begin anew with Noah and his family. In fact, in the aftermath of the flood, God covenanted with Noah and all his descendants (i.e., us) “and with every living creature . . . even every beast of the earth,” that “all flesh shall never again be cut off by the water of the flood, neither shall there again be a flood to destroy the earth” (Gen 9:10-11). Of course there is a popular tradition of interpretation arguing that God only promised never to destroy the world with a flood. But the intent of the text, it seems to me, is to underscore the Creator’s commitment to sustain the created order in covenantal faithfulness. God establishes this covenant with all of creation precisely in the face of, and even as a response to, human sin and failure. Smelling the soothing aroma of Noah’s offering, God responds, “I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man’s heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done” (Gen 8:21).

The Genesis doctrine of creation, particularly as it is re-creation in the flood narrative, is a profound affirmation of God’s underlying predisposition toward maintaining the possibilities of adventurous relationship that this created order provides. Such an understanding of creation goes hand-in-hand with Wesley’s optimism of grace, which insists that it is possible *in this life* (and hence, in this world) to love God and neighbor with all one’s being. If such love is possible for one, it is in principle possible, by God’s transforming, empowering grace, for all. Hence, individuals and societies, graced and enabled by God’s prevenient presence, can yet move, at least in principle, toward the divine vision of *shalom*. This perspective has obvious implications for developing a Christian, and particularly a Wesleyan commitment to social and economic justice as well as to the ecological health of the planet. Good stewardship of the created order, human responsibility as those created in God’s image to tend to creation, is stewardship for the long haul! One might ask, then, whether the purpose or purposes of God’s venture in creating get shortchanged by eschatological scenarios in which human activity and responsibility are brought to closure.

Even if our Creator truly is committed to the venture and risk of freedom exercised by the creature, there is no guarantee that this grand “experiment” will end satisfactorily. While the prevenient grace of God’s presence in human life and societies is faithful and true (Ps 146:6-9), that

grace is persuasive rather than coercive. The great majority of eschatological scenarios that Christians have envisioned are coercive in nature. But if grace is persuasive, and thus an indication of God's desire to lure us toward answerability for history, then the underside is that we might enact our own apocalypse. There "unfortunately is no absolute guarantee against the blood-chilling possibility that the human race will finally destroy itself as the present threat of nuclear war attests" (Dunning, 296).

### **Eschatology and Modern Cosmology**

Eschatology need not be restricted to the real possibility of the self-annihilation of the human race. Even if, by the grace of God, we should be enabled to avoid total nuclear warfare or the slow death of ecocide, we can be fairly confident that the world as we know it will not go on forever. Eschatology has made a new place for itself in the thinking of some of the theologians currently working in the dialogue between religious faith and scientific theory. Particularly when one reflects on creation from within a Big Bang paradigm, in which "the universe is walking a one-way street from hot to cold," and where "our cosmic house is moving from centralized heating to decentralized freezing" (Peters, 51), there is an inevitable conclusion to the universe as we know it. The Big Bang scenario, which presently is the dominant description among scientists of the universe's genesis, postulates a cosmos with a beginning, a relatively straight arrow of time, and an inevitable conclusion. Thus, even should we avoid planetary suicide either by nuclear war or by ecological asphyxiation, our sun will finally burn out in a universe that will have gradually expanded away all its heat.

Many if not most cosmologists, in other words, offer us a secular version of the endtime vision of the book of Hebrews, compiled as it is by a string of quotations from the psalms and the prophets:

In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end (Heb 1:10-12).

This text and others like it join with the secular eschatology of Big Bang cosmology to remind us that our universe is finite. The phenomenon of space-time, presumably begun in an unimaginable explosion of power,

will come to an end. The vital question is whether such a conclusion to the universe will also mark the conclusion of God's commitment to covenantal relationship, to the divine-human synergism of grace. A partial answer is that the New Testament echoes Isaiah's prophecy of a "new heaven and a new earth" in which righteousness dwells (2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1-5). Christian eschatology presents the promise of a new reality from the God who makes all things new—a reality not dependent on or threatened by the apparently inevitable winding down of this present order.

Ted Peters, one of those contemporary theologians working in consonance with the categories of modern cosmology, suggests that we need to envision creation as God's ongoing act, a continuing process yet to be completed. Its completion is, for Peters, what eschatology is all about. "God is constantly in the process of creating the world in light of its forthcoming end" (104). If a Wesleyan understanding of God's "end" in creating is that responsible relationship might be sustained, then whatever "new heaven and earth" God might create would also include the adventurous risk of freedom.

Most traditional eschatology, however, is uncomfortable with the expectation of such a new creation. Eschatology traditionally tends to focus on closure, on God finally saying "Enough!" to the project of creaturely otherness and freedom. Paul van Buren, struggling to understand Paul's eschatological vision of God finally becoming "all in all" (1 Cor 15:28), suggests that it "seems unlikely, having made the commitment and self-limiting move entailed in having begun this creation, that His final goal were to be rid of it; but who knows? Perhaps for God, too, enough can be enough" (200). But can God forget rainbows?

In the vision of the book of Revelation, the new heaven and new earth are no longer plagued by the sea (21:1), that recurring Biblical symbol of the chaotic elements that threaten the stability of the created order. The Revelator seems to be suggesting an entirely secure re-creation in which all contingency, threat, and danger will be removed. It is difficult to picture such a scenario that would still have any room for the possibilities of covenantal relationship rooted in human freedom and responsibility. On the other hand, it is difficult to imagine the God who is Love ever denying or negating the human capacity for authentic love made possible by response-ability.

Perhaps the best Wesleyan solution to this problem is wrapped up in the theme of eschatological love as addressed in 1 John, which was of

paramount importance for Wesley: “By this, love is perfected with us, that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; . . . there is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. We love, because He first loved us” (4:17-19). Such love is possible only in the atmosphere of authentic freedom. Moreover, such love is also the deepest meaning and fulfillment, or end, of human freedom. Such a consideration sheds light, I think, on the concluding sentence of Wesley’s sermon “The New Creation.” It reads: “And, to crown all, there will be a deep, an intimate, an uninterrupted union with God; a constant communion with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, through the Spirit; a continual enjoyment of the Three-One God, and of all the creatures in him!” (1978, 6:296).

Perhaps the eschatological experience in God’s new heaven and earth—presumably an inexplicable and unimaginable experience of divine love, light and presence—will truly liberate us to love in ways unknown to us now, and thus paradoxically to make us more truly free than we can ever experience in this life.<sup>3</sup> For in the glory that is to be revealed, we shall be truly free to love, free to serve one another in love. And that, according to Paul, is what authentic freedom is (Gal. 5:1, 13).

## Summary

By taking such an approach, one can argue the following about a Wesleyan orientation to eschatology:

1. The Wesleyan proclamation is that it is possible by divine grace to love God and neighbor perfectly in this life. This, particularly when joined with the Genesis affirmation of this world and this life as God’s arena of covenantal faithfulness, ought to energize and embolden a commitment of the Wesleyan theological tradition to transformation of this present age toward universal love as God’s intended end for creation.
2. Because Scripture envisions a new heaven and new earth, the Wesleyan tradition’s commitment to the idea of gracious synergism within the context of divinely ordained “otherness” is not necessarily dependent upon the survival of the present universe.
3. On the other hand, whatever eschatological fulfillment of creation Wesleyans might envision is only coherent and con-

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<sup>3</sup>The opposite presumably would hold in the experience of hell.

sistent with the first two points if it upholds an eschatological perfection of love, which seems inevitably to imply a continuing situation of glorious freedom and responsibility.

4. And thus we pray, as Jesus taught his disciples, "May your reign arrive; may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Amen!

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# **EUCHARIST AND ESCHATOLOGY IN THE WRITINGS OF THE WESLEYS**

**by**

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Ronald Spivey describes as follows a marble table in the apse of the City Road Chapel in London that was erected to John Wesley's memory:

In the center of the carving is the globe, for the world was John Wesley's parish. It is appropriate that the portion of the globe which confronts the eye is the Atlantic Ocean with its many shores. Protruding from behind the globe are the Biblical symbols of a winged trumpet and a shepherd's crook, for Wesley's labours combined equally the work of preacher and pastor. It is important, however, to notice that in the carving the world is held in place by two books; one is the Bible and the other is the liturgy of the Church of England. This signifies that for a proper understanding of Methodism in history and in the world today, it is essential to remember that the evangelical revival was also a revival of private prayer and corporate worship upon which the souls of many generations of Christians have been fed. The revival resulting from the proclamation of the gospel of grace was sustained and kept alive by the provision of the means of grace (qtd. in Bishop 51).

While the keenness of this analysis cannot be overestimated, there is, perhaps, at least one element missing from the construction which also could serve as a memorial to John Wesley and the entire Wesleyan movement. If the carving were placed in the shadow of a hymnal, the table would be a fairly complete symbol of Wesleyan identity.

The identity of the Wesleyan revival, as revealed in the table, was a complex of components, each of which made its own contribution. This essay inquires into one of these aspects of identity, the ardent and persistent emphasis of the Wesley brothers on the Lord's Supper within the life of the movement, and even more narrowly, the relationship of the Supper to eschatology.

The concern of John and Charles Wesley, and the movement they spawned, for eucharistic piety continually found its way into their works and practice. They were insistent on it as a necessary means of grace for the believer. While this theme played strongly in the early Methodist movement, it has too often been ignored by succeeding generations of Wesleyans. This sort of historical myopia often has caused the heirs of the Wesleys to miss (or misunderstand) their own history in one of the places where it was most vital, in the worshipful activity of the believing community. The purpose of this essay, then, is two-fold: (1) to provoke discussion about the role of the Lord's Supper in early Methodism and (2) to explore how the eschatological accents within the works of the Wesleys, in particular the hymns, had some bearing on the formation of the identity of the movement.

Identity is not something that is consciously sought. It is, rather, an emerging quality of life that occurs with maturity. It is also an essential feature of the life of a communion that has, over a period of time, listened to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

The early Wesleyan movement (the period of the Wesleys<sup>1</sup>), had a complex identity that went beyond those whose gifts organized it and sometimes kept it afloat. The Wesleys were not alone in the shaping or experience of the movement. The same spiritual forces which enlivened them quickly began "to revitalize the lives of other people" (Church 211). To put it succinctly, they were the catalyst for a revival.

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<sup>1</sup>In characterizing this period as that of the Wesleys, I do not mean that the brothers were in agreement at every point during the period nor that their individual works should be taken as one corpus. In this designation, I am attempting to describe their effect on the movement as a collective one, especially in regards to the subject matter at hand. This is made clearer below. While it is evident that John played a greater role in Methodism at large, Charles' contributions are at least as important, if not more so, in the area of liturgy and the sacraments. For a good discussion of Charles' formative role within the Methodist tradition, see Richard P. Heitzenrater, "Charles Wesley and the Methodist Tradition," in *Charles Wesley, Poet and Theologian*, ed., S. T. Kimbrough, Jr., Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992. See also T. Crichton Mitchell, *Charles Wesley: Man with the Dancing Heart* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1994).

While the Wesleyan revival began as a “militant campaign for the hearts, minds, bodies, and lives of the perishing multitudes in eighteenth century England” (Sanders 157), it quickly moved beyond the initial preaching to the formation of bands and societies of Christians seeking to live faithful and holy lives in the fear of God. It was far greater than the launching of a mere revival movement, but an attempt to restore the continuity of the full Christian life of adoration within the Anglican Church. The Wesleyan revival became more than an appeal to those outside the Christian faith. It was also a revival of authentic Christian devotion, especially that of the eucharistic variety.

The Wesleys were sacramentalists. As loyal sons of the Church of England they cherished its traditions and found great comfort and direction in its institutions, especially the Book of Common Prayer. Citations to this Book are abundant throughout their works and references to ideas informed by its contents can also be detected.<sup>2</sup> However, their sacramentalism has sometimes been viewed either as peripheral or perfunctory. It was neither. John’s words in his sermon “On The Duty of Constant Communion” are not those of someone attached only to a commonplace status for the sacrament: “He that when he may obey the commandment if he will, does not, will have no place in the kingdom of heaven” (qtd. in Bowmer 188). Charles exhibits the same high regard in his sermon “On A Weekly Sacrament” (Bowmer Appendix III). They were always conscientious in their devotion to the sacrament.

Over time the Lord’s Supper also became vital to those who followed the Wesleys. The extraordinary amount of hymnals, service books, instructions and sermons on worship, and devotional collections published by the Wesleys attest to the importance they and their followers attached to liturgical and sacramental devotion, corporate or private. In sacramental identity and practice the Wesleys “wished their people to be the same as them” (Rattenbury, 1928, 176), so they provided worship materials for instruction and service. Part of the first counsel given to those joining the Methodist societies was to be at church and the Lord’s table every week.<sup>3</sup> Further, as constant communicants throughout their

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<sup>2</sup>In 1784, when John was moved to create a Service Book for the Methodists in America, he simply abridged the Book of Common Prayer.

<sup>3</sup>John Wesley, *The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies*, 1743, quoted in Outler, 177.

lives,<sup>4</sup> the Wesleys showed themselves to be fine examples of both practice and devotion.

This should not be surprising. While the Methodist hymnal of 1933 states that Methodism was “born in song,” it is probably more accurate to say that Methodism was fathered by the pietistic influences of the Moravians and mothered, quite literally, by the devotional practices of high-church Anglicanism. The “conversion” experiences of the Wesleys were combined with the liturgical and sacramental piety that they had embraced through the influence of the Non-jurors, Anglican high churchmen, and their own parents.<sup>5</sup> Their concern for worship and spirituality was centered around both the Bible and the liturgical life of the church. In his sermon “The Means of Grace,” John speaks of the importance of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, noting I Corinthians 10:16:

Is not the eating of that bread, and the drinking of that cup the outward and visible means whereby God conveys into our souls all that spiritual grace, that righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. . . . Let all therefore who truly desire the grace of God, eat of that bread and drink of that cup (John Wesley, *An Anthology of Sermons* 165).

This was the message of Anglican high-church devotion on which the Wesleys were nurtured.

In Anglican worship the Wesley’s encountered a separate world of time and space surrounded by consecrated objects and furniture. No shrines were present, but striking and often glorious images graced the sacred space of Anglican churches. The altar, stained glass windows, and

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<sup>4</sup>In some years John communed every four or five days. In a now famous article, “The Place of the Lord’s Supper in Early Methodism,” published in the *London Quarterly Review* (July 1923), T. H. Barratt used John’s diary entries to show this pattern.

<sup>5</sup>This development has been well outlined in other places. See J.E. Rattenbury, *Wesley’s Legacy to the World*, 174ff. and Sparrow Simpson, *John Wesley and the Church of England*. Many writers link this particular strain in the identity of the Wesleys directly to their parents. While there can be no doubt that high-church devotion was taught in the rectory as well as the church in Epworth, Gordon Rupp in his *Religion in England, 1688-1791* goes so far as to name Susannah Wesley a practicing lay non-juror (pp. 25-27). The effects of these devotional practices, learned at home, would have significant consequences for the Wesleyan movement.

the building itself were frequently beautiful and at times served as magisterial reminders of the presence of God and the glory of heaven (Stout 11). Sacred time was kept with an abbreviation of the Christian year. All of this was intended to convey a deep sense of the numinous to the worshiper. Further, the historical continuity of Christ's church uniting with the angels and all the company of heaven in a liturgical unison of praise to the resurrected Lord was seen as the continuation of a mission begun in the church of the New Testament and carried on by the Church Fathers.

Through the liturgy and the Lord's Supper a deep sense of spiritual and mysterious power was conveyed. This power, the Wesleys believed, was able to sustain the believers in growth and grace and to lead them through a lifetime of the pursuit of Christian perfection. In his sermon "The Duty of Constant Communion"<sup>6</sup> John conveys this opinion about the power of the Lord's Supper:

The Grace of God given herein confirms to us the pardon of our sins and enables us to leave them. As our bodies are strengthened by the bread and wine, so are our souls by these tokens of the body and blood of Christ. This is the food of our souls: this gives strength to perform our duty and leads us on to perfection (qtd. in Outler 335-36).

This is where the spiritual brilliance of the Wesleys shines forth. "It is one of the glories of the Methodist revival that the traditional means of grace were enlisted in the service of evangelistic zeal" (Bowmer 188).

For the Wesleys there was no rigid antithesis between evangelical and sacramental, between preaching and the Lord's Supper. The two were simply different sides of the same coin. The supper was not a substitute for ethical religion, nor for implicit trust in Christ for salvation (Bowmer 200). It worked as a force to empower the evangelical labors of the revival and to deepen the believers in devotion to Christ. One need only read a few of the accounts of the Methodist assistants in *Wesley's Veterans* or *Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers* to learn how the supper played a significant role in the spiritual life of those who worked to spread

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<sup>6</sup>This sermon apparently was first written and used by John Wesley during his days at Oxford in 1733. It was republished by him 55 years later near the end of his career, with the note that in the meantime he had "added very little, but retrenched much; as I then used more words than I do now. But, I thank God, I have not yet seen cause to alter my sentiments in any point which is therein delivered" (Outler 334).

scriptural holiness throughout the land (Rattenbury, 1948, 7). From this vantage point the profound significance of the early Wesleyan movement as a model of spirituality becomes clearer. “Because the Wesleyan movement was big enough to comprehend both the sacramental and the evangelical, it can be regarded as a revival of all that was vital in experimental (i.e., experiential) and historic Christianity” (Bowmer 205).

Several details of the historical canvas need to be highlighted to deepen our understanding of the movement’s identity. First, eucharistic practice within the established church was at a decidedly low ebb. By statute, the sacrament was required to be administered only three times a year. Beyond statutory requirements, regard for the feast was included among a host of other concerns, most of which were designed to make the Christian faith a more reasonable and less mysterious enterprise.<sup>7</sup> While there were attempts at eucharistic revival within England, most notably through the efforts of the Non-jurors, none of them were able to attract for sacramental devotion the popularity it enjoyed within Methodism. The Methodists came to table and they came in great numbers, often by the hundreds or even thousands.<sup>8</sup>

To lay the blame for the high regard of the Lord’s Supper in early Methodism at the feet of the irregular observance of the sacrament in eighteenth century Anglicanism ignores several factors, not the least of which was the providential genius of the Wesleys in grounding the revival in Christian worship. Such judgement would also ignore the movement of the Holy Spirit within the people. Many of the Methodists were poor industrial workers who were not nurtured on a diet of Anglican Christianity. The encounter that they had with Methodism was the first religious experience for many of them. That they would be drawn to the eucharist because of any previous experience seems unlikely.

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<sup>7</sup>Several publications of the period bear this out: Bp. Benjamin Hoadley’s *A Plain Account of the Nature and End of the Lord’s Supper* (1735), John Toland’s *Christianity Not Mysterious* (ca. 1700) and John Locke’s *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695). At the risk of oversimplifying the argument, suffice it to say that the point of such publications was to promote the idea that any belief or practice which required understanding beyond that of natural human reason was an impediment to the Christian faith.

<sup>8</sup>Rattenbury (*Hymns* 5) cites several illustrations of these large crowds from John’s journal entries during the last ten years of his life. From Leeds to Birmingham to Manchester to Plymouth to Dublin, the people gathered in great numbers for the services of word *and* table.

Whether they attended the local parish church as the Wesleys advised or later at the Methodist chapels,<sup>9</sup> the people came because they found a great spiritual power available to them. They went to the table first because the Wesleys led them there. They continued to go, not because John and Charles were great men, but because they experienced vital and direct contact with God in the sacrament. While the Wesleys certainly did not subscribe to the doctrine of transubstantiation (no good Anglican would), they did believe that Jesus was really present in the sacrament. In one of his hymns Charles articulates this conviction:

Receiving the bread,  
On Jesus we feed:  
It doth not appear his manner of working;  
but Jesus is here! (Rattenbury, 1948, 84).

Such manner of presence was not trapped by rational articulation or bare memorial. It was belief in the mystery that Christ was making himself present to His Church in a profound and efficacious way through the sacrament. This manner of presence was not to be explained but enjoyed. Charles' hymn "O The Depths of Love Divine" depicts this combination of real presence and experiential joy in the eucharist:

Sure and real is the grace,  
The manner be unknown;  
Only meet us in Thy ways,  
And perfect us in one.  
Let us taste the heavenly powers;  
Lord, we ask for nothing more:  
Thine to bless, 'tis only ours  
To wonder and adore (Rattenbury 1948, 213).

Such experience led them deeper into things spiritual than anything else they had ever found. Charles noted this in his journal in December 1748: "The Lord gave us under the word to know the power of his resurrection, but in the sacrament he carried us quite above ourselves and all earthly things" (Jackson, 2:45).

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<sup>9</sup>The Wesleys never intended for the Methodist services to be substitutes for worship in the local parish church. The rise of the Methodist chapels was a phenomenon that arose from the will of the people (Bishop 69-72). While the chapels at first were not meant for sacramental observance, they were used by the Methodists to observe the supper when an ordained minister was present and later with regularity after their break with the Church of England.

Secondly, the popularity of the supper was also tied to the high-church understanding of the feast held by the Wesleys. For them, the Lord's Supper was the central act of Christian worship and they passed this belief on to their followers. It is interesting to note that the sacrament played a prominent role in many of the disputes of the early Methodists. This was so, not because they were divided over its meaning and use, but because they were in such agreement concerning its importance (Church 213). The sacrament of the Lord's Supper, not preaching, was the "supreme response of men to the word of God" (Bowmer 188) in the early Wesleyan movement:

The Prayer, the fast, the Word conveys,  
When mixed with Faith, thy life to me,  
In all the channels of thy Grace  
I still have fellowship with Thee,  
But chiefly here my Soul is fed  
with Fulness of Immortal Bread.  
Communion closer far I feel,  
And deeper drink th' Atoning Blood,  
The Joy is more unspeakable,  
And yields me larger Draughts of God,  
Till Nature faints beneath the power  
And Faith fill'd up can hold no more (Rattenbury 1948, 212).

Through this, the principal act of Christian worship and devotion, the worshippers were brought into contact with Christ through what one of the hymns calls "His closest Love" (Rattenbury 1948, 214). In commenting on this hymn, Geoffrey Wainwright points out that for the Wesleys the Lord's Supper was different from other sacraments. This difference existed not in kind, but in degree, since through it "Christ may enter into the very marrow of our being. Apart from the obvious doctrinal value, this presents the supper as the kind of devotional experience that is the crown of Christian experience in this life" (Wainwright 109). Such an experience of the eucharist was able to sustain the evangelical experience of those who came to the table.

Third, the Wesleyan revival, like most other revivals, was prone to emphasize the individual approach to God. Such emphasis sometimes led to subjectivistic excesses within the movement. The Wesleys found the liturgical experiences to be a powerful corrective to such extravagances. There was a need for restraint as well as expression and so John wrote sermons including "On the Means of Grace" and "The Duty of Constant Communion," and Charles wrote hymns (Rattenbury 1948, 18) that attempted to curb the "extravagance and fanaticism with historic

Christianity” (Church 255). It is somewhat ironic that these checks to immoderation were fruits of a revival. They were also integral in the formation of the identity of this particular movement.

The concern of the Wesleys for worship also had a notable effect on their theology. In doing theology, John and Charles were reflecting on Christian worship. The first two generations of Wesleyan theologians “developed their theology (or theologies) within the context of worship, corporate and private, as established by the Book of Common Prayer. They came from worship to theology; they did not develop their understanding of worship out of their theology” (Bassett 1). Such a convergence of experience and theology had profound consequences for the identity of the movement. By grounding the revival in worship, with theology informed by historic Christianity as elucidated by the Book of Common Prayer, the Wesleys provided their followers with an understanding of the faith that encompassed established Christian truth and substantive Christian experience at the same time. They did not take up theological subjects as they bumped into them along the way. Rather, the Wesleys did theology as it specifically related to the experience of the believers and as the believers would encounter these subjects in worship, whether corporate or private.

The relationship between eucharist and eschatology<sup>10</sup> in the writings of the Wesleys provides an exemplary illustration both as to how this occurred and how it played a formative role in the identity of the movement.<sup>11</sup> Where the two subjects intersect in their works, they are

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<sup>10</sup>Neither one of the Wesleys ever developed a complete scheme of eschatology. This should not be taken to mean, however, that they found no interest in the subject. John’s sermons “The Great Assize,” “On the Fall of Man,” and “On the Resurrection of the Dead” offer proof of the concern that the movement had with eschatological themes. Their concern for eschatology, though, must be understood in the broadest sense of those subjects “usually connected with a serious consideration of eschatology” (Mercer 56) such as death, hell, and resurrection. Such themes abound throughout their theological writings and hymns.

<sup>11</sup>It should be emphasized that this study is just one aspect of the identity of the movement. Ole Borgen in his definitive study *John Wesley On The Sacraments* is somewhat critical of emphasizing the eschatological aspects of the sacrament (Borgen 86ff., 217ff., 231). He believes to do so denies some of the more important aspects of the doctrinal emphases of the movement, notably the concern for the means of grace, the presence of God in the heart of the believer, and the sacrament as sacrifice. The eschatological doctrine expressed in their writings and hymns on the eucharist should not be seen as a competing factor, but as part of the full complement of Christian experience. To see these works any other way, e.g., only as doctrinal or as a denial of the importance of salvation, would be to minimize their importance for the experience of the believer and rob them of their significance.

reflecting upon their experience of the sacrament in worship and also their own eschatology that was learned in their Anglican education. The works they produced, especially the eucharistic hymns, had a double effect: (1) they taught Christian truth on the subject according to the Scriptures and Christian tradition, and (2) as the hymns were sung and the sermons heard, they helped to form a holy people seeking to live out their lives in proper fear of God.

Nowhere is this combination of eschatology and eucharist, of worship experience and theology, more evident than in their *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* (1745) which went through ten editions by 1790.<sup>12</sup> This volume is a remarkable book on at least three accounts. First, it contains a collection of 166 of the most powerful and beautiful hymns on the Lord's Supper to be found within Christendom. These alone could account for the value of this work.

Second, the volume was published under the names of both John and Charles Wesley. It is obvious that Charles wrote most if not all of the hymns. John, however, would not have lent his name, nor his editorial pen, to the work had it not "satisfactorily expressed his own views" (Sanders 161). John was possessed of temper and mind that was ample enough to dispute anything with which he disagreed. His name provides evidence that he did not do so in this case. Further, the abridgement of Daniel Brevint's *The Christian Sacrament and Sacrifice* that served as an introduction to the volume bears his distinctive hand.<sup>13</sup>

Third, it is also a good illustration of how the theological texts and worship worked together to help form the experience of the people. Both the hymns and the extract provided sustained theological reflection on the sacrament for those who encountered them. Being published for public worship and instruction, they show how worship informed theology and how theology in turn shaped the identity of the movement, including its practice and understanding of the Lord's Supper.

Brevint's work shows a "careful analysis of important aspects of the eucharist" (Simpson 35) and provided the hymnal with its divisions. The section entitled "The Sacrament as a Pledge of Heaven," a title which was taken directly from Brevint, provides the greatest number of hymns with eschatological themes, while other hymns with like attributes can be

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<sup>12</sup>It is interesting that after 1790 the hymnal is not published again until 1875 and only then by a group of Anglo-Catholics.

<sup>13</sup>Egil Grisliis claims that, because the extract is such a considerable rewrite and improvement of Brevint, it can be considered John's "own position" (103).

found throughout the book. What is seen in these hymns is a generous complement of eschatological doctrine and imagery as encountered in the supper. These hymns depict the “glorious . . . life above which in this ordinance we taste” (Rattenbury 1948, 227).

While Brevint utilized the phrases “title,” “earnest,” and “pledge” to show that a legal relationship existed between the Lord’s Supper and the coming kingdom (the sacrament is a “pledge of heaven”), the hymns give wings to the phrases and do not relegate the terms to such pedestrian use. The earnest is not just the deed to a mansion but is “felt in our hearts” as a result of the “Kingdom Feast” (Rattenbury 1948, 225). The pledge is an assurance of a place in the kingdom to come for those who receive:

His sacramental pledge we take,  
Nor will we let it go;  
Till in the clouds our Lord comes back,  
We thus His death will show.

Now to Thy glorious come;  
(Thou hast a token given;)  
And while Thy arms receive us home,  
Recall Thy pledge in Heaven (Rattenbury 1948, 227).

The hymns are also used to tie Biblical testimony about the second coming of Christ to the supper. Hymn 98 is a clear example:

He whom we remember here,  
Christ shall in the clouds appear;  
Manifest to every eye,  
We shall soon behold him nigh.

Faith ascends the mountain’s height,  
Now enjoys the pompous sight,  
Antedates the final doom,  
Sees the Judge in glory come.

Lo, He comes triumphant down,  
Seated on His great white throne!  
Cherubs bear it on their wings,  
Shouting bear the King of kings.

Lo, His glorious banner spread  
Stains the skies with deepest red,  
Dyes the land, and fires the wood,  
Turns the ocean into blood.

Take our happy seats above,  
Banquet on his heavenly love,  
Lean on our Redeemer's breast,  
In His arms for ever rest (Rattenbury 1948, 226).

Through this hymn the striking Biblical depiction of the coming eschaton was animated in the minds of the faithful. This dynamic understanding made the eschaton both a future hope and present experience of the believers through the eucharist.

The supper was also seen as a *foretaste* of heaven and the heavenly banquet. The importance of this use of taste cannot be overlooked in the hymns. The Wesleys used it to connect the feast at the Lord's Supper directly to the heavenly banquet that Christ promised to eat with his followers in the coming kingdom. The symbol is mentioned in hymns 101, 103, and 108 and alluded to elsewhere. The taste is not just a sense experience but also a "taste" of the fullness of the heavenly kingdom. For example:

Here He gives our souls a taste,  
Heaven into our Hearts he pours:  
Still believe and hold Him fast;  
God and Christ and all is ours (Rattenbury 1948, 227).

In ascribing this quality to the supper, Charles allows it to "express both the provisionality and yet the genuineness of the Kingdom as it flavors the present" (Wainwright 152).

While no doubt is left that "to heaven the mystic banquet leads" (Rattenbury 1948, 226), it is apparent that the Wesleys viewed the supper as having a powerful eschatological effect on the present experience of the believer as well. Both Bowmer (184-85) and Rattenbury (61-78) make the case that in *The Hymns on the Lord Supper* there is found an emphasis on the "already" and the "not yet" in eschatology and cite this as being the type of realized eschatology that is associated with the work of C.H. Dodd.<sup>14</sup> Geoffrey Wainwright also supports this position and links it directly to the use of the "taste" of the eucharist within the hymns. In commenting upon those hymns where the concept is used (like the one

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<sup>14</sup>That a form of realized eschatology is present within John's works is supported by Colin Williams in *John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1960), 194-198. For an interesting use of this principle by a contemporary Methodist theologian, see Theodore W. Jennings, *Life as Worship* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 1982), 126-139.

noted above), he says “the concept of taste is much rarer . . . than one might have expected; but its value as an expression for the relation between the already and the not yet is undeniable” (152).

Rattenbury says that the hymns helped the Methodists to “realize an experience that makes these ideas reality in the present moment” (1948, 63). Thus, they were able to sing around the table:

By Faith and Joy already there  
Ev’n now the marriage feast we share,  
Ev’n now we by the Lamb are fed,  
Our Lord’s celestial joy we prove (Rattenbury 1948, 224).

Such a realized view of eschatology is never far from the future perspective, for in the same hymn it says:

We now are at His table fed,  
but wait to see our heavenly King;  
To see the great Invisible  
Without a sacramental veil . . . ,  
Him to behold with open face,  
High on His everlasting throne (Rattenbury 1948, 224).

In commenting on this use of a realized eschatology, Rattenbury says that it is tied to the evangelical experience. “The sense of deliverance from sin and fear extended the experience of the Methodists to heaven itself” (Rattenbury 1948, 64).<sup>15</sup>

This form of realized eschatology was also tied to the belief in the real presence of Christ in the sacrament. The hymn “Victim Divine” shows how the divine sacrifice of Jesus, though done in the past, makes him present to the believers through the action of the table. The memorial of that sacrifice in the eucharist is dynamic and efficacious, reaching into the present experience of those who receive. The real presence of Christ provided the supper with its real power. Again, the presence is not explained, but is meant to be enjoyed:

We need not now go up to Heaven  
To bring the long-sought Saviour down,  
Thou art to All already given:  
Thou dost ev’n Now thy Banquet crown:  
To every faithful Soul appear  
And shew thy Real Presence here (Rattenbury 1948, 232).

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<sup>15</sup>It is hard to read such a commentary and not wonder if this was also tied to the concern of the Wesleys for the assurance of salvation as a real part of the experience of the believer.

The experience of realized eschatology in the eucharist also served to help the Church join in its mission of a liturgical union of praise with the whole company of heaven. The supper was understood as a vehicle that transformed the assembly of believers and gave them a present place in the “Church Triumphant”:

The church triumphant in Thy love,  
Their mighty joys we show;  
They sing the Lamb in hymns above,  
And we in hymns below.

Thee in Thy glorious realm they praise,  
And bow before Thy throne;  
We in the kingdom of Thy grace,  
The kingdoms are but one (Rattenbury 1948, 225).

These lines are taken directly from the section in the hymnal entitled “The Sacrament a Pledge of Heaven.”

Such an emphasis on eschatology should not be taken to mean that in their eucharistic theology and experience the Methodists exhausted the contents of heaven. They found so much joy in contemplating heaven because in their experience of the eucharist they had already learned much about it (Rattenbury 1948, 68). Their realization of the promise in the sacrament fairly shouted a confidence of the heavenly experience whose first-fruits were encountered at the table. This activity did not deny the future reality of the coming eschaton. It served rather to make it a present as well as a future reality.

The eucharist, as illuminated by the Wesleys, was a remarkable vehicle of Christian experience. As an “earnest of Heaven,” it brought together the past, present, and future in such a way that the believers simultaneously experienced the fullness of the glories of Christ as he made himself present through the sacrament. This convergence of experience is expressed in hymn 94:

O what a soul-transporting feast  
Doth this communion yield.  
Remembering here Thy passion  
We with Thy love are fill’d.

Sure instrument of present grace  
Thy sacrament we find,  
Yet higher blessings it displays,  
And raptures still behind.

It bears us now on eagle's wings,  
If Thou the power impart,  
And Thee our glorious earnest brings  
Into our faithful heart.

O let us still the earnest feel,  
Th' unutterable peace,  
This loving Spirit be the seal  
Of our eternal bliss! (Rattenbury 1948, 224).

This particular work is evidence that what occurred in this period of the Wesleyan movement was extraordinary. The eucharistic devotion of the Wesleys and those who followed them played a vital role in the emerging identity of the movement. As the early Methodists heard the sermons about worship, sang the sacramental hymns, read Brevint's work and others like it that Wesley abridged,<sup>16</sup> and followed the Wesley's lead to the table, their love for the sacrament and their numbers at the table increased. While not all of their followers shared this love, it had an undeniable influence on the movement.

In considering the intersection of eucharist and eschatology in the works of the Wesleys, several conclusions become apparent that help to explain the role they played in the identity of the movement. The importance of eschatology, both in the scheme of eucharistic theology and in the identity of the movement, should not be overlooked. Eschatology was not just an incidental part of the Lord's Supper. It was, for the Wesleys, an important part of the fullness of Christian truth and experience that the sacrament imparted to the faithful.

The Wesleys were careful to help their followers understand the importance of the table by emphasizing it both as a powerful tool of spiritual devotion and also as a guard against the divorcing of present experience from historic doctrine. For example:

Whoever, therefore, does not receive, but goes from the holy table when all things are prepared, either does not understand his duty or does not care for the dying command of his Saviour, the forgiveness of his sins, the strengthening of his soul, and *the refreshing of it with the hope of glory* (qtd. in Outler 336, emphasis added).

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<sup>16</sup>An example is Thomas Á Kempis' *Companion to the Altar* (1742) which was an extraction from Book IV of his *The Imitation of Christ*. This little publication went through at least six printings.

This linking of experience to doctrine was also important as a check against individualism and fanaticism. It helped the Wesleys defend their theology against those who would charge them with enthusiasm of the kind that was reliant on purely emotional forms of religion to supply its followers with spiritual power.

The material on eucharist and eschatology bears the distinctively Wesleyan accent that the Church is “best defined in action, in her witness and mission” (Outler 307). The concern of the Wesleys with Christian devotion was so that their followers would experience the grace and truth of the One that they adored in an authentic way as they witnessed to him in worship. In joining the Lord’s Supper and eschatology, they made the form of Christianity in the Wesleyan movement a fusion of historic doctrine and enthusiastic experience. They tied the traditions of the Book of Common Prayer to present devotion and experience in ways that encouraged the participation of the faithful. The identity of the movement cannot be understood apart from this.

The Wesleys’ use of a form of realized eschatology was consistent with their emphasis on the present experience of the believer. Through the hymns, as they were sung and heard, the eschaton came to life. It was no longer a far-off promise, but a part of present reality. This was true because the doctrine “was no longer contained in abstract and prosy definitions, unintelligible to the great majority; it lived in simple inspired phrases so unforgettable that the singers became thinkers who presently made truth their own” (Church 230). As they experienced the glorious, resurrected Christ in His supper, they were strengthened to live a holy life of authentic and sincere devotion to the Saviour, the goal of which was heaven. The fullness of the eschatological experience and its significance for both the present and the future were found at the table of the Lord’s Supper.

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# **MILLENARIANISM AND POPULAR METHODISM IN EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY ENGLAND AND CANADA**

by

**Grant Underwood**

Why does a Brigham Young University professor specializing in the history of Mormonism take an interest in things Methodist? Simply this: in the early years of Mormonism, some of the Saints' (Mormons') most enthusiastic converts, as well as ardent opponents, were Methodists. I want to be able to explain the difference. The pattern that eventually became apparent was that those Methodists who went on to join the Mormon church almost invariably expected the imminent return of both pentecost and paradise. Of course, only a fraction of the acknowledged minority of all Methodists who were millenarians became Mormons. Nonetheless, the search leads me to the fascinating study of early nineteenth-century Methodism, which appears only recently to have begun to be explored. As elsewhere in religious studies, the focus on ordinary people and minority manifestations promises to broaden our view of a movement whose current portrait largely reflects institutional histories and systematic theologies.

## **Definitions in Historical Perspective**

Eschatologists tell us that millennialism is a later, predominantly a Christian development growing out of Jewish apocalypticism.<sup>1</sup> Its novelty is the expectation of a future "golden age" on earth

before the final, apocalyptic transformation at the end of time. As various versions of the millennial dream developed over the centuries, some proponents retained the vivid and dramatic spirit of their eschatological progenitor, lashing out against contemporary society and promising imminent vindication for the beleaguered faithful.

Others proponents, however, drifted toward a more irenic view of the world around them and interpreted the Biblical prophecies more figuratively. By the nineteenth century, there were basically two rival millennial visions of the future. What is today labeled “post-millennialism” constituted one approach. What is best called “millenarian apocalypticism,” but more commonly is simply designated “millenarianism” or “premillennialism” (often used interchangeably), represented the other.<sup>2</sup>

Simplistic differentiations about whether Christ will come before (pre-) or after (post-) the millennium are hardly sufficient to distinguish these two schools of thought. As historian Robert Clouse warns, “the distinctions involve a great deal more than the time of Christ’s return. The kingdom expected by the premillennialist is quite different from the kingdom anticipated by the postmillennialist, not only with respect to the

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<sup>1</sup>Information found in this and subsequent paragraphs is taken from Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic: The History and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979); John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1984); Jean Danielou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), pp. 377-404; D. H. Kromminga, *The Millennium in the Church: Studies in the History of Christian Chiliasm* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1945); Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); Bryan W. Ball, *A Great Expectation: Eschatological Thought in English Protestantism to 1660* (Leiden: Brill, 1975); and W. H. Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists: The Uses of Biblical Prophecy in England from the 1790s to the 1840s* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1978).

<sup>2</sup>Millennial eschatologies do not always neatly fit scholarly taxonomies. See Richard Cogley, “Seventeenth-Century English Millenarianism,” *Religion* 17 (Oct. 1987), 379-396; James W. Davidson, *The Logic of Millennial Thought: Eighteenth Century New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); and James H. Moorhead, “Between Progress and Apocalypse: A Reassessment of Millennialism in American Religious Thought, 1800-1880,” *Journal of American History* 71 (Dec. 1984), 524-542.

time and manner in which it will be established but also in regard to its nature and the way Christ will exercise control over it” (Clouse 7). The source of the differences seems to be hermeneutical. “As a general rule,” summarizes W. H. Oliver, premillennialists were “literalists [who] stressed the discontinuities between the mundane world and the future,” while postmillennialists were “allegorists” who emphasized “the continuities, with respect to both the means of change and the result of change” (Oliver 18-19).

From the beginning, millenarianism has served as a vehicle for prophetic excoriation of the religious establishment. Like its eschatological ancestor, apocalypticism, millenarianism reacts strongly against the comfortable accommodation to the world evidenced by the dominant faith. It calls for a purification and a return to “old-time religion,” and seeks to free God to do remarkable things as in the past. Millenarian eschatology promises that God will do them again. Not surprisingly, throughout Christian history, millenarianism often has been associated with a yearning to recapture the miraculous gifts of the “primitive church.”

Both millenarianism and primitivism maintain a similar philosophy of history. The march of time is not upward; history is actually a downward spiral of spiritual decay. It is the story of apostasy, and severe judgments are proclaimed against a present considered to be the faint and fallen image of a distant golden age. Both millenarianism and primitivism see resolution only in reformation by a dramatic return to pristine purity. Primitivism focuses on *what* is to be restored, while millenarianism emphasizes *when* and *how* the former glory will be recovered. This link between primordium and millennium is well illustrated along the popular fringe of early nineteenth century British Methodism.

### **Early British Methodism**

At first, explains Clarke Garrett, “‘methodism’ was as much a style of spirituality and an affirmation of the possibility of the immediate experience of divinity as it was an organized religious body. It was the most visible sector of a broad movement of popular piety that affirmed that the age of miracles was not past and that Christianity would regain the purity and vitality of its beginnings” (Garrett 104). As time passed, however, Methodism followed the sociological model of movement from sect to denomination. Renewal rigidified into regimentation, and the initial outpouring of the Spirit was subordinated to institutional concerns.

Even before Wesley's death in the final decade of the 1700s, cries were heard that "primitive" Methodism had been lost. Splinter groups began to break away within a few years, and by the turn of the century it was no longer possible to talk of Methodism as a single entity. In nineteenth-century England, it is necessary to distinguish Wesleyan Methodism or, more simply, "Wesleyanism," from Primitive Methodism, New Connexion Methodism, Bible Christians, and a host of others.<sup>3</sup>

Nor were all Methodists who were dissatisfied experientially or eschatologically with the parent body "come-outers." Some could not bring themselves to formally dissociate with Wesleyanism, even though their views may have differed from the official theology.<sup>4</sup> As British social historian J. F. C. Harrison observes, "There is a danger for the historian in assuming that the written word was actually what people believed. We know, for instance, that many thousands of laboring people sang hymns which enshrined the basic doctrines of Methodism. But we are not warranted in assuming that when humble Methodists sang of grace, salvation, and the blood of the Lamb, these words had the same meaning for them as for John Wesley, or the same significance that theologians, psychologists and historians have attributed to them later" (Harrison xiv).

Numerous private gatherings of the pious in class and other meetings became hothouses for holiness and eschatological excitement at the same time that their participants continued to retain nominal affiliation with Wesleyan denominations.<sup>5</sup> As David Hempton remarks, Methodism

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<sup>3</sup>Studies of English Methodism are myriad. Perhaps the most comprehensive and up-to-date is the three-volume *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, eds., R. E. Davies, A. R. George, and E. G. Rupp (London: Epworth Press, 1965, 1978, 1983). In volume 2, separate chapters treat "The Wesleyan Methodists" and "Other Methodist Traditions," pp. 213-329. Also helpful are David N. Hempton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society, 1750-1850* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984); and Anthony Armstrong, *The Church of England, The Methodists, and Society, 1700-1850* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1973).

<sup>4</sup>Robert Currie, *Methodism Divided* (London: Faber, 1968) and John C. Bowmer, *Pastor and People* (London, 1975) make clear that the Methodism of the pulpit was not always the Methodism of the pew.

<sup>5</sup>See Deborah M. Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters: Female Preaching and Popular Religion in Industrial England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); and D. A. Gowland, *Methodist Secessions: The Origins of Free Methodism in Three Lancashire Towns: Manchester, Rochdale, and Liverpool* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1979). As David Luker expresses it for the group he studied, "Cornish Wesleyan Methodism was clearly something very different from orthodox Wesleyanism" (Luker, "Revivalism Theory and Practice: The Case of Cornish Methodism," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 37, 1986, 603-19).

should not be treated “as a monolith” since there were “many Methodisms in many places at many times” (216, 230).

Therefore, it may be more helpful to look at Methodism from the perspective of a spectrum of religious attitudes and ideas rather than one particular set of beliefs and behaviors. Toward one end of the spectrum would be found those individuals, whatever their denominational affiliation, who were interested above all else in enjoying a vital, gifted Christianity and who tended to espouse a millenarian eschatology. Such a model is valuable precisely because it points to the source of a disproportionate number of millenarian Methodists.

This is especially so when one approaches the data from the perspective of popular religion. “The autobiographies of most working-class millenarians and seekers in the period,” notes Harrison, “record contact at some stage with a local Methodist Society” (30). In striving to recapture the early spirit of Methodism in the face of a definite establishmentarian drift in the nineteenth century, some Methodists found compelling the millenarian analysis of a world in apostasy and the expectation of the imminent eschaton.

Numbers of searching souls had “pondered long over the scriptures, especially the prophecies and promises of the coming of Christ’s kingdom.” Many of them “had already had some form of inner-light experience, and all were ready to be influenced by visions and dreams” (Harrison 132). “I was earnestly looking out,” wrote one such individual, “for some one to be visited by the Spirit, to revive the work, and raise up the cause of God. . . . I went everywhere that I heard of any one being visited by the Spirit of God . . . in hopes of finding the truth” (Harrison 153). Postulating the dismal and “dead” state of both mainstream Methodism and institutional Christianity, their millenarian faith was that “something would turn up, either the gospel would be [more fully] introduced, or afflictions would come upon the nation” (Valenze 87).

Smaller conventicles of less well-known schismatic Methodists often made explicit their millenarian motives and hopes for holiness. Consider, for instance, the “United Brethren” of Herefordshire, England. They broke off from the Primitive Methodists not only for the usual reasons of ecclesiological localism, but also on the grounds that the original

spirituality had been lost and that a proper understanding of eschatology was lacking.<sup>6</sup>

There was the “Christian Society” of Robert Aitken which boasted chapels from London to Liverpool during the 1830s.<sup>7</sup> Aitken had sought ordination in the Wesleyan Connexion, was rebuffed, mingled temporarily with the Wesleyan Methodist Association, and eventually broke away to create his own society. He thought that even most Methodists were “living beneath their privileges” and that there was “much worldly conformity amongst them.” In short, “their standard of holiness is very far beneath the Gospel standard.”<sup>8</sup> Like his followers, Aitken had moved steadily toward the pentecostal end of the spectrum of religious expectation, and had also become an avid student of the prophecies and a premillennialist.

For Aitken and his followers, the absence of contemporary charismata was definite proof of the overwhelmingly apostate condition of the religious world around them and of the nearness of the end. “And now,” he remarked, “if we want a standard whereby to judge of the apostasy of the present churches, we must take the church of Christ when the apostatizing spirit was least manifested—that is to say, in the apostolic age. With this pattern in our eye, where, I ask, are the gifts of the Spirit—where the miraculous power—where the gift of healing—where the gift of prophecy—where the signs that were appointed to follow them that believed? . . . Alas! alas! my brethren, the gifts of the Spirit are gone, and, I fear, most of the graces have gone with them. . . . Such things have long been mere matters of history” (Aitken 11). Only the latter-day outpouring of the Spirit in conjunction with the personal return of the Lord Jesus Christ was thought able to rectify the situation.

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<sup>6</sup>See Julia S. Werner, *The Primitive Methodist Connexion: Its Background and Early History* (Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984); *From Mow Cop to Peake, 1807-1932: Essays to Commemorate the 175th Anniversary of the Beginnings of Primitive Methodism, May 1982* (Wesley Historical Society, Yorkshire Branch, 1982); and Job Smith, “The United Brethren,” *Improvement Era* 13 (July 1910): 818-823.

<sup>7</sup>Very little is known about Robert Aitken beyond what is published in the *British Dictionary of National Biography* 1:206. Some information is contained in Gowland, *Methodist Successions*.

<sup>8</sup>*Laws, Regulations and General Polity of the Christian Society, in connection with the Rev. R. Aitken* (1836).

From the beginning Wesley had tried to steer his followers between the Scylla of formalism and the Charybdis of “enthusiasm.” His approach was to distinguish the “extraordinary gifts” such as tongues, miracles, and healings, which he felt were generally confined to the Apostolic Age, from “ordinary graces” such as sanctification which were available to all believers in every age. The line, however, was frequently crossed in popular Methodism. Donald Dayton’s observation about the later drift toward pentecostalism fits well what was already taking place in certain sectors of popular Methodism: “Those who stayed closest to the Wesleyan tradition,” he notes, “emphasized the *ethical* consequences and the ‘graces’ rather than the gifts of the Spirit, but the push was increasingly toward the ‘spiritual gifts *and* graces’—especially where the fascination with Pentecost was most intense” (93).

Aitkenites also expected that “every prophecy and promise respecting his second coming” along with “the changes predicted in the world—elements, nature, condition of animals, and the like, shall be literally accomplished.”<sup>9</sup> For the Christian Society, the lamb really would lie down with the lion, and Christ really would reign personally over the earth from some terrestrial capital. To all of these prophetic promises the postmillennialist majority gave a spiritualized interpretation. Literalism, nonetheless, was the cornerstone of both chiliasm and the quest for New Testament charismata.

### **Pre-Confederation Canada**

Similar beliefs, both experientially and eschatologically, can also be found among Methodists in pre-Confederation Canada. In the years following 1790, William Losee and his associates led in the evangelization of the St. Lawrence River valley. Methodism was firmly entrenched in the region by the 1830s. In the leading cities of Kingston and Toronto (York, before 1834), a significant undercurrent of radical Methodism was present.<sup>10</sup> It was fostered in private study groups and prayer meetings and included some of the most prominent citizens of the area. One such group met at the home of lay preacher William Patrick who was also clerk of the House of Assembly and former treasurer of the

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<sup>9</sup>*Extracts from the Minutes of the Fourth Annual Convocation of the Christian Society* (Liverpool, 1839), p. 6.

<sup>10</sup>See J. E. Sanderson, *The First Century of Methodism in Canada, I: 1775-1839* (Toronto: Briggs, 1908); S. D. Clark, *Church and Sect in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1948).

Toronto Temperance Society. Patrick was a prominent member of the Toronto Methodist establishment (Clark 307). One participant remembered that the group “laid great emphasis upon the doctrine of the first resurrection, the judgment, and Christ’s millennial reign” (Fielding 50).

Another met at the home of the widow Isabella Walton whose recently deceased husband had been chamberlain of Toronto. Their literal approach to the Scriptures led them to question the postmillennialism of their Methodist peers. A typical critique is found in an unsigned broadside which declared: “Many are flattering themselves with the expectation that all the world is going to be converted and brought into the ark of safety. Thus the great millennium, in their opinion, is to be established. Vain, delusive expectation! The Savior said to his disciples that ‘as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the coming of the Son of Man.’ Query. Were all the people converted in the days of the of Noah, or mostly destroyed?” The answer was clear, and events “will soon show to this generation that the hour of God’s judgment hath come.”<sup>11</sup>

Even Thomas Vaux, Secretary to the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, found himself influenced for a time by premillennialist doctrines. This may seem ironic since the conventional wisdom has it that because premillennialists were pessimistic about society, they were therefore largely uninvolved in evangelism or social reform, expecting Christ to single-handedly and supernaturally set up his Kingdom. The latest millennial scholarship, however, has made it clear that such characterizations and conclusions are unwarranted on several counts.<sup>12</sup> “The millennial hope is a paradoxical one,” explains Moorhead, “and one can extrapolate a dismal or optimistic view of history, encompassing temporal disaster or progress, or both. . . . Efforts to seize the Kingdom by violence, passive withdrawal from corruption to await the Second Coming, or melioristic reform efforts—all these and other

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<sup>11</sup>*Prophetic Warning* (Toronto, 1836), n.p.

<sup>12</sup>The most recent historiographical pieces are Dietrich G. Buss, “MEETING OF HEAVEN AND EARTH: A Survey and Analysis of the Literature on Millennialism in America, 1965-1985,” *Fides et Historia* (1988): 5-28; James H. Moorhead, “Searching for the Millennium in America,” *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 8 (1987): 17-33. See also, Leonard I. Sweet, “Millennialism in America: Recent Studies,” *Theological Studies* 40 (1979): 510-531, and in Hillel Schwartz, “The End of the Beginning: Millenarian Studies, 1969-1975,” *Religious Studies Review* 2 (1976): 1-15.

responses have been adduced from eschatological symbols” (Moorhead 1978, 8).<sup>13</sup>

Those who have studied premillennialism in depth find, for instance, that millenarians could be just as dedicated to missionary work as any postmillennialists. In exploring the renaissance of American premillennialism in the final quarter of the nineteenth century, one scholar found that it actually brought a heightened interest in missionism: “Just as D. L. Moody [said he] ‘felt like working three times as hard’ after becoming a premillennialist, others experienced a new desire to bring the gospel to a dying world” (Weber 67). George Duffield, an American contemporary of Vaux, defended his premillennialism against the charge that it dampened missionary efforts in these words: “The groans of a world perishing in its corruption calls for quickened, multiplied effort, and for zeal irrepressible and inextinguishable. The Gospel of the Kingdom must be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come” (in Marsden 194).

In Canada, the mixing of millenarianism and Methodism received impetus from George Ryerson. The Ryersons were one of the most influential Methodist families in Upper Canada and George was well acquainted with Patrick, Vaux, and others (Sissons). Ryerson had gone to England in 1831 to help raise money for Methodist Indian missions and to petition Parliament on behalf of the non-Anglicans of Upper Canada. He stayed on to settle the estate of his wife’s mother, but became increasingly disillusioned with British Wesleyanism. At one point he was attracted to the millenarian preaching of Reverend Edward Irving, founder of the Catholic Apostolic Church.<sup>14</sup> Ryerson eventually joined the CAC and

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<sup>13</sup>The difficulty in classifying people’s eschatologies is well illustrated in the case John Wesley. Kenneth O. Brown surveyed a century’s worth of studies on Wesley and found that scholars were almost equally divided in their characterization of him as either premillennialist or postmillennialist. See Brown, “John Wesley: Post or Premillennialist?” *Methodist History* 28 (Oct. 1989): 33-41.

<sup>14</sup>Still the most important study of the Irvingites is P. E. Shaw, *The Catholic Apostolic Church* (New York: King’s Crown Press, 1946). Irving’s nephew, G. Carlyle, produced *The Collected Writings of Edward Irving*, 5 vols. (London, 1866). Recent studies intent on emphasizing the experiential primitivism of Irving are Arnold Dallimore, *Forerunner of the Charismatic Movement: The Life of Edward Irving* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983); Charles Gordon Strachan, *The Pentecostal Theology of Edward Irving* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1973); and Strachan, “Theological and Cultural Origins of the Nineteenth Century Pentecostal Movement,” in *Essays on Apostolic Themes*, ed. Paul Elbert (Peabody, Mass., 1985), pp. 144-57.

endeavored to bring the glad tidings to his Methodist friends in Canada. He was responsible for sending William Caird, CAC evangelist and wife of famed Scottish charismatic, Mary Campbell, to the Toronto Methodists in 1834.

Several groups, including Patrick's, were hospitable to Irvingite millenarianism and proto-pentecostalism, but did not then abandon their Methodist associations. Shortly after the Irvingite visit, however, several of their number had their pulpit privileges withdrawn for heterodoxy by the local Methodist conference.<sup>15</sup> At least one of Patrick's group acknowledged that his interest in the millennium had been heightened by Irvingite teachings. Recalled Joseph Fielding, "I had for some time been much interested in the subject of the millennium, etc., which had been revived by Edward Irving, a Scotch minister in London, and partly from his writings, etc., and partly by reading the Word of God, I was fully convinced the Christian world as it is called was in a very different state to what [it was] supposed. As to the second coming [of] Christ it [was] almost entirely denied or misunderstood."<sup>16</sup> According to the *Toronto Minutes of Conference*, some eventually defected to the Irvingites and later to the Mormons, but most retained their Methodist associations and their millenarian eschatology.

So what is to be concluded from all this? Perhaps nothing more than to acknowledge that in England and Canada, at an unofficial, popular level the forces that would eventuate in the holiness and pentecostal movements were already well underway by the mid-nineteenth century. Given the spiritual imperatives unleashed by Wesley, it is understandable that certain devotional trajectories would lead toward a kind of millenarian pentecostalism, but the degree to which such paths were pursued at the grass-roots level is yet to be fully appreciated.

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<sup>15</sup>See P. E. Shaw, *The Catholic Apostolic Church*, 112-116; Stott, "John Taylor's Religious Preparation," 124-26. According to Joseph Fielding, the dangerous doctrines they had imbibed, all Irvingite basics, included such millenarian teachings as "the first and second resurrection, the destruction of the wicked in the last days by the judgments of God, the coming Christ to reign on the earth in the millennium and the apostasy of the Gentile churches" (*Millennial Star* 2, August 1841, 50-52).

<sup>16</sup>Fielding, "Diary," p. 1.

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# ESCHATOLOGY, SOTERIOLOGY, AND SOCIAL ACTIVISM IN FOUR MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY HOLINESS METHODISTS

by

Woodrow W. Whidden

The primary aim of this article is to assess the impact of holiness theology on the eschatology and social involvement of four important mid-nineteenth century Methodist figures. The crosscurrents between these factors can be very complex.<sup>1</sup> Our central aim, however, is not merely to assess the impact of eschatology on social involvement. The major burden is to analyze how soteriology might affect eschatology and then how both appear to have influenced social involvement.

We will examine the eschatology, soteriology, and social views and actions of Phoebe Palmer and three persons who were her contem-

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<sup>1</sup>For an excellent analysis of the relationship between these issues in the nineteenth century, see James H. Moorhead's "Social Reform and the Divided Conscience of Antebellum Protestantism," *Church History* 48(1979), 416-430 and "The Erosion of Postmillennialism in American Religious Thought, 1865-1925," *Church History* 53(1984), 61-77. A good introductory overview of millennial currents in American history is given in Charles Lippy's article "Millennialism and Adventism," in Charles H. Lippy and Peter W. Williams, eds., *Encyclopedia of American Religious Experience: Studies of Traditions and Movements*, 3 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988), vol. 2, pp. 831-844.

poraries. These contemporaries all had some experience and sympathy with holiness teaching. All of them were prominent “company men,” with varying degrees of theological interaction with Palmer. Nathan Bangs and Bishop L. L. Hamline were very close to her, while Bishop Gilbert Haven was considerably more distant. I have included Haven because of his prominence and his contrast with Bangs and Hamline in the way he understood both sanctification and its implications for postmillennial thinking.

### **Phoebe Palmer**

Phoebe Palmer (1807-1874)<sup>2</sup> was the most important figure in the Holiness Movement during the middle decades of the nineteenth century. We will not rehearse here the dynamics of her “shorter way,” or “altar theology,” except to observe that her religious ethos was overwhelmingly typified by concern for personal salvation and individual reformation, rather than transformation of the present social/political order.<sup>3</sup>

While Palmer’s “shorter way” was quite controversial in some quarters of the Methodist Church, she did enjoy great influence with many ministers and bishops (including Nathan Bangs and Bishops Hamline and Janes). These three were particularly supportive and, while Bangs had some reservations regarding her views on “the witness of the Spirit,”<sup>4</sup> the soteriology of these three cannot be distinguished from hers.

While Palmer left relatively few comments on eschatology and no direct treatment of a millennium, she did leave enough to suggest strongly

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<sup>2</sup>For further biographical background see Richard Wheatley, *The Life and Letters of Phoebe Palmer* (New York: W. C. Palmer, Jr., 1876). There are two relatively recent scholarly biographies: Charles White’s *The Beauty of Holiness: Phoebe Palmer as Theologian, Revivalist, Feminist, and Humanitarian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986) and Harold E. Raser’s *Phoebe Palmer: Her Life and Thought* (Lewiston/Queenston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1987).

<sup>3</sup>See Melvin E. Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century* (Metuchen, N.J. & London: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1980), pp. 27 ff., for a succinct summation of Palmer’s “altar theology.”

<sup>4</sup>We will elaborate on this disagreement further when we consider Bangs’ theology.

<sup>5</sup>While Palmer’s view might be characterized as pre-millennial, it would probably be better, technically, not to speak of her in such terms since she never explicitly addressed the issue of a millennium.

that she was a believer in a literal, visible, cataclysmic second coming of Jesus Christ.<sup>5</sup>

One of the intriguing matters in this area is Palmer's relationship to the Millerite Movement. While she wrote nothing publicly about this movement during its heyday, she did manifest an interest. She was friends with a well-known "holiness" Presbyterian, Millerite preacher Charles Fitch,<sup>6</sup> and wrote to Methodist Adventist G. F. Cox asking information about the eagerly anticipated Advent. She expressed to Cox the caution that Millerite eschatological speculations were drawing away from Christ as Savior and hurting the church's missionary program (White, 154-55). Regarding eschatology, her main reservation with Millerism apparently was not its emphasis on the second coming as literal, imminent, or premillennial, but its date-setting speculations. As she neared the end of her life, Palmer's hope in the second coming of Christ seemed to grow. While she clearly said the date could not be set, she wondered if 1866 might not be the year. Her first editorial in 1867 opened with the admission that the Lord had not come in 1866 (White, 155).

Her clearest statement on the second coming is found in an 1873 publication in which she clearly expressed no sympathy with date setters, but said that "for thirty years we have unwaveringly believed that in the most emphatic sense 'the end of all things is at hand.'" By reliance on the Word<sup>7</sup> and "observance of the signs of the times" it was said that the believer could "know when the coming of the Lord *draweth nigh*, and is even at the very door." She added that this "truth" is "too palpable to require comment" (Wheatley, 513-14).

Another aspect of Mrs. Palmer's eschatology was her concern for the Jews (White, 155-56). Her most extensive statement of such a burden is found in her little pamphlet entitled *Israel's Speedy Restoration and Conversion Contemplated or Signs of the Times in Familiar Letters* printed in 1854. While this document did not mention the second

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<sup>6</sup>Fitch had preached "holiness" themes and such advocacy had cost him his position and standing in the Presbyterian Church. Cf. Leroy Edwin Froom's *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, Vol. IV (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Assoc., 1954), pp. 533-45.

<sup>7</sup>Mrs. Palmer's hermeneutical literalism is one of the best evidences for her belief in a literal, visible second coming. See White, pp. 106 ff.

coming or the millennium and seemed to display no proto-dispensationalist (my term) sentiments, it was flavored with a dash of prophetic anticipation. The return of the Jews to Palestine was certainly understood to be a “sign of the time” (a phrase which had clear eschatological significance in the 1850s). Furthermore, in commenting on Paul’s discussion in Romans 11 of the relationship of Israel to the fullness of the Gentiles, she said:

The apostle’s meaning is, that a general conversion of the Jews will take place before the end of the world, and will afford to the Gentiles the completest evidence of the truth of the gospel. . . . Indeed, so many prophecies refer to this grand event, that it is surprising any Christian should doubt of it (13).

The most striking aspect of this statement is the expression “the end of the world.” It is clear that, in view of her reading of Biblical prophecy, she saw the fate of the Jews as a “sign” that the “end” was near, implying that if Christians would take up the work of Jewish evangelism, the end would be hastened. Please observe, it is the “end of the world,” not the beginning of an earthly millennium of peace.<sup>8</sup>

Since I have characterized Palmer’s views on the second coming as personal and cataclysmic, and since this was in contrast to the views of her “circle,” I have offered this four-point argument for such a contention:

1. She did manifest an interest in the Millerite movement, even admitting that she “would love to embrace the doctrine” (White, 154);
2. Her literalistic hermeneutic for Scripture seemed much more susceptible to a literal view of the second coming than the reigning postmillennial views;
3. Her anticipation that the Lord would return in 1866 and her disappointment in this regard expressed in early 1867 lends strong evidence for a literal view;
4. Her poem, set to music in the well-known Adventist hymn “Watch Ye Saints” is filled with terminology and concepts that would have been familiar to any Mil-

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<sup>8</sup>Though the argument is from silence, the silence is impressive in contrast to what her influential friends were saying about the consummation.

lerite, not to mention that it was penned in 1844 (Froom, 4:537-38).<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, though we cannot classify Mrs. Palmer as a pre-millennialist in the explicit sense of the term, the evidence clearly indicates her belief that the Lord's second coming was to be personal, visible, cataclysmic, and imminent.

The practical implication of Mrs. Palmer's eschatology was not that the millennium's nearness called for believers to get busy with the transformation of the world, but that believers should encourage as many

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<sup>9</sup>Watch, ye saints, with eyelids waking;  
Lo! the powers of heaven are shaking;  
Keep your lamps all trimmed and burning,  
Ready for your Lord's returning.

Kingdoms at their base are crumbling,  
Hark! His chariot wheels are rumbling;  
Tell, O tell of grace abounding,  
Whilst the seventh trump is sounding.

Nations wane, though proud and stately;  
Christ His kingdom hasteneth greatly;  
Earth her latest pangs is summing;  
Shout, ye saints, your Lord is coming.

Sinners, come, while Christ is pleading;  
Now for you He's interceding;  
Haste, ere grace and time diminished  
Shall proclaim the mystery finished.

Note the allusion to the parable of the ten virgins of Matthew 25 ("Keep your lamps all trimmed and burning") which was the great theme passage of the later stages of the Millerite movement. In fact, the last time-setting stage was called "The Midnight Cry." This poem is suffused with themes of urgent imminence and notes of cataclysm ("Kingdoms at their base are crumbling" not at their height are transforming!). Also the expression the "seventh trump is sounding" was a reference to the seven trumpets of Revelation 8-11 and the seventh trump was understood by the Millerites to be the trumpet of the "Last Trump." The expression "the mystery finished" was clearly understood to refer to the time when the voice of the seventh trumpet "blast ends with the voice of the archangel at the end of the world" (cf. Froom, 4:723-24).

Froom contends that Palmer and her husband were believers in the "Advent truth," but apparently he did not investigate the matter beyond citing her poetic raptures about the Advent. While his characterization of the Palmers as "accepting" the "Advent truth" must be qualified, Froom is correct that they were at least distant fellow-travelers in the hope of the Lord's soon, personal, and visible return.

people as possible to be ready to greet the Lord in holiness and peace at His literal appearing. Her ethos was personal salvation, not social transformation.

Palmer was an avid humanitarian and did engage in social relief (White, 207-229; Raser, 211-226). Even so, she could not be classified as a social reformer (in the sense of seeking fundamental changes in the social order through political means). While she did oppose slavery, she, along with a host of prominent supporters in the Methodist Church, valued church unity more than a radical witness against slavery.<sup>10</sup>

### **Nathan Bangs**

Nathan Bangs (1778-1862) was a venerated elder statesman of Methodism at the time when Phoebe Palmer and the Holiness movement were rising to prominence. He had had a long career as a pioneering evangelist, pastor, editor,<sup>11</sup> missions promoter (he founded the Methodist Missionary Society), educator, historian,<sup>12</sup> and polemicist for Methodism (especially in opposing the predestinarians).<sup>13</sup>

Experiencing entire sanctification early in his Christian life, Bangs became a life-long advocate of a holiness emphasis (Stevens, 345-37) and was closely associated with Mrs. Palmer's Tuesday Meeting. He had

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<sup>10</sup>Timothy Smith relates that "her fast friends, Bishop Edmund Janes and Leonidas Hamline, were the architects of the policy of silence which later became the regret of Northern Methodism. George Peck and Jesse Peck, Nathan Bangs, Alfred Cookman, and a host of her other admirers supported it fully. . . . Although early to take part in the relief of the widowed, orphaned, and imprisoned or in any other task which required the exercise of compassion, her New York and Philadelphia coterie were laggards in whatever demanded stern attacks on persons and institutions" (Smith 1957, 211-212).

<sup>11</sup>He is credited with starting the system of maintaining official church journals (cf. Nolan B. Harmon, ed. *Encyclopedia of World Methodism*, Nashville: The Methodist Publishing House, 1974, vol. 1, p. 214).

<sup>12</sup>For a list of major publications, see the article on Bangs in Harmon, ed., *Encyclopedia of World Methodism*.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 213-214. So far there has been no major scholarly treatment of the life and work of Bangs. The best work on his life and a ready source of much important Bangs material is Abel Stevens' *Life and Times of Nathan Bangs* (New York: 1883).

known her since she was a child and had given hearty support for her holiness advocacy (Stevens, 350-53, 368).<sup>14</sup>

Bangs left considerably more published material on eschatology than did Palmer. He was always very optimistic about the future, the prospects of the Methodist Church, and the Christian cause generally (Stevens 349; Janes 27). He was, however, not very optimistic about Millerism. It was too pessimistic for his optimistic view of what God was doing through the church. To his death Bangs was firm in a postmillennial outlook that eschewed a literal and visible coming of Christ before the millennium and promoted instead a temporal, real, but spiritual rule of Christ (not physically present) on the earth during the millennium.<sup>15</sup>

Bangs was quite forthright in expressing the relationship between his views on the dynamics of sanctification and the inspiration to benevolent and missionary efforts (Bangs 231, 241). Sanctification not only gives a proper sense of priorities about truth, but for the believer these “essential truths” penetrate “the depths of his soul, burn within him like ‘fire shut up

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<sup>14</sup>His support was somewhat qualified. On March 15, 1857 he records specifically attending the Tuesday Meeting “to speak against certain theories which have sometimes been broached there” (Stevens, 396). It is clear that Bangs opposed not the actual concept of entire sanctification, but how the dynamics of the experience works in the believer’s awareness that the “fact” of it has happened. Said Bangs: “We must, therefore, be sanctified, and have an evidence of it before we have any scriptural authority to believe it; so it appears to me, for the existence of the fact and its evidence must precede our belief in their reality” (Stevens, 399).

In this disagreement Bangs probably had the better of the argument, but the difference was not serious enough for him to repudiate the overall thrust of Palmer’s teachings and work. In his last years he often attended and even presided over the renowned Tuesday Meeting and there is not one negative word recorded about him in Palmer’s letters or published documents (and she was not above correcting what she felt were serious threats to the view of entire sanctification (cf. White, 113 ff.). Their agreement on the work of entire sanctification was, for all practical purposes, quite complete.

<sup>15</sup>His most important eschatological and millennial statements were made in his 1850 publication. While Bangs had rather pronounced views on eschatology, he was not overly dogmatic, allowing great “liberty to enjoy . . . opinion” (Bangs 315-16). This tolerant attitude is probably one of the reasons that he and Palmer could work together so closely for the promotion of holiness and entire sanctification and yet have some varying views on eschatology. His views can be summarized as follows:

1) Millerism was a serious, “frenzied delusion . . . by which many weak but honest minds were maddened by the wildest speculations that ever bewildered and bewitched the human soul” (Bangs 17, 187). He confessed that he once had indulged in some prophetic, chronological speculations inspired by the works of Faber, Fleming, and Wesley, but came to largely consider all such efforts as

in his bones,'” and “he is impelled forward in the grand work of conquering the world to Jesus Christ” (Bangs 271). The sum total of Bangs’ concept is that the “conquering of the world to Jesus Christ” is largely a matter of personal conversion to Christ, rather than primarily the subjection of the social order to Christian ideals (the latter would come, but as a result of the former).

This personal salvationist mode of “conquering” through a sanctified church was negatively reflected in the less than positive attitude of Bangs towards social reform. He admitted the need to purify the social order from evil (slavery, intemperance, etc.), but his references to “abolition” were almost always negative—using such pejorative expressions as “the abolition excitement” (Bangs 20).

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“baseless conjectures.” While he did not completely discount such prophetic study (Bangs 196), he concluded that “wisdom would seem to dictate the propriety of waiting patiently for time to develop the hidden meaning of those prophecies which is now wrapped up in that symbolic language which is hard to be understood” (Bangs 187-90).

2) But the overriding truth to be affirmed was that “the signs of the times, which now appear in the political and religious horizon, seem to indicate the near approach of that day, when the kingdom of the Lord Jesus shall extend from the river even to the ends of the earth . . . when the great God shall establish his kingdom universally among men” (Bangs 190-91). Bangs reviewed all of the wonderful things that were going on involving Christian missionary and benevolent endeavor and optimistically concluded that the “universal” rule of Christ among men was “nigh, even at the door, if it be not indeed already begun” (Bangs 191-195; cf. 207-08).

3) As already intimated, his millennial concept was that the thousand year period was “near at hand, if indeed it has not already begun”; yet it may be a “long time, as we measure time in progress. . . . But whether the time be long or short, and whether the spiritual reign of Christ on this earth be a thousand or ten thousand years, it is most manifest that a great work remains to be done before that happy consummation shall be fully realized (Bangs 197).

For Bangs, the millennium would be a spiritual rule of Christ on the earth which will be brought on through the agency of the Church (inspired and empowered by the Holy Spirit), not a visible and literal bodily presence of Christ on the earth. This millennial period would then be followed by the literal and visible appearing of Christ at the “great white throne” judgment to put down all final opposition to His rule (Bangs 193-94; cf. 308-316).

4) Although Bangs saw many hopeful signs of Christian effort throughout the world, he clearly implied that the Christian United States was to be the key player that would usher in the spiritual, millennial rule on the earth. Though many ugly realities in the United States remained to be conquered (Bangs 206), and he admitted his patriotic “partiality,” he could “presume to say that there is not, nor ever has been, any country so favourable to the spread of the Gospel, and for the establishment of Christian and benevolent institutions, as the United States” (Bangs 205).

The impression is that Bangs was much more concerned about the unity, spirituality, and numerical prosperity of the church than the moral tragedy of slavery. He could affirm that the disputes between the North and the South were “a deleterious influence upon the interests of true religion” and not utter a word in this context about the evil influence of slavery on the “interests of true religion.”<sup>16</sup> Social reform was clearly not very high on his priority list. The benevolent fruition of sanctification did not necessarily include strong moral opposition to social evil in its systemic manifestations.

So, for Bangs, there were great millennial events in the imminent offing, but the path to this dream society was through the workings of the Lord for personal regeneration that would somehow bear fruit for the rule of Christ on the earth. It was a very activist mode, but a personal salvationist mode, not a collective, political one in its ultimate thrust.

### **Bishop L. L. Hamline**

Bishop L. L. Hamline (1797-1865) was best known as a Methodist editor and promoter of holiness. Elected a bishop at the 1844 General Conference, he took a leading role in the debate over the case of Bishop James Andrew which led to the North-South schism of American Methodism. He remained a bishop until resigning because of poor health in 1852. The rest of his days were spent as a semi-invalid in retirement.<sup>17</sup>

Hamline and his second wife (Melinda) had a very close relationship with Phoebe Palmer and his election to the office of bishop (along with Edmund Janes, another holiness advocate) in 1844 greatly increased the influence of Palmer in the Methodist church. She carried on a continuing correspondence with the Hamlines until her death (White 40).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Bangs 20-22.

<sup>17</sup>Harmon, *Encyclopedia of World Methodism*, Vol. I, p. 1063. There has been no full-scale critical work done on Hamline, and Hibbard’s *Biography of Rev. Leonidas L. Hamline* (Cincinnati: Hitchcock and Walden, 1880), along with Walter Palmer’s *Life and Letters of Leonidas L. Hamline, D.D.* (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1866) are the only detailed sources of biographical information available. He was not overly prolific in publishing, but there is a two-volume edition of his works edited by Hibbard and entitled *Works of the Rev. L. L. Hamline, D.D.* (Cincinnati: Hitchcock and Walden, 1869-71).

<sup>18</sup>In Wheatley there are probably more letters to the Hamline’s than any other persons. Later, Walter Palmer edited (authored?) *Life and Letters of Leonidas L. Hamline, D.D., Late One of the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church*.

Hamline experienced “entire sanctification” in 1842 and promoted the experience and the doctrine the rest of his life (Hibbard, 1880, 104-05). His views on entire sanctification seem to be almost totally identical with Palmer’s (Hibbard, 1880, 101 ff.). His views on eschatology and the millennium were fairly well developed, though not extensively elaborated (neither “dogmatic” nor “wrought into a perfect theory”) (Hibbard 272).

The major features of Hamline’s millennial views were summarized by Hibbard and supported by a number of citations from Hamline’s own works. Hibbard reported that it was in “the period of active labors and most vigorous manhood [that he] more frequently [recurred] to the millennium and the Second Coming of Christ” (Hibbard, 1880, 271). This observation fits well with Hamline’s advocacy of holiness and the clear relationship he saw between holiness and his views on eschatology.

Although Hibbard is reserved in his characterization of Hamline as a postmillennialist, it is quite evident that his views were of this kind. This conclusion arises out of his explicit views on the state of the world during the millennium and its relationship to Methodist sanctification. Commenting on Isaiah 2: 1-5, Hamline asked:

What is the millennium? I will not say it is a period in which Christ shall visibly and personally reign on the earth. But I will say it is a period in which he will spiritually and solely reign, maintaining dominion over all human affections. The millennium has, in my opinion, been unwarrantably viewed as a state of very partial improvement. I believe, and I see no reason why we, holding the doctrine of sanctification as we do, should not believe, that it is a state bordering on perfection (Hibbard, 1880, 276).

The relationship between his holiness doctrine of sanctification and the state of the world during the coming millennium was explicit: the “doctrine of sanctification” the Methodists hold should lead to “a state bordering on perfection.”

Elsewhere he declares that “after a few more generations, ours will become a sanctified race” (Hibbard, 1869-71, 1:374). Such a sanctifying work of transformation would be gradual, not instantaneous<sup>19</sup> and it would be accomplished through Bible knowledge attended by the Holy Ghost who would “transform” the earth “into holiness and beauty” (Hibbard, 1869-71, 1:377).

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<sup>19</sup>It is interesting that it was anticipated to be instantaneous for individuals, but gradual for the world.

The specific instrumentality for the regeneration of the world would be the “ministers of Jesus” and “the members of his militant church” (Hibbard, 1869-71, 1:378). Hamline was greatly encouraged that the world, for so long averse to Scriptural truth, was now displaying “a craving appetite for its teachings and its blessings” (Hibbard, 1869-71, 1:377) and such a craving was understood to be a sure sign of the near advance of the millennium when “the earth shall be like heaven” (Hibbard, 1869-71, 1:378).

For Hamline, the near approach of the millennium was to be an inspiration, above all else, to preach the gospel (not to engage in a lot of eschatological conjectures):

Whether the millennium or the judgment is coming I know not, nor am anxious; but God has come forth in his power among the people. . . . I am looking for great wonders and for woes from heaven. But in the midst of all, as a minister of Jesus, I hear nothing but “Go ye and preach the gospel . . . our days are passing away, and we shall soon be in the grave, in heaven or in hell. O, that the blessed Jesus may prepare us for our final state! (Hibbard, 1880, 274).

As with Bangs and Palmer, for Hamline the main issue in eschatology was personal preparedness for eternity. The millennial rule will come on the earth, but it will come as a result of personal preparedness resulting from the power of gospel sanctification preached by the church. As with Palmer and Bangs, eschatology inspired an activist mode, but it wasn’t socially activist. Hamline was one of the architects of silence that tried to keep peace in the Methodist church—eschewing thorny social issues in favor of spiritual unity.

### **Bishop Gilbert Haven**

Gilbert Haven (1821-1880)<sup>20</sup> was the most politically and socially radical Methodist leader of the mid-nineteenth century. He not only advocated abolitionism, but also preached social equality and inter-racial marriage. In addition to his racial concerns, he was “an early defender of civil rights, advocate of prohibition, women’s suffrage and equality, and lay representation in the conferences of the church” (Harmon, 1:1094).

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<sup>20</sup>Haven has received considerable scholarly attention. Will Gravely provides an excellent, selected bibliography of both primary and secondary works in his *Gilbert Haven: Methodist Abolitionist* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1973), pp. 258-263.

He began his pastoral career during 1851 in New England and spent the next ten years pastoring in Massachusetts. It was during this period that he began his strong abolitionist advocacy, which was quite at variance with the Northern Methodist policy.

In 1861 he answered Lincoln's call for troops and volunteered as a chaplain with the Eight Mass. Regiment. In 1867 he was elected editor of *Zion's Herald* and was a member of the General Conferences of 1868 and 1872. At the latter conference he was elected Bishop and assigned to Atlanta, Ga. "His radical abolitionist views and his association with Negroes on the basis of equality made him unpopular with Southern people" (Harmon, 1:1094).

Haven's relationship to and experience of entire sanctification was much different than that of Bangs and Hamline. He sought the blessing intermittently until after the war (Smith, 1957, 220). While pastoring in Northampton he gave himself to the reading of "Edwards on the Affections" and this reading inspired a serious consideration of perfection:

I am inclined to believe in a conscious cleansing of the heart from its foulness by the power of Christ. I do not feel clear upon the point as yet; if I did, I should not rest until I had entered that state (Prentice, 107).

There is no evidence that he ever claimed the blessing.

As to his relationship to Phoebe Palmer, there is no evidence that the two ever had anything to do with each other.<sup>21</sup> As of this writing, I have been unable to locate any place where he advocates the holiness experience or the movement's goals. In fact, it seems that the movement's lack of social and political activism left him cold.

In 1876 students (apparently African-American students) at Fisk University in Nashville were turned away from meetings by Major Whittle and D. L. Moody. Haven "turned away in disgust from such spurious piety which did not overcome caste nor issue in ethical action and social service" (Gravely 230). "Not sanctification raptures in Northern campgrounds and churches, but devotion to these, Christ's

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<sup>21</sup>Charles White (1986, 97) incorrectly says that the Palmers spent the night with their old friends Dr. and Mrs. Gilbert Haven. It was actually his cousin, Bishop Erastus O. Haven (who at the time of this incident was President of the University of Michigan), with whom the Palmers spent the night at Ann Arbor. See Wheatley (1876, 425-428).

children in captivity and contumely, is to be the real test in that day of the Christ-like condition of the believer” (Gravely 230).

The most definitive statement on Haven’s eschatological and millennial views is found in the sermon “The War and the Millennium” (Haven 373-392). Though Haven gave no personal testimony to holiness experience, he couched his millennial vision in sanctificationist terms: “The plunge was through Satan unto sin, the deliverance must be through Christ unto holiness. The perfected deliverance is the Millennium” (Haven 375). Yet it is not sanctification in simply personal terms, but it is God “sanctifying every part of every soul, and making them communities of holiness, centers of sacred life, sweeping away the crime of civil and social life until the ‘statelier Eden comes again’ to a long-degraded and ruined world” (Haven 375). Haven envisioned this triumph to be imminent as the opposition of human rebellion was soon to die out (Haven 378-79, 382). America was to be the vehicle that would unite all in a world of democratic equality: “If America is lost, the world is lost” (Haven 380-82).

Haven was somewhat equivocal as to whether the rise of the millennium would be gradual or instantaneous, but he leaned toward the gradual (Haven 384, 386-7). The millennium would not come until racial equality was achieved, and this great achievement was anticipated to be real and visible (Haven 387-88). The vision of triumph over slavery would lead to a great outbreak of personal morality (Haven 390). This millennial kingdom would definitely be earthly. Another means to its attainment would be the granting of woman’s suffrage (Haven 627).

One of the most provocative of Haven’s eschatological views was his conviction that the Civil War was a providential means and a prelude to the purification of society which would lead to a social millennium (Haven 379-80).<sup>22</sup>

It is striking that Haven could take the sanctificationist terminology and apply it with a social/political/collective perspective. It is not just personal holiness that leads to social justice, but such social victories (as the triumph over slavery) would lead to personal morality (Haven 390, 627).

For Gilbert Haven, the millennium would come on gradually when Christian believers would rouse themselves to not only personal holiness,

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<sup>22</sup>It should be noted that this sermon was preached on Thanksgiving Day, Nov. 26, 1863; the Battle of Lookout Mountain had been fought on Nov. 24 and the Battle of Missionary Ridge on Nov. 25. Haven is consciously reflecting on these events for a providential understanding of the war.

but also social righteousness, and he was not afraid to get involved in the messy business of politics to bring it about.<sup>23</sup> He was definitely a postmillennialist, but in stark contrast to the postmillennial leanings of Bangs and Hamline. He was a social/political activist with a “bang” (but without Bangs’ reticence)!

### **Eschatology, Soteriology, and Social Action**

While Phoebe Palmer viewed the second coming of Jesus in personal and cataclysmic terms, Bangs, Hamline, and Haven were all postmillennialist, giving little evidence of agreement with Palmer’s eschatology. But, while these three contemporaries of Palmer were clearly postmillennial, they viewed the moral implications of such eschatology in markedly contrasting ways. Even though all three were activists in promoting moral transformation, their activism could be classified in two ways: (1) activist in an evangelistic, personal ethics sense, with a strong accent on personal salvation from all sin (Bangs, Hamline, and Palmer) and (2) a more political agenda—promoting collective salvation from social or systemic evil (Haven).

What accounted for this difference in activist application? Timothy Smith asks: “Did the proliferation of Pentecostal<sup>24</sup> rhetoric signal the beginning of a spiritual retreat from the rational and the ethical concerns that since Wesley had characterized the proponents of sanctification?” Smith thinks not. Even so, in the case of Palmer and her “near” circle of intimates who shared her holiness convictions, there was a qualified “spiritual retreat from . . . ethical concerns” (Smith, 1979, 40).

There is a history of social involvement in both the pre- and postmillennialist traditions. Charles Lippy insists that premillennialists “were and still are not cut from a single cloth” (2:832). It nonetheless appears that social activism has been much more likely to occur among postmillennialists. Yet, having said this, how do we account for the relative lack of social/political involvement on the part of Palmer, Bangs, and Hamline in contrast to Haven’s political calls for the transformation of the social order?

I argue that there are elements inherent in the personal salvationist ethos that preclude a more radical social activism. The issue has to do

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<sup>23</sup>Such political maneuvering was mainly ecclesiastical, but it also involved seeking to influence secular government.

<sup>24</sup>In this citation Smith uses the term “Pentecostal” in its emerging Pentecostal or pneumatological sense to describe the experience of holiness.

less with one's view on the millennium and more with one's view of the primacy of personal salvation.<sup>25</sup>

Inherent in the personal salvation mentality is a strong sense of personal moral responsibility and decision. Palmer and company sensed that such moral "holiness" was best promoted by revivalism. Yet revivalism is not the bedrock of the issue: it was only an efficient (though controversial) means to the end of personal salvation from personal moral evil.

It is striking that such seemingly disparate groups as the revivalistic and Arminian Holiness Movement and the more staid Old Princeton Calvinists (Charles Hodge and others)<sup>26</sup> were both reticent to get involved in social activism.<sup>27</sup> By contrast, the more "processive"<sup>28</sup> the soteriological views (such as Haven's views on holiness), the more inclined one might be to social/political activism. Is it possible that the more con-

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<sup>25</sup>It certainly must be recognized that there are factors other than doctrine that play into how individuals or movements relate to social reform. Such matters as familial role-modeling and the overall impact of one's culture of origin could be much more decisive. It is probable that the reason for Gilbert Haven's much greater involvement in social reform was the example of his public-spirited father and the broader influence of the New England Puritan vision of society as a Holy Commonwealth. The work of cultural historians is significant. One such recent study is David Hackett Fischer's *Albion's Seed* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) which demonstrates strong cultural persistence by tracing the British roots of four American folk traditions. Another helpful discipline focuses on systems theories, including the way new members are incorporated into the existing struggles of the churches and the denominations they join.

<sup>26</sup>Again, one must move with caution in assessing such a figure as Hodge. It could be that his literal Biblical hermeneutic played a greater role in the way he viewed the church and collective social concern than his soteriology did. Hodge simply could not find the kind of straight-forward mandate for radical social reform in Scripture.

<sup>27</sup>It is interesting to note that both the holiness people and the Princeton Theology advocates saw God as working very powerfully in the soul to bring about salvation, even though they differed over (1) synergism and (2) the extent to which sin would be cleansed out of the life this side of glory. Compare Phoebe Palmer's *The Way of Holiness* (New York: Palmer and Hughes, 1867, pp. 63, 126, 130, 136-37, 139, 149, 157) with Charles Hodge's *Systematic Theology*, vol.2 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1978, pp. 650 ff.) on the "Vocation of the Spirit."

<sup>28</sup>I use the term "processive" in the sense of nineteenth century liberalism's distrust of "sharp discontinuities in the spiritual life" in favor of "continuous maturation and of the natural unfolding of religious experience" (Moorhead, "Erosion of Postmillennialism . . ." p. 69).

cerned one is with the working of God in personal salvation, the less likely one is to be socially active? The contrasts between Haven and the Palmer holiness group (and Old Princeton) suggest a positive answer.

Yet there are troubling exceptions that make such a seemingly obvious conclusion problematic. What about the social activism of Charles Finney, for instance, who held views on sanctification very similar to Phoebe Palmer's and yet was outspokenly active in opposition to slavery and other social evils?

First, it needs to be stated that there should be a clear distinction between social relief and social/political activism. Certainly Phoebe Palmer engaged in social relief and was socially concerned. But hers was an activism that took the form of personal relief primarily, rather than attempts to directly change the social order by political action.<sup>29</sup> But again, what is to be said about the more radical social advocacy of such figures as Finney?

A closer look reveals more commonalities than differences between the social views of Palmer's near circle and the Oberlin perfectionist circle. James Moorhead's incisive analysis of Finney's social activism concludes that Finney's views of "benevolence" demanded that any social reform "must always remain an 'appendage' of spiritual regeneration," avoiding any "preoccupation" that would "divert attention from the overriding duty to promote revivals."<sup>30</sup>

Closely related to Finney's guarding the interest of the personal salvationism inherent in revivalism was his understanding that all reforms were to be shaped by "a vivid sense of personal accountability and self-

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<sup>29</sup>In this regard, writers such as Timothy Smith have been somewhat amorphous in their definitions of social reform. Did Smith's antebellum aggregates of revivalism, perfectionism, and millennialism promote real collective, structural social reform or a certain type of consciousness where an aggregate of individuals will create a moral society based on white, middle class, Victorian, Protestant norms? (I take no personal credit for these insights. They were generated during discussions in a doctoral seminar on American millennial themes taught by James H. Moorhead at Princeton Theological Seminary in the Spring of 1987).

<sup>30</sup>Moorhead, "Social Reform and the Divided Conscience of Antebellum Protestantism," p. 424. Moorhead, however, has suggested caution in treating Finney and that a further look at his political views after the Civil War needs further analysis. For instance, Finney, in contrast to Mahan, was a strong supporter of the Radical Republicans (observations made by Moorhead to Whidden in recent personal conversations).

discipline.” Furthermore, while his undergirding views on social theory provided a “powerful instrument for exposing statutory inequalities, they tended to hide more covert forms of oppression,” making it “difficult for class or economic grievances to be enunciated clearly.”<sup>31</sup>

The evidence strongly suggests that the only difference between Palmer-Bangs-Hamline and Finney<sup>32</sup> was the level of their rhetoric, not their base philosophy. Social evils were certainly recognized and opposed, but it was essentially a vision of individualistic transformation rather than a political, frontal attack on systemic evil.<sup>33</sup>

By stark contrast, Haven was less concerned with personal holiness and had a more powerful view of social evils in their systemic settings.<sup>34</sup> It seems that his differing soteriology was more decisive for his activism than his millennial views.

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 428.

<sup>32</sup>Here it is appropriate to ask about the views of Finney’s Oberlin colleague, Asa Mahan. Despite disagreements between them on ontology and utility in ethics, both shared views of the will that, in the context of the urgent demands of revivalism, called for immediate moral decision and active response in a life of benevolence. Although Mahan advocated many social reforms (abolition, temperance, peace, women’s rights) and was considerably more politically active than Finney (even running for Congress in 1872 on the Liberal-Democratic ticket), he devoted the last fifteen years of his life almost exclusively to the promotion of holiness, “the tie that bound all the chapters of his life into a coherent whole” (Edward H. Madden and James E. Hamilton, *Freedom and Grace: The Life of Asa Mahan*, Metuchen, N.J. and London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1982, p.184). The ultimate passion that finally seemed to swallow up all else was personal salvation.

<sup>33</sup>In this regard, the observations of Lippy are quite trenchant: “Some (premillennialists) have indeed been concerned with social issues, though more with an eye to protect the righteous remnant from contamination than to transform the very fabric of society” (Lippy and Williams, Vol. 2, p. 832).

Whether the “remnant” is the “Holiness” movement, the powerful, up-and-coming Methodism of the nineteenth century, Jerry Falwell’s Israel (or little boys and girls in the public schools that need prayer and fetus souls in mother’s wombs needing protection), or Seventh-day Adventism’s apocalyptic vision—the issue has almost always been the seizing of issues that benefit the remnant primarily rather than the eradication of systemic evil from the larger, collective body politic.

<sup>34</sup>He was certainly a prototype of the figures who would strongly promote social activism in later nineteenth and early twentieth century Methodism (could we call Haven a proto-social gosseller?).

In conclusion, I argue that any system which concentrates on personal salvation is more likely to be reticent to devote time and energy to a war on systemic evil. Soteriological concerns seem to impact more than eschatological visions on the resulting level and types of social action.

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# THE ESCHATOLOGY OF GEORGE D. WATSON

by

**Stephen J. Lennox**

In 1878 Daniel Steele, one of the more prominent holiness authors of the late nineteenth century, declared premillennialism absolutely incompatible with the doctrine of entire sanctification. How can premillennialism be embraced, he asked, when it pronounces “the dispensation of the Holy Spirit as inadequate to the conquest of the world for Christ?” When everything from the cross to the second coming is described as a “parenthesis,” all who embrace holiness should “shudder at the disrespect which is thus shown to the Paraclete, the personal successor to the risen Lord Jesus” (195, 169).

Less than thirty years later, however, W. B. Godbey announced that most people in the holiness movement were embracing premillennialism (1904, 46). Godbey himself, through his prolific writings, is due much credit for furthering this shift. Another person, lesser known than Godbey, but also very influential in this regard, is George D. Watson.

## **Questioning the “Post” Perspective**

Watson, born in Accomac County, Virginia in 1845, was converted when a revival swept his southern regiment during the Civil War. He later attended the Methodist Biblical Institute in Concord, New Hampshire for one year, joining the Philadelphia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1868. After claiming to be entirely sanctified in 1876, Watson left the pastorate to enter full-time holiness evangelism.

Watson experienced a well-documented shift from post to pre-millennialism in 1896. From then until his death in 1924, Watson wrote

and spoke widely on this subject. “It permeated his writings and sermons, and the last article he ever dictated was on the millennium,” according to his wife and biographer, Eva M. Watson (114). By considering Watson’s eschatological shift, we further clarify the move from post to premillennialism that occurred within the American holiness movement and evangelicalism more generally.

In 1889 Watson, then a postmillennialist, predicted in triumphant tones, “the day is coming when the Church of God shall have power over this world, and every satanic industry will be ruled out by the iron power of law and Christian legislation, and every believer receives in miniature that which is to come” (1889, 23). A few years later, after becoming a Wesleyan Methodist, Watson began to question postmillennialism. He wrote:

For twenty-five or thirty years of my life I accepted the old Roman Catholic notion, which is accepted by most Protestants, that the second coming of Jesus would be after the millennium, and at the time of the general judgment. Then, for a few years, I was unsettled in my views on that subject, for I saw so many portions of Scripture that could not have any reasonable interpretation in harmony with that old theory.

Early in 1896 I began to pray very earnestly for the Holy Spirit to open up the scriptures to me clearly on that subject. In two or three weeks afterward the Spirit began unfolding to my mind, in a remarkable way, the Book of Revelation, and the parables of Jesus, and other scriptures on the pre-millennial coming of Christ, and the light on that subject has been increasing ever since (1898, 5).

After this experience, he became rather critical of the “utopian dreams” of postmillennialism whose delusions are “just as unscriptural as the gradual sanctification of the believer (Watson, 1913, 147, 150). Post-millennialists “have imbibed the notion that the Kingdom of God will come about by various achievements of civilization and science, and modern progress, and ecclesiastical machinery . . .” (1898, 62-63). “But such a view of the coming of Christ’s kingdom,” said Watson, “is utterly unscriptural, and nothing more or less than an anti-Christ, that is, the substituting of a church or a system of teachings for the personal presence of Jesus Himself” (1898, 63).

In what appears to be a veiled censure of Daniel Steele, Watson referred to “an eminent Greek scholar” who was “furiously opposed to

any teaching on the pre-millennial coming of Christ” but who also taught the punctiliar nature of entire sanctification based, in part, on the aorist tense of the Greek. “That great scholar,” said Watson, “stultified his own common sense and all his Greek scholarship by refusing to admit that all these words referring to the chaining of Satan were in the aorist tense, just as perfectly as were the verbs on instantaneous sanctification” (1927, 214-15).

Watson not only attributed his embrace of premillennialism to divine illumination, he asserted that this same light was available to all who are fully sanctified. “If we are perfect believers we will be mightily influenced by things to come, and especially by what the Bible reveals of the coming of the Lord, and of the next age when His kingdom shall be established in the earth” (1927, 70).

### **Shift in Dispensationalism**

Prior to becoming a premillennialist, Watson divided history into three dispensations: the Age of the Father, the Age of the Son, and the Age of the Holy Spirit. Watson acknowledged his debt to John Fletcher for this insight.<sup>1</sup>

Fletcher, Wesley’s hand-picked successor, considered that these three dispensations corresponded to God’s great promises to humanity. In the dispensation of the Father, God promised the “external manifestation of the Son.” The promise of the Holy Spirit was given in the dispensation of the Son, first by John the Baptist, then by Jesus himself. The third dispensation, that of the Holy Spirit, was marked by the promise of Christ’s second coming.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Numerous passages could be cited, including George Watson, *White Robes or Garments of Salvation and Spiritual Feasts* (Cincinnati: God’s Revivalist, 1883), 128, 130; cf. also *Love Abounding and Other Expositions on the Spiritual Life* (Cincinnati: God’s Revivalist, 1891), 51, 176, 349. He gives credit to Fletcher in *Love Abounding*, 51. Watson does refer to three dispensations at least once after 1898 in *A Pot of Oil or The Anointed Life as Applied to Prayer, the Mental Faculties, the Affections and Christian Service* (n.p., n.d. [1900]), 83, although the date of the first presentation of the passage is questionable.

<sup>2</sup>*The Works of the Reverend John Fletcher, Late Vicar of Madeley*, vol. 3, *The Portrait of St. Paul or the True Model for Christians and Pastors* (Salem, OH: Schmul, 1974), 166-169. Cf. the excellent summary of Fletcher’s dispensationalism and its relevance for the American holiness movement and Pentecostalism in Donald W. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury-Zondervan and Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1987), 51-54.

After Watson became a premillennialist, he deviated from Fletcher's divisions and partitioned history into four dispensations rather than three. Instead of linking each dispensation with a promise of God, as he had done earlier, these were identified by the manner in which God chose to reveal Himself.<sup>3</sup> The first age lasted from Adam to the flood during which time there was neither law, nor church, nor written revelation. Humanity was governed by conscience as acted upon by the Holy Spirit. It was during this age that "God intended to prove to all the world that the human conscience, by itself, is not a sufficient guide for conduct . . ." (1891, 248-49).

Following this came the Age of Law (also called the Mosaic or Jewish Age). In this Age, which began with the call of Abraham and closed with the crucifixion of Jesus, people heard from God through the Law as well as the conscience. In its failure as a nation, Israel demonstrated "to all the universe that human character could not be thoroughly changed by mere law or by force of mental instruction, and that something else was required, to go deeper down into the character of man's soul" (Watson, 1927, 251).

The coming of the Spirit at Pentecost began the Gospel or Church Age. Now God speaks to humanity through conscience, Law, and the Holy Spirit, and will continue to do so until this age closes with the Rapture of the saints (Watson, 1919, 105, 128). Even with the gift of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, this dispensation, like those which preceded it, is demonstrating the failure of humanity. "This present Gospel Age is winding up with great wickedness and the rankest kind of false religions, and the utter denial of the supernatural grace of God, and will be attended with the judgment of the great tribulation upon the whole world" (Watson, 1927, 253).

Last of all is the Kingdom or Millennial Age, to be inaugurated when Christ returns with his saints following the tribulation period. This age will open fifty days after the overthrow of the Antichrist and will represent a Third Pentecost (Watson, 1913, 83, 86). Against those who found little mention of a thousand year millennial period, Watson observed no less than fifty such references in the Bible (1927, 233).

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<sup>3</sup>These ages are explained, perhaps most clearly in *God's Eagles*, 248-55. Other references to the ages include *God's Eagles*, 219; *God's First Words: Studies in Genesis Historic, Prophetic and Experimental* (NY: Revell, 1919), 73; *The Heavenly Life* (Cincinnati: God's Revivalist, 1904), 95.

From these passages, he judged that the millennium will be a literal thousand year period in which Christ and the believers will reign on earth over the nations. After this they will reign in heaven forever over those nations born in the ongoing ages (1913, 84, 98, 114-15). Satan will be chained, the curse will be lifted, “and yet, in spite of all these marvelous blessings, we are told in several places that even in that age multitudes will serve God feignedly or deceitfully, and at the close of the Millennial Age, when Satan is let loose again, he will find countless thousands of hypocrites in the earth and lead them to revolt against the government of Christ, so that fire will come down out of Heaven and destroy them” (1927, 254). After their destruction, God will begin “a new series of ages which is referred to so many times in the Bible by the expression ‘ages of ages.’ . . . Hence there will be no end to the successive serious [sic] of ages in the history of the universe” (1927, 255).

### **Elements of Watson’s Premillennialism**

Watson’s conversion to premillennialism was naturally marked by a change in his interpretation of the book of Revelation. Writing prior to 1896, he emphasized the relevance of this book to the present life of the believer; Revelation was “God’s looking-glass.” While the seven “overcomeths” of chapters two and three might have some future relevance, they were “not to be understood as belonging to the future life merely.” While there will be a tree in Paradise whose fruit we can eat, “the Scriptures teach us that it is to be fulfilled *first* in this world . . . (emphasis his)” (1889, 6-9).

As a premillennialist, Watson continued to make present-day application of Revelation, but became much more interested in that book as prediction. This shift was deliberate and was explained by Watson in the preface to *Steps to the Throne* (1898, 5-6):

Some years ago [1889] I published a small book, called *The Seven Overcomeths*, giving only the interpretation that applied to the interior spiritual life, but did not then see their ulterior and perfect relation to the coming of Jesus, and His millennial reign. I have given in this book what the Spirit has given to me of the application of the seven overcomeths, not only to the inner life in the present state, but their application as preparing the believer to reign with Jesus in His coming kingdom.

Also accompanying Watson’s eschatological conversion was the conviction that Revelation must be interpreted literally. He became

especially vexed by those who would spiritualize passages in this book by which they did “great violence to the word of God” (1898, 121). “The unholy habit of spiritualizing all such Scriptures utterly destroys their meaning, and perverts the Word of God, and weakens Christian faith, and sows the seed of infidelity” (1913, 130).

In spite of this strong rhetoric, Watson continued to embrace the view he expressed in 1889 while a postmillennialist: “all Scripture has a two-fold fulfillment, first the inward, and then the outward” (1889, 46). As a postmillennialist, Watson focused on the inward or spiritual meaning; as a premillennialist, he was more interested in the outward or future meaning.

The descriptions of the New Jerusalem he offered before and after 1896 illustrate what he meant by inward and outward meanings and how his focus shifted. As a postmillennialist, Watson identified the New Jerusalem as a spiritual entity associated with the entirely sanctified. He emphatically asserted that it was not a material structure (1889, 52).

After 1896, he described it in material terms as a city constructed of pure, transparent gold with trees that bear fruit and a river that “will flow every way with equal felicity” (1927, 238). He reconciled these views by describing the city as a

composite structure, including both the material of the city and the inhabitants that live in it. It is called a city built of pure gold like unto clear glass, and yet it is called the Lamb’s wife, and both of these descriptions are inspired and both are true (1927, 238).

Ironically, while Watson was insisting on the literal interpretation of Revelation, he continued the rampant typologizing which characterized his writing. Known as the man who could find holiness where no one would ever think of looking for it (1886, 4), Watson was also able to find premillennialism in the most unexpected places. For example,

the reign of King Saul was a type of the law, which, as Paul said, proved to be a failure. Then the reign of David was a type of Christ in the suffering dispensation of the church age. Then the reign of King Solomon was a type of the reign of Christ in the Millennium.

Jeroboam’s exile typified the chaining of Satan while Jeroboam’s return from exile represented the unchaining of Satan after the Millennium (1927, 236-37). This is the kind of typological exegesis one finds throughout Watson’s earlier writings, except there it is used to defend

entire sanctification. After 1896, he employed types primarily to prove premillennialism.<sup>4</sup>

While entire sanctification ceased to be the sole theme of Watson's writings, it did not become any less important to him. Premillennialism provided him with what he saw as a more suitable eschatological context in which to place holiness. He now saw entire sanctification as the earthly preparation for the task of reigning with Christ in heaven as the Bridehood Saints. Watson made it his new priority to proclaim holiness within this eschatological context.

A large class of people have in modern years become intensely interested in the personal coming of Jesus, but have studied that subject in a mere material and political aspect to the utter neglect of a deep experience in personal holiness. . . . On the other hand a large number of deeply spiritual persons who accept the full Bible teaching on personal and full salvation as a fitness for life, as well as for entrance to heaven, have entirely passed over the subject of our Savior's return to this earth, and of His personal reign over the nations for a thousand years. . . . But when we look into the New Testament, we find both of these classes to be holding to mere partial truths. The Holy Spirit has blended these great truths into unity, and taught us in scores of places the direct connection between scriptural holiness and the premillennial appearing of our Lord (1898, 58-59).

Along with other premillennialists, Watson embraced a pretribulation rapture, defending this doctrine by the usual passages<sup>5</sup> and by a few more less usual. Without documentation or argument, he states that the Greek word *parousia* refers to the rapture while *apocalypsis* refers to Christ's open return following the period of tribulation.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>For a fuller development of this subject, see my dissertation, "Biblical Interpretation in the American Holiness Movement: 1875-1920" (Ph.D. diss., Drew University, 1992). Watson is one of seven authors studied. The others are W. B. Godbey, Daniel Steele, Beverly Carradine, Reuben Robinson, Martin Wells Knapp, and Joseph H. Smith.

<sup>5</sup>In addition to references to Matthew 24:40-41 and Revelation 4:1, he points out that the church does not appear again in Revelation until after the tribulation period has ended and the millennium begun.

<sup>6</sup>G. Watson, *God's Eagles*, 106. Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich contend that references to *parousia* are "nearly always of his Messianic Advent in glory to judge the world at the end of this age" (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* [Chicago: U of Chicago, 1957], 635.) *Parousia* in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 more likely refers to an open coming, 2 Peter 1:16 to Christ's first coming and 2 Peter 3:12 to the coming Day of God as the final cataclysmic end.

Watson also saw the rapture typified in such events as the unusual departures of Enoch and Elijah. “In both of these cases the translation took place just before severe judgments, and in this respect they are samples of the translations of the prepared saints just before the setting in of the great tribulation judgment which is to come on the entire world” (1927, 109).

Following the rapture of the saints will begin a period of tribulation lasting about forty years. Watson determined the length of time based on several factors, including the final chapter of the book of Daniel. “If we examine the time set forth in the last chapter of Daniel, and deduct the prophetic day-year of the time for the treading down of Jerusalem to the opening of the new age, it leaves between thirty-five and forty years for the great tribulations and the heavenly banquets” (1898, 118).

A forty-year period was also suggested by several typical events from the Bible, such as the forty days of rain preceding the Flood, Egypt being uninhabited for forty years (Ezekiel 29:11-12), Moses’ forty-day sojourn on the mountain, and the forty days Jesus spent on the earth following His resurrection.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the number forty “always signifies the period for punishing, proving, trying, and testing a person, or nation, or thing” (1898, 119). While this period will be a time of great suffering on earth, the saints in Heaven will be rewarded for their earthly deeds. They will enjoy the Marriage Supper of the Lamb—an actual meal involving Jesus, His Bride (those entirely sanctified), and the invited guests (unsanctified Christians).<sup>8</sup>

Active during this tribulation period will be the Trinity of Hell. The Dragon represents Satan, Judas Iscariot will be the False Prophet, and King Saul will return to carry out the role of the Antichrist.<sup>9</sup> Their eventual destruction “will remove from the earth every form of organized wickedness and every form of human government, and be the glorious consummation for which the righteous have prayed all through human history.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>G. Watson, *God’s Eagles*, 18, 116; *Steps to the Throne*, 118-20.

<sup>8</sup>G. Watson, *God’s Eagles*, 129, 140-53, 168-81.

<sup>9</sup>Watson referred to Satan, Judas, and Saul in several places, including *Bridehood Saints*, 275 and *God’s Eagles*, 197, 214, 206. He offered most clearly his reasons for these identifications in *God’s Eagles*, 203-6. Prior to 1896, Watson identified this trio differently: The dragon was Heathenism, the False Prophet, Mohammedanism, and the Antichrist, worldly power (*Seven Overcomeths*, 36).

<sup>10</sup>The destruction of the Antichrist is described in G. Watson, *God’s Eagles*, 195-207.

## Sources for Watson's Premillennialism

In considering the source for Watson's premillennialism, one is tempted to credit the better known dispensational premillennialists with whom Watson shares some common ground. Both divided history into multiple ages based on God's activity. Both taught the rapture of the saints. In fact, Watson's view sounds very much like that of Scofield: "Enoch . . . is a type of those saints who are to be translated before the apocalyptic judgments."<sup>11</sup> Both speak of a special role for the Jewish nation<sup>12</sup> and both see each dispensation ending with failure and tragedy.<sup>13</sup>

In spite of the similarities, Watson never mentioned the dispensational premillennialists, except to criticize their soteriology.<sup>14</sup> He differed from them in identifying the bride of Christ with the entirely sanctified. These are the "elect," the "bridehood saints," the "selection from the selection," the "front-rank saints."<sup>15</sup> While he was probably aware of their writings, it seems unlikely that Watson followed them to any great extent.

W. B. Godbey was too prolific a writer and too powerful a figure in the holiness movement not to influence Watson's views. Prior to 1896 Godbey was proclaiming premillennialism, the rapture, and the identification of the entirely sanctified as the Bridehood.<sup>16</sup> When it comes to the source of Watson's four dispensations, however, Godbey is not a likely candidate. Godbey refers to dispensations, but is less than consistent with their names or number.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, Watson believed all Christians will

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<sup>11</sup>C. I. Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible* (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1945 [1909]) on Genesis 5:22. It should be noted that, unlike Scofield, Watson does not identify Noah as a type of the Jewish people who are saved through the tribulation. Cf. W. E. Blackstone's identification of Enoch as a type of the church (*Jesus is Coming* [N.Y.: Revell, 1932 {1898}], 79).

<sup>12</sup>Jews will be transported back to their own land by Gentile governments, according to G. Watson, *Pot of Oil*, 103. Watson identified the 144,000 as saved Jews representing the first-fruits of the restoration of Israel (*God's Eagles*, 116-17). Similar sentiments can be found in Blackstone, 162-76, and W. B. Godbey, *Commentary on the New Testament*, vol. 1, *Revelation* (Cincinnati: Revivalist Office, 1898 [1896]), 63-68.

<sup>13</sup>G. Watson, *God's Eagles*, 252-53. C. I. Scofield was another who made this observation (*Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth* [Wilmington, DE: Just A Word, n.d.], 12).

<sup>14</sup>G. Watson, *Coals of Fire*, 19; G. Watson, *Love Abounding*, 26.

<sup>15</sup>G. Watson, *God's Eagles*, 19, 242, 237.

<sup>16</sup>W. B. Godbey, *Spiritual Gifts and Graces* (Cincinnati: God's Revivalist Office, 1895), 62, 66; *Revelation*, 108, 71.

<sup>17</sup>Godbey, *Revelation*, 276.

be raptured while Godbey considered this the privilege of only the entirely sanctified.<sup>18</sup> Such differences suggest that Godbey was not the primary source for Watson's views. Watson was capable of very creative interpretations, as a survey of his writings makes clear. It would not be surprising, therefore, to find that some of Watson's premillennial views are original products.

### **Reasons for the Shift to Premillennialism**

Watson offers several reasons for his eschatological change. It came, he notes, because of the new light on Scripture which God gave him in answer to his prayers. Watson believed neither he nor his readers would have needed such illumination if only the church had maintained its spiritual vitality beyond the second century. It was the deadness and worldliness that characterized the church from the third century on which produced postmillennialism (1898, 61). He saw the emergence of the holiness movement as the sign of a new day in which God intended to reveal the events of the end times. God originally gave the book of Revelation in "signs or telegraphic ciphers" so that "the message might be safely transmitted through the dark ages. If the Romanists had perfectly understood in centuries gone by all the teachings of this book, they would have destroyed it from the earth. . . ." As the coming of Christ draws nearer, "the Holy Spirit is more and more revealing the secrets of this wonderful book to His humble and thoughtful servants in all the earth; and many things which have been concealed through the Dark Ages are now beginning to be unfolded in the clear light, which the Holy Spirit is pouring upon those who are entirely devoted to God" (1898, 7-8).

The church was also blind to this truth because it sought its eschatology in poets like Dante, Milton, and Pollock instead of in the Bible (1927, 140). To make matters worse, says Watson, the church had mistranslated the important Greek word "aion" as "world" rather than as "age." "There are no less than 35 places in the New Testament where the word 'world' should be *age*, and because of this there has been produced so much misunderstanding concerning the second coming of Christ and the things connected with the coming kingdom" (emphasis his, 1927, 70).

Watson embraced premillennialism as the most Biblical view. Without the key of premillennialism and dispensationalism, he came to

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<sup>18</sup>G. Watson, *God's Eagles*, 177-78. Godbey, *Revelation*, 232, 254. Watson and Godbey also disagreed on the identity of the Anti-Christ (cf. G. Watson, *God's Eagles*, 199, and Godbey, *Revelation*, 150).

believe, one cannot unlock the deepest meanings of the Bible. With this key “we also get light on a whole family of kindred truths that go along with it, and it makes all other Bible doctrines to perfectly harmonize and fit into their right places.”<sup>19</sup>

There appear to be reasons for Watson’s change of eschatology beyond those he identifies. One suspects that his ecclesiology helped to foster his eschatological shift. Postmillennialism thrives where the established church is held in high regard. Where the established church is seen as a failure, premillennialism provides a ready explanation for the ultimate triumph of the faith.

The view of the established church held by the holiness movement was less than enthusiastic by the turn of the century. At best the church was neutral to the proclamation of holiness; at worst it had removed holiness proponents from its ranks. Many in the movement had turned their loyalty away from the church to the holiness associations; some denied that denominations had any legitimate place whatsoever.

Watson did not go to this extreme, but he did warn against counting on the church to bring in the Kingdom with its “ecclesiastical machinery.” Men and women, he asserted, “have unwittingly put the church in the place of the Lord Jesus.” They have stood by while “the nominal church has usurped His [God’s] place in the hearts of men, and has assumed His throne and attempted to play the King in His stead” (1898, 62-64).

The view that Watson’s negative opinion of the established church was connected in any way with his move from the Methodist Episcopal Church to the Wesleyan Methodist Connection (Church) is intriguing, but difficult to verify. At any rate, Watson’s negative attitude to “ecclesiastical machinery” provided fertile ground for his premillennialism.

Also contributing to the eschatological shift was the fact that Watson and the rest of the holiness movement were becoming increasingly isolated from the rest of American Christianity. Throughout the last half of the nineteenth century, the movement had ridden the crest of a popularity wave. The doctrine of holiness was spreading across denominational lines as the National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness gained national recognition. Naturally such popularity and optimism would be at home with postmillennial eschatology.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>G. Watson, *Bridehood Saints*, 45. Dispensationalism as the hermeneutical key is found in *God’s Eagles*, 189, 192.

<sup>20</sup>Melvin E. Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*. Studies in Evangelicalism, no. 1 (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1980), 110.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, the influence of the holiness movement had begun to wane. As it drifted out of the mainstream of Protestantism, it came to see itself more and more in a minority and disinherited role (1913, 129-30). That its new self-image fit well with premillennialism is evident from Watson's words:

. . . countless thousands of believers who will be saved in Heaven have criticised the bridehood saints and persecuted those who were sanctified. But at the judgment day, in the presence of Jesus, they will change their tune and will praise and honor the very saints that in this life they criticised and spurned.<sup>21</sup>

Premillennialism also was fostered by the anti-Catholic sentiment that grew in strength during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in America. The fires of anti-Catholicism, which had long smoldered in American culture, were now being fanned into flame by the arrival of great numbers of Roman Catholic immigrants. That Holiness folk were not immune to such nativism is evident from Watson's repeated pejorative references to Catholicism, and H. C. Morrison's warning of Roman Catholicism's attempt "to dominate and control this great republic." Godbey was among those who identified the Roman Catholic church with the beast and the harlot.<sup>22</sup> If postmillennialism was, as Watson describes it, "that old Roman Catholic notion," rising nativist sentiments would have pushed him and others to reject it.

One final reason for this shift is apparent. Dispensational premillennialism was most fully embraced in America by those within the trajectory that eventually produced fundamentalism.<sup>23</sup> Fundamentalists emphasized an approach to Biblical interpretation that was very literal, highly inductive, and which highlighted the structure of the Bible. They

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<sup>21</sup>G. Watson, *God's Eagles*, 153. It is interesting that current Revelation scholarship considers the minority viewpoint to be the best posture from which to interpret this book since ". . . the author of Rev. has adopted the 'perspective from below' and expressed the experiences of those who were powerless, poor, and in constant fear of denunciation" (Elisabeth Schussler-Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985], 9).

<sup>22</sup>H. C. Morrison, *Romanism and Ruin* (Louisville: Pentecostal Publishing, 1914), 7-8. Godbey's identifications can be found in *Revelation*, 152, 199.

<sup>23</sup>For a full treatment of the development of fundamentalism, see George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1980).

placed greater weight on the objective authority of Scripture than on its subjective or experiential authority. The accuracy of the Bible became a weapon used to defend its authority.<sup>24</sup> Because Scofield wanted to highlight the divine nature of the Bible, he pointed out its “greater outlines of truth,” and its “ordered beauty and symmetry.” This is the reason Blackstone specifically refers to the Bible’s “unfolding majesty and infinity of God’s plans revealed therein.”<sup>25</sup>

More than any other major holiness figure, Watson was influenced by nascent fundamentalism. We have already observed his strong emphasis on the literal meaning of the text, even when this was inconsistent with his practice of typologizing.

Watson interpreted the Bible inductively, stressing the perfect arrangement of God’s Word. The metaphors of Revelation have been chosen with “a perfect scientific accuracy” and are explained within that book (1898, 8). In fact, so perfectly is the Bible arranged, you may take any Biblical metaphor, wherever it is used in the Bible, and it will always have the same meaning (1891, 330). This is possible because the Bible is a unified whole, every bit of it patterned in the book of Genesis and with that book serving as the ultimate key to Biblical interpretation.<sup>26</sup>

This emphasis, while present in Watson’s writings before 1896, is especially evident after this time. He considered it absurd to say that the “marvelous arrangement” and correspondences of the Bible could have happened by chance. Unity as a guarantee of divine authorship is one of the main themes underlying Watson’s *God’s First Words* (1919). The identification of certain doctrines (dispensationalism and premillennialism) and a certain book (Genesis) as “keys to interpretation” represents an effort to emphasize the unity and thus the divine inspiration of the Bible.

Watson is not unique in claiming a unity for the Bible; what is noteworthy is his purpose for doing so. He emphatically defended the structured nature of the Bible in order to prove its divine authority, and he was the first major holiness writer to do so.

The influence of fundamentalism on Watson can also be seen in his emphasis on the preeminence of orthodoxy. Even while encouraging people to come to the experience of entire sanctification, Watson pointed out that this experience is not as important as orthodoxy. Unless people are “perfectly orthodox in Bible truth,” he wrote,

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<sup>24</sup>Marsden, 55-62.

<sup>25</sup>Scofield, *Rightly Dividing*, 4. Blackstone, 116.

<sup>26</sup>G. Watson, *God’s First Words*, 8, 28, 78, 95.

they will flop over this way or that way, and be easily influenced by every wind of doctrine. Perfect Bible truth on all points is the most complete brace that a soul can have in this life, and is the belt that we all need for our march through this state of trial (1913, 249).

Argued Watson, “There never has been, and there never can be a deep, thorough, strong religious experience and character except in those people who have clear scriptural views of the most glorious Trinity, and the distinct personalities of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost” (1913, 261). Without implying that the holiness movement considered orthodoxy unimportant, it appears that Watson’s elevation of orthodoxy over experience is uncommon among its spokespersons. Here again, the influence of fundamentalism is to be suspected.

That Watson helped lead the holiness movement into premillennialism should not be surprising. His methods of interpreting the Bible and his defense of its infallibility, as well as his emphasis on orthodoxy over experience, suggest the influence of fundamentalism. It stands to reason that his eschatology would have come under that influence as well.

## **Conclusion**

George Watson was not the only holiness spokesperson who embraced premillennialism. That he did it so publicly and then wrote so much about it makes him a figure worthy of attention when considering the dynamics of such a shift. It was a conversion that altered his dispensationalism and caused him to read the book of Revelation in a new light. From that point on, he preached holiness in a premillennial context.

According to Watson, this shift to premillennialism took place because of new light breaking forth from God on the Bible. Other reasons for the change were the low view of the established church and a negative attitude toward Roman Catholicism. Finally, Watson’s own orientation to fundamentalist thought was another reason why he abandoned one long-held notion and embraced another with vigor.

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# PIETIST INFLUENCES IN THE ESCHATOLOGICAL THOUGHT OF JOHN WESLEY AND JÜRGEN MOLTSMANN

by

J. Steven O'Malley

The intent of this study is to provide a historical and theological context for the treatment of the eschatological thought of John Wesley and Jürgen Moltmann by examining their respective uses of sources from the continental Pietism of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The general influence of Pietism on the thought of each of these men has been noted,<sup>1</sup> but attention has not been given to examining its specific significance for their eschatological thought. Our task will proceed by identifying the relevant Pietist sources and then assessing their positive and negative impact. The goal is to demonstrate that the relative place of eschatological thought in our subjects can be more precisely delineated by considering the influence of Pietistic motifs in their respective work.

## **Pietist Eschatological Motifs Influencing John Wesley**

There is evidence that German Pietism was a chief source of Wesley's eschatological thought. However, the most recent treatment of

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<sup>1</sup>See Kenneth J. Collins, "The Influence of Early German Pietism on John Wesley," *Covenant Quarterly*, 48:4 (1990), 23-42; and J. Steven O'Malley, "The Role of Pietism in the Theology of Jürgen Moltmann," *The Asbury Theological Journal* 48:1 (Spring 1993), 121-127.

Pietist influence upon Wesley does not address this relationship.<sup>2</sup> Its discussion is limited to the Lutheran and Moravian manifestations of Pietism and its treatment of Spener does not address the eschatological thought that was central to his theology and resulted in his speaking of a “hope for better times for the church.”<sup>3</sup> As Stein has recently shown, this expectation deeply informed Spener’s soteriology, as well as that of his leading disciple, A. H. Francke, whom Wesley read and commended to his fellow Methodists.<sup>4</sup>

It has been shown that Spener (and the Hallensian Pietism that followed him) derived his eschatological orientation from the influence of the federalist school of Reformed theology and the Reformed separatist, Jean Labadie, whose work he encountered at Strassburg. Likewise, it is the connection with Rhineland (Reformed) and Württemberg Pietism that was a primary contributor to Wesley’s eschatological ideas, together with influence from the English Puritanism that was indigenous to his immediate environment.<sup>5</sup>

Johann Albrecht Bengel (1684-1752), the Tübingen (Württemberg) Pietist whose field was Biblical studies, brought to a culmination the tradition of symbolic-prophetic Biblical exegesis that is traced to the federal school of Dutch and German Reformed Pietism. Its principal representatives were Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669) and his student Campegius Vitringa (1659-1722). Bengel, a student of Vitringa, brought this eschatological-oriented mode of Biblical interpretation to an advanced state of development in his *Gnomon* (Commentary) upon the Old and New Testaments.<sup>6</sup> In the introduction to his *Notes on Revelation*,

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<sup>2</sup>Collins, *supra*.

<sup>3</sup>See K. James Stein, “Philipp Jakob Spener’s Hope for Better Times for the Church,” *Covenant Quarterly* 37 (August 1979), 3-20; and Stein, *Philipp Jakob Spener: Pietist Patriarch* (Chicago; Covenant Press, 1986). Likewise, the author has found helpful an unpublished paper by James B. Bross titled “John Wesley and Eschatology” that treats Wesley’s use of Johann Bengel, but does not provide a comparative theological analysis of their respective positions.

<sup>4</sup>See August H. Francke, *Nicodemus in A Christian Library*, John Wesley, ed. (Landin J. Kershaw, 1826), 29:468.

<sup>5</sup>For a treatment of the latter influence, see Robert Monk, *John Wesley: His Puritan Heritage* (Abingdon, 1966). The influence of the Puritans is seen in Wesley’s “Covenant Renewal Service,” in which covenantal promise and fulfillment are treated from an eschatological perspective. Other sources could include the Apostolic Fathers, especially Irenaeus.

<sup>6</sup>See Johann Albrecht Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament* (1742), tr. C.T. Lewis and M.R. Vincent (Philadelphia, 1864).

Wesley strongly acknowledged his dependence upon Bengel in developing his *Notes*.<sup>7</sup>

**John Wesley's Use of Bengel's "Gnomon."** What, then, was the nature of Bengel's influence on Wesley and in what ways might this eschatological thinking have influenced Wesley's reflections on the future of the kingdom and the personal destiny of believers?

Wesley issued disclaimers with reference to Bengel's chronological speculations on the millennium. For example, when Bengel claimed that Christ's millennial kingdom would begin in 1836, Wesley declared that he "had no opinion" about this, for "these calculations are far above, out of my sight. I have only one thing to do — to save my soul, and those that hear me."<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, Wesley discloses in the Introduction to his *Notes* on Revelation that for many years he had overlooked the "middle parts" of the book, due to their obscurity; and "perhaps I should have lived and died in this sentiment, had I not seen the works of the great Bengelius." Wesley credits Bengel with reviving his hopes of understanding these prophecies.<sup>9</sup>

Wesley's principles for interpreting this material, reflecting Bengel's approach, are explicated in Wesley's introduction to Revelation 6.<sup>10</sup> In these principles, he recognized that, while Revelation was written with reference to ancient kingdoms, "yet the Revelation contains what relates to the whole world, through which the Christian church is extended"; further, "We must take care not to overlook what is already fulfilled; and not to describe as what is still to come."<sup>11</sup>

While these principles concern the prophetic fulfillment of God's redemptive deeds in history, it should not be forgotten that these acts were

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<sup>7</sup>John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, 2 vols. (Baker repr., 1983; from an undated ed. published by the Wesleyan-Methodist Book-Room, London).

<sup>8</sup>John Wesley, Letter to Charles Wesley—1788, No. CCCVI, in *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed., Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, London, 1872 (repr. 1979, Baker), XII, 319.

<sup>9</sup>John Wesley, *Notes*, II, n.p.

<sup>10</sup>Wesley, *Notes*. In introducing Revelation 4, Wesley divides the entire book into the following parts: "The first, second, and third chapters contain the introduction; the fourth and fifth, the proposition; the sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth describe things which are already fulfilled; the tenth to the fourteenth, things which are now fulfilling; the fifteenth to the nineteenth things which will be fulfilled shortly; the twentieth, twenty-first, and twenty-second, things at a greater distance" (*Notes*, Revelation 4).

<sup>11</sup>Wesley, Introduction to *Notes* on Revelation.

being interpreted for Methodists whose mandate is the desire to flee the wrath to come, to be “saved from their sins.”<sup>12</sup> Hence, in commenting upon Revelation 12:12, Wesley related prophecy to the believer’s *status cor deo*: “We live in the little time wherein Satan hath great wrath: and this little time is now upon the decline.”<sup>13</sup>

It is instructive to note that this discussion is prefaced by Wesley’s interpretation of the seventh trumpet (Rev 10:6) as referring to the period from 800 (Charles the Great) to 1836—the date Bengel had set for the return of Christ and the last judgment!<sup>14</sup> However, in nine letters of 1788, Wesley distanced himself from this opinion.

Hence, Wesley’s reliance upon this Pietist exegete is extensive, though not slavish, with his major interest being to mine the practical, soteriological import of Bengel’s treatment of the eschatological dimensions of the Biblical text. The dimensions that most interested Wesley concerned the eschatological implications for the Christian life, death and resurrection, judgment, heaven, and hell. On each of these subjects Wesley was in substantial agreement with the interpretations given in Bengel’s *Gnomon*.<sup>15</sup>

Wesley noted in Sermon LVII that physical death, being a mark of the fall, is not precluded by growth in grace within believers. It is signified in the deterioration of the body prior to death.<sup>16</sup> In his exposition of Luke 16, he identified paradise and hades as abodes of the dead, prior to their resurrection, with his emphasis falling on the impossibility of repentance in that state and, hence, the urgency of repentance in the present moment.<sup>17</sup>

There is a measure of tension in Wesley’s thought between the conquest of death that occurs within the regenerated at their physical death and its abolition that occurs as a final eschatological event

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<sup>12</sup>Wesley, “The Rules of the United Societies,” VIII, 3rd ed., Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, London, 1872 (repr. 1979, Baker), 269-271.

<sup>13</sup>Wesley, *Notes*, Revelation 12:12.

<sup>14</sup>Wesley, *Notes* on Revelation 12:12. The scheme of Wesley’s treatment of the ages of history are in conformity with those devised by Bengel. Wesley acknowledged his indebtedness to Bengel’s scheme in the Introduction to his *Notes* on Revelation.

<sup>15</sup>Compare Bengel’s treatment of these themes, as summarized in F. E. Stoeffler, *German Pietism in the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), 224-236.

<sup>16</sup>Sermon LVII, “The Fall of Man,” *Works* VII, 22cf.

<sup>17</sup>Sermon CXII, “The Rich Man & Lazarus,” *Works*, VII, 244-515.

(explained in his note on Revelation 20:14).<sup>18</sup> The nature of the resurrected bodies of believers is treated extensively in his sermon “On the Resurrection of the Dead,”<sup>19</sup> where he speaks of the transformation of the glorified body occurring in direct proportion to the extent to which the old, fallen nature has been crucified by Christ during its temporal existence.

Positioned between the general resurrection and the inauguration of heaven and hell stands the judgment, which Wesley treats in depth in his sermon “The Great Assize.”<sup>20</sup> Here he provides possibly his most extensive treatment of the eschatological signs in the heavens and on earth that presage the judgment. It will occur before the Great White Throne that will stand suspended far above the earth. Hence, in Christ’s presence all the resurrected appear to give account of the totality of their thoughts and deeds, resulting either in acquittal and admission to heaven or in condemnation and sentence to hell. The latter is treated more extensively by Wesley than the former, especially in his sermon “Of Hell.”<sup>21</sup> Based on Mark 9:48, this sermon describes hell as consisting of the withdrawal of God’s presence and of all blessings of life, as well as the introduction of the pain of eternal fire.<sup>22</sup> However, his greater concern was with the practical and present implications of these end-time portrayals, implications that could function as support for his admonitions against temptations in this life.<sup>23</sup>

Although Wesley appeared not to have been acquainted with the technical terms “rapture” and “tribulation,”<sup>24</sup> he did take a position on the question of the millennium. There are two distinct millennial ages—the first will occur when Satan is bound and the second when the saints shall reign. As he explains in his *Notes*:

By observing these two distinct thousand years, many difficulties are avoided. There is room enough for the fulfilling of all the prophecies, and those which before seemed to clash are

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<sup>18</sup>Sermon LXLV, “The New Creation,” *Works*, VI, 295-296; and *Notes on the New Testament*, Revelation 20:14.

<sup>19</sup>Sermon CXXXVII, *Works*, VII, 474-485.

<sup>20</sup>*Works*, V, 171-185.

<sup>21</sup>*Works*, VI, 381-391.

<sup>22</sup>*Works*, VI, 390.

<sup>23</sup>*Works*, VI, 390.

<sup>24</sup>Bross (op. cit., 7) notes that Wesley does not use these in his discussion of the relevant texts (*Notes on Matthew 25:40 and I Thess. 4:17*).

reconciled; particularly those which speak, on the one hand, of a most flourishing state of the church as yet to come; and, on the other, of the fatal security of men in the last days of the world.<sup>25</sup>

Wesley's abbreviated treatment of the millennial theme (to which may be joined his identification of the popes from the time of Gregory VII as the antichrist)<sup>26</sup> is to be contrasted with the more speculative millennial views of his Pietist mentor, the exegete Bengel.

***Wesley's Eschatological Interests and Those of Bengel.*** Having reviewed the basic areas of Wesley's dependence upon Bengel, as a basis for Wesley's eschatological reflections, let us proceed to examine how his position may be understood within the larger context of his *Sitz im Leben* that prompted him to direct the Bengelian influences in ways quite different from those pursued by his mentor.

William Pope Harrison observes that Wesley aspired to uphold the Biblical standards of holiness in line with the rigor of Puritanism, but he sought to attain this standard within the context of the means of grace that were supplied by Anglicanism.<sup>27</sup> Hence, the Lord's Supper was to be taken weekly, even daily if possible. In addition, fasting, the hours of prayer according to the Book of Common Prayer, and charitable works were all to be observed as the ecclesial means to life devoted to God. It was only after Aldersgate, when his crisis of faith produced personal assurance of saving grace, that Wesley emerged from near despair to evangelical conviction.

By contrast, Bengel, as a young Lutheran theological student at Tübingen, reflected a peaceful and confident sense of divine favor that enabled him to proceed with his Biblical labors in an unabated fashion. Bengel's trials came in the form of his struggle to discern and become convinced of the presence of truth, of divine revelation, within the objective text of Scripture. Wesley's struggles were located more in his heartfelt search for experiential and subjective verification of the promises of Scripture. For Bengel, the unconverted person

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<sup>25</sup>Notes, Revelation 20:4-7.

<sup>26</sup>Notes, Revelation 17:11.

<sup>27</sup>William Pope Harrison, "John Albert Bengel," in *The Quarterly Review of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Nashville: M.E.S. Publishing House), 29:2 (1889), 400-01.

meets with no difficulty in subscribing to any form of doctrine . . . and cares not for the trouble of proof. But a really converted man feels truth to be a precious thing, is disposed to inquire after it, preserves it when found, and handles it as he would an invaluable jewel, with great care and circumspection. Finding it impossible to go on in a careless, trifling spirit, he is obliged to “prove all things” whatever trouble it may give him. Now, as truth upon every point is not attainable without many a hard struggle, his progress is often in the meantime very slow, during which he may easily be mistaken for a person of heterodox opinions.<sup>28</sup>

Bengel therefore appeals for a liberality of spirit to allow the converted, dedicated Biblical scholar “the full liberty of disclosing to us every private scruple” in the quest for certainty.<sup>29</sup>

In view of these differences in outlook, Wesley could assume a more facile distinction between “essentials” and “opinions,” and Wesley’s twofold explanation of the millennium, that he discusses briefly and without argumentation, for him certainly falls within that category of “opinions.” Even when it comes to such “essential” doctrines as the Trinity, Wesley can assert that we are not required to believe in the *manner* of the Trinity, but only in the fact.<sup>30</sup> What is more important is to make plain for godly living the great practical principles of the gospel.

By contrast, Bengel’s concern was for the objective (scholarly) verification of Biblical truth, that he sought to pursue on carefully delineated exegetical principles. Whereas Wesley’s eschatological thought is mainly expressed within the context of his soteriology,<sup>31</sup> Bengel’s eschatological focus is located primarily within the text of Scripture itself, which he interprets according to his symbolic-prophetic method of exposition. For Bengel, the prophetic aspect is the dominant and unifying theme for interpreting Scripture as a whole. This aspect is linked to his view of history, the view Moltmann later would regard as being more teleological than truly eschatological.

Bengel’s interpretation of the Apocalypse produced a system that linked the anticipated “favorable times” of the church with the age of

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<sup>28</sup>Bengel’s *Gnomon*, cited by Harrison, 401.

<sup>29</sup>Harrison, 401.

<sup>30</sup>John Wesley, “On the Trinity,” Sermon LV, *Works*, VI, 204.

<sup>31</sup>See the discussion of Clarence L. Bence, “Processive Eschatology: A Wesleyan Alternative,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 14 (Spring, 1979), 45-59.

Pietism and the rise of missions, culminating in the overthrow of the Beast and the parousia of Christ in 1836 that would be followed by the millennium. By contrast, Wesley, whose main interest was soteriology, had scant interest in this technical, chronological data. While borrowing Bengel's basic formulations on the millennium, these were imprecisely formulated and were not vitally linked to his soteriological concerns that affirmed Christian perfection in this life. Wesley's conservatism with regard to eschatological speculation may also have reflected his controversy with the radical adventism of one of his own converts, George Bell.<sup>32</sup>

### **Pietist Influences on the Eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann**

In articulating his "theology of hope," Jürgen Moltmann drew from the same store of Pietist luminaries as did Wesley before him, but these sources function quite differently than they did for Wesley. In contrast with Wesley's minimal interest in end time details, Moltmann's thought is substantially influenced by his use of eschatological motifs that were transmitted by the Pietists. This influence is especially apparent in his interest in the renowned medieval interpreter of the Apocalypse, Joachim of Fiore (1131-1202), and in the continuation of Joachite motifs in the symbolic-prophetic school of Pietist exegesis that culminated in Bengel.

Moltmann's interest in these motifs, seen first in an important group of historical essays from the 1950s, emerges from his sympathetic though critical study of a wide range of church and radical Pietists, together with their antecedents in medieval apocalypticism.<sup>33</sup> Joachim, the seminal apocalyptic writer in this group, first explicated the symbolic-prophetic mode of exegesis that was used later by Bengel. It had spawned a host of late medieval apocalyptic movements and social protests (that Wesley would disparage as antinomian).<sup>34</sup> Moltmann traces its reappearance in the left wing of the Reformation, and in the later representatives of the

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<sup>32</sup>Bell scheduled the end of the world for February 28, 1763, thus unleashing a fever of antinomian ecstasy. See Wesley, "Journal," October 29, 1762 to February 9, 1763, and *Works* III, 119-128.

<sup>33</sup>These interpreters, in addition to Joachim and Bengel, include Jacob Boehme (1595-1624), Johannes Coccejus (1603-1669), Campegius Vitringa (1659-1722), Friedrich A. Lampe (1683-1729), Gottfried Arnold (1666-1714), Count Zinzendorf (1700-1760), Gerhard Tersteegen (1697-1769), Friedrich Oetinger (1702-1782), and the Neo-Pietist J. C. Blumhardt (1805-1880).

<sup>34</sup>See Wesley's confrontation with George Bell, as seen in note above.

federalist (covenant) school of Rhineland and Württemberg Pietism. With this school, the symbolic-prophetic exegetical mode finally had enabled millennial thought to be represented within rather than outside the mainline state church traditions.

Joachim's method of Biblical interpretation, based on the symbolic and prophetic reading of the text of Scripture, had resulted in a threefold historical schema correlated with the Persons of the Trinity. Moltmann was drawn to this formulation of an economic, rather than an ontological understanding of the Godhead found in the ancient ecumenical creeds. By contrast, Wesley adhered to the traditional formulations as an expression of his intent for Methodism to be a source of renewal within Anglicanism.

Moltmann was attracted to Joachim's future orientation, whereby he had predicted the imminence of the "Third Age," that of the Spirit, that would be marked by the fullness of the Spirit as an indwelling Presence within the lives of humankind. Authority no longer would be externally and coercively imposed from without, as in the former ages of Israel (the Age of the Father) and the Church (the Age of the Son).<sup>35</sup> Moltmann also affirms Joachim's outlook over against the more normative, Augustinian view of history that subdued the element of progress in the historical struggle between the two cities and also spiritualized, and thereby relativized, the doctrine of the millennium by identifying it with the age of the church in history since Pentecost.<sup>36</sup>

Moltmann found in Joachim the basis for overcoming what he has called the "monotheistic interpretation of the lordship of God" by Joachim's advocacy of a "trinitarian understanding of the Kingdom."<sup>37</sup> He saw a correlation between such monotheistic emphases and social systems organized under the control of despotic monarchs or oligarchies. By contrast, Wesley did not hesitate to support the Hanoverian monarchs, despite the protests of the American colonists (including many of the Methodists in America). Moltmann affirms Joachim in asserting that

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<sup>35</sup>See Wesley's confrontation with George Bell, as seen in note above. By contrast with Moltmann, Wesley insisted on retaining the Anglican structures of an ordained ministry in relation to the sacraments to balance the evangelical structures that his societies fostered.

<sup>36</sup>Moltmann notes that Joachim's outlook also challenged the authority of his near contemporary, Thomas Aquinas, and his apotheosis of the Church of Rome and its dogma as the *Summa Theologica* (Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*), 203.

<sup>37</sup>Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 203.

“there is hardly anyone who has influenced European movements for liberty in church, state, and culture more profoundly than this twelfth-century Cistercian abbot from Calabria, who believed that in his visions he had penetrated the concordance of the Old and New Testaments, and the mystery of the book of Revelation.”<sup>38</sup>

Further, Moltmann takes issue with the charge of Aquinas that Joachim had “dissolved” the doctrine of the Trinity in world history. It was rather “a question of appropriating to the different Persons of the Trinity the forms which the Kingdom took in the different eras of world history.”<sup>39</sup> Moltmann explains Joachim’s third form of the Kingdom, that of the Spirit. It is said to be the “rebirth of men and women through the energies of the Spirit,” whereby God rules through direct revelation and knowledge and people are turned from being God’s children into God’s friends.<sup>40</sup> Hence, Moltmann’s understanding of the quality of life in the coming Kingdom is essentially shaped by Joachim’s portrayal of “friendship with God.” This friendship is the highest stage of freedom and also uniquely the mark of the Kingdom of the Spirit (cf. 2 Cor. 3:17).

By comparison, Wesley identifies this eschatological stage of free and unfettered friendship with God with one’s personal, processive attainment of “full salvation,” not with a coming historical epoch. By that he means the “eternal life” that begins “when it pleases the Father to reveal the Son in our heart.” This is when “happiness” begins, when, says Wesley, “The life which I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.”<sup>41</sup> Nonetheless, and despite the fact that Wesley’s frame of reference is more personal-soteriological and Moltmann’s is more historical-transformationist, both men tend to speak in terms of an “anticipated eschatology.”<sup>42</sup>

It is puzzling to observe that the theologian who did the most to adapt the Joachimite, economic view of the Trinity and its realistic eschatology to the concerns of pastoral ministry (F. A. Lampe) was ignored by Wesley and the Methodists, but not by Moltmann, who cites Lampe as one who gave definitive expression to the sense of progress in the eighteenth

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 204.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 205.

<sup>41</sup>John Wesley, *Works*, XII, 430.

<sup>42</sup>Cyril Downes, “The Eschatological Doctrines of John and Charles Wesley” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1974), 37, cited by Bence, 52.

century. Lampe integrated the soteriological perspective, Wesley's focus, with the prophetic view of historical transformation, the concerns of Joachim and later of Moltmann. As a Pietist, Lampe presented the order of salvation that was to be personally appropriated in a stepwise fashion.<sup>43</sup> The *ordo* was correlated with his presentation of the successive ages of redemption within universal history, as understood under the dispensations of God's successive covenants with humanity (the *Heilsgeschichte*).

Just as the goal of personal salvation was the completion of sanctification, to be achieved under the Spirit's personal leading, so also the overall goal of history was to be found in the millennial age of the Spirit, when God's Kingdom and the historical church will become coterminous.<sup>44</sup>

Lampe discovered signs of this coming convergence by examining the prophetic text of Scripture, the rise of evangelical awakenings (including those in his own Bremen parish), and the new breakthroughs in science.

Finally, attention needs to be given to Moltmann's use of Bengel, which differs as well from Wesley's reliance on this great Pietist exegete. Wesley was attracted to Bengel's pious erudition in interpreting the text, but had little interest in the chronological calculations offered by Bengel since Wesley's concerns were mainly soteriological. He did not explicate the possible connections between Bengel's emphasis on entire sanctification and a millennial future. On the other hand, Moltmann sees important eschatological themes being brought into renewed focus by Bengel, themes akin to those previously articulated by Joachim.

Moltmann is aware that Bengel had proceeded upon the basis of Joachim's conviction that prophecy is knowledge. What is especially insightful for Moltmann is Bengel's conviction that a proper knowledge of Biblical prophecy delivers one from acts of sin that arise either from presumption or despair. Both states, notes Moltmann, share the common problem of prematurity. The former prematurely anticipates what is desired from God, and the latter prematurely anticipates God's non-fulfillment.<sup>45</sup> However, Moltmann criticizes Bengel for undermining the

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<sup>43</sup>These steps included the effectual call, faith, justification, regeneration, sanctification, sealing, and glorification. See the summation of his thought in J. S. O'Malley, *Pilgrimage of Faith: The Legacy of the Otterbeins* (Scarecrow, 1973).

<sup>44</sup>J. Steven O'Malley, "The Role of Pietism in the Theology of Jürgen Moltmann," *Asbury Theological Journal* 48:1 (Spring, 1993), 124.

<sup>45</sup>Jürgen Moltmann, *The Theology of Hope*, tr. J. W. Leitch (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 23-25; and John C. Weborg, "The Eschatological Ethics of Johann Albrecht Bengel," *The Covenant Quarterly* (May 1978), 33.

openness to the future that is inherent in Biblical prophecy by reducing it to anticipated history, that is “prognostic and predictive.” He observes,

The novum of God’s promise becomes factum. In place of the eschaton of the fulfillment, which must be searched for in hope on the basis of the promise that has been heard, merges a finale of history which is to come to place in the course of history.<sup>46</sup>

In Bengel’s defense, it has been argued that he counsels “faithfulness to a time and place about which one is conscientious but not compulsive.”<sup>47</sup> There is some analogy here with Wesley’s tendency to speak of the anticipation and cooperation with the ongoing work of saving grace within the life of the awakened Christian.<sup>48</sup> However, for Bengel and for Moltmann, the frame of reference is not one’s individual development within the *ordo salutis*, but rather one’s apprehension of the redemptive movement that is occurring *in toto* within and through world history. It should be cautioned that Bengel does not counsel that the knowledge of the future is in itself salvific, “although it may contribute to the sanctifying process in that it thwarts presumption and despair by giving heed to the proper time and place for the service of God and neighbor.”<sup>49</sup>

## Conclusion

Our study has sought to explicate the different uses of a common school of eschatological thought as found in the work of Wesley and Moltmann. Moltmann extends his discussion to include other Neo-Pietist sources such as J. C. Blumhardt (1805-81), whose socio-political work

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<sup>46</sup>Jürgen Moltmann, *Hope and Planning*, tr. Margaret Charkson (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 187.

<sup>47</sup>Weborg, “The Eschatological Ethic,” 33.

<sup>48</sup>O’Malley, “The Role of Pietism,” 125.

<sup>49</sup>Bengel expresses the act of comprehending the present moment in the light of eternity with the metaphor of existing “before the eyes of Jesus.” By comparison, Wesley focused on the need for the sanctified believers to have eyes fixed upon God. For Bengel, this visual imagery was also a motivation to seek the sanctified life, in that it represents an antidote to the sin of losing time for the labors of love by the indulgence of sloth (*acedia*) (J. A. Bengel, *Sechzig erbauliche Reden uber die Offenbarung Johann’s oder vielmehr Jesu Christi*, Neue Auflage, Stuttgart: Johann Christoph Erhard, 1771, 60, 104). See Wesley’s exposition of Matthew 6:22 in Sermon 28, *Works*, V, 362-3.

increasingly emphasized the human role in the imitation of the end-time events.<sup>50</sup> Wesley's eschatological thought also was influenced by other Pietists.<sup>51</sup>

It has been contended that Wesley was only minimally interested in formulating doctrines concerning end-time events. Indeed, even the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England that he abridged contain no article on the Last Judgment! What references exist concerning these matters, as in Wesley's *Notes*, are largely derived from Bengel and are little integrated into his major soteriological concerns. With regard to the latter, there undeniably does exist a latent, anticipatory and progressive eschatological dimension to his conception of the *ordo salutis*. His sermons on the judgment and the afterlife also reflect these soteriological concerns.

By comparison, Moltmann finds within Bengel, as in the medieval apocalyptic and Reformed federal traditions that preceded him, substantial support for the enunciation of an economic (rather than an ontological) formulation of the Godhead, and for a realistic, non-spiritualized view of the coming Kingdom of God. Still, given these differences, Wesley and Moltmann share an anticipatory outlook, and each has contributed in distinctive ways to shifting the Protestant theological tradition and the Christian life from static to dynamic categories of self-understanding.

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<sup>50</sup>O'Malley, "The Role of Pietism . . .", 125.

<sup>51</sup>Note, e.g., the hymnody of Gerhard Tersteegen (1697-1769), a man formed in the context of the Rhineland Reformed Pietism. Wesley translated into English four of Tersteegen's hymns. He was drawn to Tersteegen by the latter's reverence for the inward witness of the Spirit, expressed in terms of the inward progression of grace that renovates our lives. This progression was viewed as a personal, existential fulfillment of the prophetic sense of Scripture. See Francis Bevan, *The Hymns of Tersteegen and Others* (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, n.d.).

# **JÜRGEN MOLTSMANN AND JOHN WESLEY'S THIRD ARTICLE THEOLOGY**

by

**D. Lyle Dabney**

Today many of us in the Wesleyan theological tradition would ask, what indeed has Jürgen Moltmann to do with John Wesley? What does this German systematic theologian, who began his career by specializing in the history of continental Calvinism and who has held a chair of Reformed Theology at Tübingen for more than twenty-five years, have to do with a tradition founded by one who was Anglo-Saxon, pietistic, and Tory?

The thesis of this essay is that Moltmann has much to do with Wesley and Wesleyanism. If we of the Wesleyan tradition wish to comprehend and express our own central concern more fully and faithfully, I suggest that in part we can do so by taking a theologian like Jürgen Moltmann as a partner in conversation. In the following I describe what I take to be the promise and the problematic of the Wesleyan theological tradition, and then I propose how the work of Moltmann could be of help in enabling this tradition to realize its own best insights.

## **Wesley and the Western Theological Tradition**

The twentieth has been a century in which the various theological traditions of the west have struggled to critically reclaim basic theological insights of the historic Christian tradition. In the last hundred years there has been a dramatic renewal and reinterpretation of the thought of Augustine and the early church fathers, of Aquinas and the Scholastics, as

well as of the Reformers Luther and Calvin. The rise of critical studies in Wesleyan theology is part of this larger movement.

It has become increasingly apparent that the western theological tradition has been defined largely by two conflicting trajectories or tendencies of thought.<sup>1</sup> It also has become increasingly apparent that if we would understand both the promise and the problematic of the theology of John Wesley, it must be in terms of locating and analyzing his work on the horizon defined by those two conflicting lines of thought.<sup>2</sup>

The first trajectory is seen most clearly in medieval Scholasticism, a form of theology which makes creation, i.e. created nature, its starting point and understands salvation as an ascent to knowledge of God through the assistance of grace. This type of theology begins with a kind of syllogism: God is good in being and act; creation is an act of God; therefore, creation is essentially good. According to this theology, despite the brokenness and incompleteness in the world, it is ultimately the goodness of God's creating that defines the creation.<sup>3</sup> That goodness expresses itself above all in an innate human capacity for God, an openness or desire to ascend to the fulfillment of our nature in union with our Creator.

Catholic theology of this sort is, therefore, cast as an appeal to the created nature of human beings to find the fulfillment of their being by ascending to God through a receiving of the grace Jesus Christ has

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<sup>1</sup>E.g., on the Catholic and Protestant theological trajectories and their very different starting points, see David Brown, *Continental Philosophy and Modern Theology* (Oxford: Basil Mitchell, 1987), 20, 75; Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, I (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1982), 45ff, 75ff; H.-H. Schrey, *Theologie II. Evangelische Theologie*, RGG, 3. Aufl., Bd. VI, 769-775, 769f; C. Moeller & G. Philips, *The Theology of Grace and the Ecumenical Movement* (Paterson, N.J.: St. Anthony Guild Press, reprint 1969); Robert W. Jenson, *Unbaptized God: The Basic Flaw in Ecumenical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 107ff.

<sup>2</sup>The need to understand Wesley's thought in relation to the larger western theological tradition was the substance of Albert Outler's call for "Phase III" in Wesley studies issued at the Seventh Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies in 1982. See Albert C. Outler, "A New Future for Wesley Studies: An Agenda for 'Phase III,'" *The Future of the Methodist Theological Traditions*, M. Douglas Meeks, ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 34-52.

<sup>3</sup>Thus, for instance, Anselm defined original sin not as an active but a passive reality, a lack of original righteousness. Cf. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, vol. 3: *The Growth of Medieval Theology (600-1300)*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 112f.

provided in and through the Church.<sup>4</sup> The “natural” virtues, both moral and intellectual, it is claimed, lead *to* even as they are transcended and guided to fulfillment *by* the “theological” virtues of faith, hope, and love. Hence, while Catholic Scholasticism explicitly differentiates between nature and grace, it does not contrast but rather orders them in an unbroken hierarchical relationship.<sup>5</sup> Its clear tendency, then, is to posit a fundamental continuum between nature and grace, the human and the Divine, creation and redemption. It is a theology of *nature fulfilled by grace*. Thus the representative affirmation of medieval Scholasticism was: “Grace does not destroy, but rather presupposes and perfects nature.”<sup>6</sup>

Against this sort of thought stands the theology of the Reformation, the second dominant theological trajectory in the west. The fundamental logic of Reformation theology is protest. It protests against the root affirmation of Scholastic theology that human nature, by virtue of being God’s good creation, is intrinsically open to and in search of God. “On the part of man, however, nothing precedes grace except ill will and even rebellion against grace,” Luther declared in his “Disputation Against Scholastic Theology” (1517). Not the goodness but the sin and brokenness of the world is thus Reformation theology’s point of departure. Sin is seen as the defining reality in all of creaturely existence.

When Calvin spoke of the “depravity” of nature,<sup>7</sup> he did not mean that there is no good in the world, but that there is no *unalloyed* good in the world, no part or capacity or desire untouched by the fall. Sin has spoiled all, according to this theological trajectory, so that there is no untouched *humanum* or residual *imago* to which one can appeal as purely good, as open to and in search of its creator. Indeed, according to this theology, the claim that there is such a possibility is the essence of sin

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<sup>4</sup>See Joseph Ratzinger, *Theologie III. Katholische Theologie*, RGG, 3. Aufl., 775-779, 775f.

<sup>5</sup>The *locus classicus* for this schema is, of course, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*.

<sup>6</sup>*Gratia non destruit, sed supponit et perficit naturam*; cp. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1a.1.8. et al. See Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, vol. 3: *The Growth of Medieval Theology (600-1300)*, 103f, 284-293, esp. 292.

<sup>7</sup>See Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, J. T. McNeill (ed.), F. L. Battles (trans.), (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), II.1.viii-xi. Cf. Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), 80ff.

itself, for it constitutes the claim that one can by one's own efforts be redeemed.

Reformation theology, therefore, is cast not in the form of an appeal to the good, but in the form of a dialectic,<sup>8</sup> according to which God in Jesus Christ as the Divine Word stands over against creation, confronting human beings in their sin and shame and summoning them to faith in the free grace of God made manifest in the death of Christ on the cross. We come to right relationship with God, it is claimed, not through being enabled by grace to fulfill nature's law and so ascend to God, but rather by forswearing such reliance on law and placing our trust in Christ who by grace imputes his righteousness to us.

This sort of theology, therefore, finds its point of departure not in creaturely good, but in creaturely sin, and takes the form not of creation's ascent to God, but of God's descent to creation in Jesus Christ. Its clear tendency, then, is to assert utter contradiction between law and Gospel, God and world, creation and redemption. Not creation *and* anything, certainly not nature *and* grace, but rather *solus Christus, sola fide* and *sola scriptura* were the Reformation watchwords. The one "and" the Reformers allowed, law *and* Gospel, underlines that point, for the "and" in this instance marks a relation not of continuity but discontinuity. This is a theology of *law contradicted by Gospel*. As the Anglo-Catholic John Burnaby says: "Against the 'Both-And' of the Catholic, Protestantism here as everywhere sets with . . . insistence it's 'Either—Or.'"<sup>9</sup>

To place John Wesley on the horizon of western theology as it is defined by these two trajectories is both to illustrate the central dilemma of the western tradition and to illuminate Wesley's own unique theological trajectory. The dilemma of the western tradition is the result of the clash of the two theological tendencies which dominate it. The one can be helpfully defined as a theology of the first article of the creed, a theology of creation which takes as its chief concern the potentialities and actions of the creature as it seeks to ascend to its Creator. The other can be defined as a theology of the second article of the creed, a theology of redemption that emphasizes the sovereign, electing, gracious will of the Redeemer who in the person of the Son Jesus Christ descends to the world to achieve reconciliation between the human and the Divine. The

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<sup>8</sup>See Ernest B. Koenker, "Man: *Simul Justus et Peccator*," *Accents in Luther's Theology*, Heino O. Kadai (ed.), (St. Louis: Concordia: 1967), 98-123.

<sup>9</sup>John Burnaby, *Amor Dei: A Study of the Religion of St. Augustine* (Norwich: The Canterbury Press, 1938, reissued 1991), 4.

dilemma is the conflicting “logic” of each trajectory, leading them to champion either the creature at the expense of the Creator or the Redeemer at the expense of the redeemed, either the potentiality and act of humanity to the detriment of the activity of Divinity or the electing and saving grace of God to the detriment of the works of human beings.<sup>10</sup>

When seen against the background of this western theological tradition, Wesley’s thought manifests a readily identifiable tendency. The development of Wesley’s trajectory of thought began with what was essentially a theology of the first article, clearly discernable in his earliest sermons and correspondence.<sup>11</sup> It then moved to and through a kind of theology of the second article, expressed emphatically in the sermon “Justification by Faith” published in 1746. But Wesley did not stop there. His contribution to the western theological tradition consists in his pursuit of what can be termed *a theology of the third article* of the creed, a theology of the transforming consummation of creation in and through the Holy Spirit.<sup>12</sup>

Wesley takes as his central concern neither the *fulfillment* of creation nor the *contradiction* of sin and grace, but the Divine *initiation* of a process of “Christian perfection” understood as a life of perfect love. He refused to remain mired in the dilemma of the either/or of western theology, pushing instead beyond that impasse to develop a theology encompassing both those moments of God’s activity in a unified vision of Divine grace.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Cf. Hendrikus Berkhof, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1964), 78ff, esp. 81.

<sup>11</sup>Note Albert Outler’s characterization of the theology found in Wesley’s first sermons as “the Gospel of moral rectitude,” *Works of John Wesley*, bicentennial edition (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987) 4:254. Cf. Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989), 81ff; Richard P. Heitzenrater, “Great Expectations: Aldersgate and the Evidences of Genuine Christianity,” *Mirror and Memory: Reflections on Early Methodism* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1989), 106-149.

<sup>12</sup>Cf. Melvin E. Dieter, “Wesleyan Theology,” in *John Wesley: Contemporary Perspectives*, John Stacey, ed. (London: Epworth Press, 1988), 162-175. The expanding role played by Pneumatology in the thought of Wesley is widely recognized. For example: Henry Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 385f; Richard Heitzenrater, *Great Expectations: Aldersgate and the Evidences of Genuine Christianity*, 107ff, 127ff, 138ff, 145ff.

<sup>13</sup>See Wesley’s sermon “On Working Out Our Own Salvation,” first published in 1785, for what probably is his most successful attempt to address the issue in the classical categories of the relation of “nature and grace.”

Here is a theology attempting, as Albert Outler remarked, “to transcend the stark and doctrinal disjunctions which had spilled so much ink and blood since Augsburg and Trent.”<sup>14</sup> More specifically, Wesley attempted to overcome the disjunction between divine grace and human holiness, God’s act of the justification of sinners and the actualization of sanctification in human acts.<sup>15</sup> This theological trajectory towards a theology of the third article constitutes the promise of Wesley’s theology and the tradition that bears his name.

The problematic of this Wesleyan tradition is that it has failed to fully achieve precisely this distinctive sort of theology. One reason for this failure is that from its very beginning the Wesleyan theological tradition has attempted to articulate its own vision in the language and thought forms of traditions which, in the final analysis, are inimical to it. Wrestling with the basic theological dilemma in the west, Wesley failed to comprehend that his central concern for perfection in and through the work of the Holy Spirit represented, not something simply to be added to the theologies of the west, but rather a distinct perspective that makes possible and even demands a reinterpretation of every area of theology.

John Wesley failed, therefore, to fulfill the promise of his own theological trajectory because he did not do the one thing theologically needful. He did not develop a truly alternative conceptuality of his own and thus clearly transcend the forms and dilemma of the theology that he had inherited. Instead, he seems to have taken the “holy living” tradition from his Anglican background and appended it to the Reformation tradition of “justification by grace through faith” that he received through his encounter with the Pietists and the evangelical revival—as if these were rightly understood as a set of discrete events occurring in a chronological order. The result is an ungainly *ordo salutis* in which the Holy Spirit plays an all-pervasive though not clearly defined role in the life of the individual on the way toward Christian perfection. As a

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<sup>14</sup>Albert Outler (ed.), *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), viii; cf. Thomas A. Langford, *Practical Divinity: Theology in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), 21f; Melvin Dieter, *Wesleyan Theology*, 166ff; George Croft Cell, *The Rediscovery of John Wesley* (New York: Henry Holt, 1935), 359f.

<sup>15</sup>Thus the statement about Wesley’s theology by Melvin E. Dieter (“Wesleyan Theology,” in J. Stacey, ed., 1988, 166): “Its most basic tenets lie grounded in the maxim that God will not save us because of ourselves, nor will he save us without ourselves.”

consequence, while Wesley's theology is not like those of the first nor of the second article of the creed, neither does it achieve the form of a genuine theology of the third article.

### **Contribution of Moltmann's Thought**

What has Jürgen Moltmann to do with John Wesley? Entering into conversation with Moltmann's work can help the Wesleyan tradition understand and articulate its own central concern more fully and faithfully. The account of the promise and problematic of Wesleyan theology given above already has begun to intimate how that might be the case. The following suggests two ways in which Moltmann's "Athens" has to do with the "Jerusalem" of Wesley.

The first way has to do with *the form of Moltmann's thought*. Moltmann has attempted to think systematically through all of Christian theology from a single perspective, namely, the perspective of eschatology. Emerging in its modern form at the turn of this century through the work of New Testament scholars such as Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer,<sup>16</sup> eschatology has become one of the chief characteristics of twentieth century theology. Among others, the theme became central to the early dialectical theology of Karl Barth. Moltmann's first major work in systematics was a ground-breaking study of the issue that subjected Barth's understanding of eschatology to a severe critique and led to a fundamental reorientation of the discussion.<sup>17</sup>

Claiming that "Christian eschatology is at heart christology in an eschatological perspective,"<sup>18</sup> Moltmann took as his point of departure the history of Jesus Christ, centering on the resurrection. In the resurrection, he argued, the eschatological future of both Christ and all creation is made manifest. Eschatology, therefore, is not to be understood as the "vertical" infringement of eternity into time. It has to do rather with the "horizontal" horizon of God's future, the world's present, and the way that future impacts that present. It defines the promise of God to all

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<sup>16</sup>For an excellent introduction to the subject, with extensive bibliography, see D. E. Aune, "Eschatology (Early Christian)," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (N. Y.: Doubleday, 1992) 2:594-609.

<sup>17</sup>For a much fuller examination of Moltmann's reorientation of the eschatological discussion in his *Theology of Hope* (Harper & Row, 1967), see D. Lyle Dabney, *Die Kenosis des Geistes: Kontinuität zwischen Schöpfung und Erlösung im Werk des Heiligen Geistes*, Th.D. diss., Tübingen, 1989, 43ff.

<sup>18</sup>Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 192.

creation, a promise that is the measure of all that would claim the name Christian. Thus Moltmann writes:

The eschatological is not one element of Christianity, but it is the medium of Christian faith as such, the key in which everything in it is set, the glow that suffuses everything here in the dawn of an expected new day. For Christian faith lives from the raising of the crucified Christ, and strains after the promises of the universal future of Christ. Eschatology is the passionate suffering and passionate longing kindled by the Messiah. Hence eschatology cannot really be only a part of Christian doctrine. Rather, the eschatological outlook is characteristic of all Christian proclamation, of every Christian existence and of the whole Church.<sup>19</sup>

Moltmann proceeds to demonstrate how eschatology serves to define all of Christian life and thought by offering an “eschatological” interpretation of revelation, christology, history, church, and mission.

What makes this perspective especially germane to Wesleyan theology is that, although undeveloped in Wesley himself, eschatology goes to the very heart of Christian perfection, the primary concern of Wesley. Wesley understood eschatology to be the traditional doctrine of the “last things,” death, resurrection, judgement, heaven and hell. He simply assumed their objective reality.<sup>20</sup> Although surfacing in Wesley’s writing and preaching frequently, the topic was for him not a matter of central concern and thus was handled conventionally.<sup>21</sup>

Now, however, we are in a position to realize that, for Wesleyan theology, eschatology is not about the *last* things but rather about the *central* thing.<sup>22</sup> The claim of Christian perfection is that individually and corporately we have begun to experience the “end” here in the “middle,” that the future has been made present in our presence, that the initiation of the consummation of all things has come upon us. The claim that we are “created for good works” is an eschatological statement. It is a perspective which defines all our talk about God and world. An engagement with the theology of Jürgen Moltmann could help the Wesleyan theological tradition come to grips in a new way with the modern

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 16.

<sup>20</sup>For a brief overview, see Robert W. Burtner & Robert E. Chiles (eds.), *John Wesley’s Theology: A Collection from his Works* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982), 275ff.

<sup>21</sup>Cf. Robert W. Burtner & Robert E. Chiles (eds.), *John Wesley’s Theology*, 275; Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 381f.

<sup>22</sup>See Colin W. Williams, *John Wesley’s Theology Today*, 191ff.

rediscovery of the centrality of eschatology to the witness of the New Testament and to its own distinctive witness.

The second way in which the theology of Jürgen Moltmann can be beneficial for Wesleyan theology involves *the course of the development of his thought*. As I have argued elsewhere more fully,<sup>23</sup> when one examines the trajectory of Moltmann's thought against the background of the western theological tradition as outlined above, one discovers in Moltmann a movement toward a theology of the third article in a manner that in many significant respects parallels the theological development of Wesley himself. Like Wesley, Moltmann has from very early in his development had as his central concern the question of the effect of the Christian faith on the concrete life of human beings. It was that concern that animated his *Theology of Hope*.

The central logic of this pivotal volume, true to Moltmann's Reformation heritage, is the dialectical contradiction between the risen Christ as God's Word of promise to all creation, on the one hand, and the "godless" world of suffering and sin in which Jesus Christ the Son dies abandoned and alone, crying out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!" (Mk 15:34), on the other. This is clearly an example of a theology of the second article. But in the course of time, and in response to criticism from both sides of the theological spectrum, Moltmann came to realize that simply to *contradict* is not to *transform*, and *transformation* is what his thought is all about.

In the last fifteen years Moltmann has turned increasingly toward a theology of the third article, one that enables him to speak, not just of Jesus Christ the Son of God who stands over against creation, but also of the Spirit of Christ who encompasses creation in the horror of the cross and in the hope of the resurrection. By entering into the debate through conversation with Moltmann, the Wesleyan tradition could come to a better understanding of the challenges facing the development of a theology featuring its own most basic concern, Christian perfection.

What indeed has Jürgen Moltmann to do with John Wesley? Much, indeed. By entering into conversation and debate with the theology of Moltmann, I submit, we in the Wesleyan tradition can come to better comprehend and express our own unique concerns. Moltmann may not have all the right answers, but he has something more important, the right questions, the very questions that have been the impetus for Wesleyan theology from its very beginning.

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<sup>23</sup>D. Lyle Dabney, "The Advent of the Spirit: The Turn to Pneumatology in the Theology of Jürgen Moltmann," *Asbury Theological Journal* 48 (1993), 81-107.

# **CHANGING PATTERNS IN AMERICAN DISPENSATIONAL THEOLOGY**

by

**Craig A. Blaising**

Just a few decades after the Wesleyan revivals and the establishment of Methodist societies, the Brethren Movement began in Ireland and England. Like Methodism, Brethrenism arose out of discontent with status quo Anglican church life. As such, both the Methodist and Brethren movements share a common heritage in that creative history of religious renewal and dissent that has characterized Anglo-Christianity.

Like Methodism, the religious impact of Brethrenism quickly spread to the New World where its ideas and contributions went beyond the structural forms of the original movement. Out of early Methodism came the Wesleyan tradition which has expressed itself in multiple ecclesial forms and has contributed to the overall shape of American Evangelicalism. Out of the original Brethren movement came the dispensational tradition which is represented in several ecclesial groupings today and has impacted many more, thus making its own contribution to the developing history of American Evangelicalism.

The histories of these traditions are not parallel in every respect. Methodism built up a strong denominational structure from which it impacted American Christianity ideologically and from which it generated new denominational structures. Brethrenism remained denominationally small in the United States. Its conflicts and inner tensions weakened it rather than proving to be creative outlets for strong denominational expressions.

Dispensationalism, however, spread transdenominationally. Key American clergy reshaped the ecclesiological dynamic of early Brethrenism into a transdenominational affirmation of evangelical unity. This allowed them to add dispensational theology to their existing traditions, reinforcing and spreading dispensationalism in interdenominational Bible and Prophecy conferences.<sup>1</sup> Dispensationalism got its greatest boost through the interdenominational Fundamentalist movement.<sup>2</sup> As a result, dispensationalism came to be widely influential in twentieth century American Evangelical thought.

What is dispensationalism? In my own work, I have come to see dispensationalism as a tradition of Biblical interpretation that has undergone various modifications through its less than 200 year history. Certain themes and emphases give continuity to this tradition, such as an emphasis on the authority of Scripture and the practicality of its exposition for personal and corporate edification. Other emphases include a belief in the relevance of Biblical prophecy and apocalyptic for theological work today and an appreciation of diversity in Biblical theology as it relates to the history of revelation. These emphases have led dispensationalists to explore the significance of the church as a new manifestation of grace in redemption history and to affirm a future for national, political Israel.<sup>3</sup>

The changes that have occurred in dispensational interpretation are just as much a part of the identity of the dispensational tradition as the themes and emphases that characterize its continuity. This is most clear in the relationship of these changes to the dispensational emphasis on Biblical authority. The dispensational tradition began by appealing to the authority of Scripture as the basis for reconstructing a theological interpretation of redemptive history, especially in relationship to Biblical prophecy. Inevitably, that same emphasis on Biblical authority over

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<sup>1</sup>See particularly C. Norman Kraus, *Dispensationalism in America: Its Rise and Development* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1958); and E. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

<sup>2</sup>Sandeen's thesis, which essentially identifies Fundamentalism with millenarianism, has been modified by George Marsden and others. Nevertheless, dispensationalism played a large role in the Fundamentalist movement. See G. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford, 1980).

<sup>3</sup>For a history of the problem of defining dispensationalism and a rationale for the descriptive definition given here, see C. Blaising and D. Bock, eds., *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 13-34, 377-79.

church tradition has functioned as the basis for internal revision in dispensationalism. As a result, the history of dispensational thought exemplifies the dynamic of a hermeneutical process, namely the critical appropriation of an existing theological tradition in a fresh interpretation of the Biblical text, in turn leading to doctrinal reflections which open new directions, new stages of tradition.

It will be my purpose in this article to survey some of the changes in American dispensational thought as they reflect this hermeneutical process.

### Classical Dispensationalism

I use the phrase *classical dispensationalism* to refer to that form of dispensational thought stemming from the writings of John Nelson Darby and like-minded Brethren in the mid-nineteenth century, to the publication of the *Scofield Reference Bible* in 1909 (and again in 1917) and the *Systematic Theology* of Lewis Sperry Chafer in 1948.<sup>4</sup> Since we are focusing our attention on American dispensationalism, the *Scofield Reference Bible* and Chafer's *Systematic Theology* can be taken as primary representatives. Although differences of interpretation can be found among classical dispensationalists, all are united in the themes and emphases noted earlier (i.e., Biblical authority, emphasis on prophecy, the uniqueness of the church, etc.). However, what especially marks classical dispensationalism is its advocacy of the *two purposes/two peoples* theory. This is the theory that Scripture reveals two different divine purposes—one for heaven and one for the earth—envisioning two different humanities—one, a heavenly people, and the other, an earthly people.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>See C. Bass, *Backgrounds to Dispensationalism: Its Historical Genesis and Ecclesiastical Implications* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960). On the life of Darby, see M. Weremchuk, *John Nelson Darby* (Neptune, N. J.: Loizeaux Brothers, 1992). For a comparison of Darby and Scofield, see L. Crutchfield, *The Origins of Dispensationalism: The Darby Factor* (Lanham, MD.: University Press of America, 1992). On the theology of Lewis Chafer, see L. S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 vols. (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947-48); also see C. Blaising, "Lewis Sperry Chafer," in *The Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, W. Elwell, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 83-96.

<sup>5</sup>F. S. Elmore, "A Critical Examination of the Doctrine of the Two Peoples of God in John Nelson Darby" (Th.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1990), 201-311. The theory runs through the writings of Chafer. For various references to this theme in Chafer's writings, see C. Blaising, "Lewis Sperry Chafer," in *The Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*. An overview of the *two purposes/two peoples* theory is given by the early American dispensationalist, T. H. Cleland, "The Celestial and the Terrestrial, or the Dispensational Difference Between the Church and the Kingdom of Heaven," *Truth, or Testimony to Christ* 7 (1881): 416-20, 461-67, 514-17; idem., *Truth, or Testimony to Christ* 8 (1882): 34-39, 85-91, 125-28, 173-81.

To understand this proposal, one should recall the social and religious context in both Britain and the United States into which this theory was first proposed and in which it flourished.

The Wesleyan revivals of the eighteenth century contributed to a rise in evangelistic and missionary endeavor. The relative political tranquility of the times, combined with evangelistic expansion and the spread of missions, seemed to support the Whitbyan interpretation of Christianity as the millennial kingdom. Dispensational thought, however, arose in the early nineteenth century context of political and religious turmoil. Political revolution, anarchy, and war on the continent brought a renewed interest in prophecy and Biblical apocalyptic. Discontent with government control of the Anglican church was also high, inducing a desire for an apolitical, ideally spiritualized Christianity. These two viewpoints came together in a decisive rejection of the postmillennialism so much in vogue only a few decades earlier. Brethren dispensationalism not only reaffirmed premillennialism (expecting the millennial kingdom to come through the apocalyptic judgment of Christ's personal return), but did so as part of an overall critique of Christian culture.

Culture-Christianity, Christendom, or Anglicanism (along with existing non-conformist traditions) was not viewed by the Brethren as Christianity at all, but rather its ruins. The true church, it was believed, must be entirely spiritual, having nothing to do with earthly political matters, either political matters as they existed in nineteenth century England or as predicted in Biblical prophecy for the end times. Consequently, it was deemed illegitimate for the state to interfere in the operation of the church and it was considered inappropriate to view either state or church in terms of a millennial kingdom.

Dispensationalists, appealing to a common sense understanding of Old Testament texts, argued that Biblical prophecy regarding a kingdom of glory referred to the Jews, and had nothing to do with the church. The church, on the other hand, was a completely new kind of humanity in accordance with a completely new purpose of God revealed by Christ and his Apostles. Its members were a heavenly people destined for a heavenly inheritance. Biblical prophecy, however, was thought to refer to God's judgments on earthly peoples and structures (such as governments) in accordance with the divine plan for a future kingdom for Israel.

Classical dispensationalism was promoted in the United States in the aftermath of the Civil War by evangelical Christians (primarily Presbyterian, Congregational, and Baptist) who were disenchanted with the identification of Christianity and national progress. The *two purposes/two peoples* theory of Brethren dispensationalism was found to be just as

useful against American postmillennialism as against its British original. It allowed American evangelicals to affirm a highly spiritual, revivalist and individualist Christianity distinct from millennialism.<sup>6</sup> This had several advantages. On the one hand, they could offer an application for kingdom texts that did not conflict with revivalist Christianity, safeguarding the necessity of individual salvation in even the most progressive of cultural situations. On the other hand, the application which they made of these kingdom texts seemed quite relevant to the “apocalyptic” aspects of the Civil War in the nineteenth century and the two World Wars in the twentieth century. As the crisis with modernism entered its full sway, classical dispensationalism helped to provide many fundamentalists and other conservative Christians with a sense of true Christian identity and an explanation for an apostate Christendom which improperly relegated to itself Biblical kingdom teachings.

In the twentieth century, as non-dispensational fundamentalists and evangelicals turned away from millennialism or strengthened their non-millennial versions of Christianity, classical dispensationalism used its *two purposes/two peoples* theory to affirm millennialism alongside God’s program for the Christian church. Once again, matters regarding the kingdom of God were relegated to God’s plan for Jews, not Christians. This seemed agreeable with a more literal reading of Old Testament prophecies about Jews, the rise of Zionism, the apocalyptic features of the World Wars, and the eventual founding of the state of Israel in 1948.<sup>7</sup>

The *two purposes/two peoples* theory allowed classical dispensationalists to solve to their own satisfaction the age-old problem of relating the Old and New Testaments. Dispensationalists postulated the divine sanction of two religions, rather than just one as had been traditionally perceived in Christianity. These two religions, which L. S. Chafer called Christianity and Judaism, are not simultaneously legitimate except in the eschaton.<sup>8</sup> Prior to the return of Christ, the two religions are separate dispensationally, which meant both that they were distinguished

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<sup>6</sup>See Carl E. Sanders II, “The Premillennial Faith of James Hall Brookes” (Ph.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1994), esp. 76-134.

<sup>7</sup>Twentieth-century dispensationalism’s primary emphasis on millennialism (and eschatology generally) in contrast to nineteenth and early twentieth century dispensationalism’s primary emphasis on ecclesiology can be seen by comparing the works of Lewis Sperry Chafer and John F. Walvoord. See J. Hannah, “John F. Walvoord,” in *The Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, 241.

<sup>8</sup>L. S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:14-15.

historically, as different religions pertaining to different historical periods, and distinguished intrinsically, essentially as earthly versus heavenly, law versus grace.<sup>9</sup>

For eternity, however, the *two purposes/two peoples* theory meant that God had two redemptive purposes which will be accomplished in tandem, forever conjoined but never consolidated. The heavenly purpose envisions a heavenly people in a grace religion. The earthly purpose envisions an earthly people in a political, theocratic and legal religion. The heavenly purpose and people concern the true Christian church which is destined for the heavens forever. The earthly purpose and people concern the Jewish nation (and subordinate Gentiles) who inherit the earth forever. We have here a neo-platonic mystical Christianity conjoined with a radically nationalistic and particularly Old Testament view of Judaism set side by side and affirmed as equally and eternally legitimate, though historically (dispensationally) distinct religions of the Bible.

Some of the most memorable aspects of classical dispensational teaching came from the use of the *two purposes/two peoples* theory to interpret teachings of Jesus and the early church on the kingdom of God. Here classical dispensationalists affirmed the continuity of Old Testament and New Testament kingdom doctrines by assigning the focus of both to the hopes of Israel. They were then able to advocate a national prophetic and apocalyptic context for Jesus' teaching on the kingdom prior to the epoch-making study of Johannes Weiss.<sup>10</sup> At the same time they also affirmed the substance of an ethical kingdom in the teaching of Jesus. Instead of treating these themes as mutually exclusive, classical dispensationalists affirmed them both. Furthermore, they claimed the two concepts could be identified in a lexical and exegetical distinction between the terms *kingdom of heaven* and *kingdom of God*.<sup>11</sup>

The teaching of Jesus on the kingdom of heaven (a Matthean term) related to the political, theocratic kingdom promised to Israel and the house of David. Classical dispensationalists acknowledged that some-

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<sup>9</sup>For a more extended discussion, see C. Blasing, "Lewis Sperry Chafer," *The Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, 88-90.

<sup>10</sup>J. Weiss, *Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes* (Gottigen, 1892).

<sup>11</sup>*The Scofield Reference Bible* (1917), n. 1 on Matthew 3:2, n. 1 on Matthew 6:33, and n. 3 on 1 Corinthians 15:24. For an extended presentation of the Scofieldian doctrine of the two kingdoms, see L. S. Chafer, *The Kingdom in History and Prophecy* (Chicago: Bible Institute Colportage Ass'n, 1936).

times the term *kingdom of God* was used with this meaning (as in Synoptic parallels), but taught that in other texts, kingdom of God referred to God's ethical and moral rule in the human heart. This ethical and moral rule was always manifest, though in different dispensational forms. But the political, Davidic kingdom, the kingdom of heaven, underwent a history of fulfillment. The kingdom of heaven appears in the teaching of Jesus as he offered the prophesied political kingdom to Israel. Israel refused his offer. Jesus then revealed two stages of the kingdom of heaven, a mystery form to appear after his ascension and a final and complete fulfillment of the kingdom of heaven postponed until the time of his return. The final fulfillment of the kingdom of heaven will take place at Christ's return when he will rule over Israel and all Gentile nations. The three stages of the eschatological kingdom of heaven, offered and postponed, mystery, and fulfillment, became popularly known through the widespread use of the *Scofield Reference Bible*. In conjunction with the three stages of the kingdom of heaven was the overarching kingdom of God, present at all times in the rule of God in the hearts of God's people.

As interesting as this attempt was to relate the ethical and political aspects of New Testament kingdom teachings, the *two purposes/two peoples* theory required that the structures as a whole be primarily identified with God's earthly purpose. The church was distinguished a priori from the kingdom. The immediate result was the separation of the large majority of the teachings of Jesus from God's plan and purpose for the church.

Exploring further, the logic of classical dispensational interpretation is most consistent and most vulnerable on the matter of the mystery form of the kingdom of heaven, the form of the kingdom between the ascension and the parousia. Here the mystery of the kingdom of heaven was identified with Christendom, the nemesis of dispensational ecclesiology. This Christendom exists under the lordship of Christ (Scofield saw it as an aspect of his David rule), but it is inherently mixed with evil in its confusion of the earthly and heavenly plans of God. The church gives Christendom its legitimacy as a mystery of the kingdom, but is not itself the kingdom nor ever will be. It is incumbent on the citizens of Christendom to recognize God's purposes and enter the heavenly purpose, for the earthly aspects of Christendom will be judged by Christ when he comes to fulfill the kingdom of heaven. Thus, postmillennial Christendom was seen to be totally mistaken in thinking itself to be the fulfillment of millennial prophecies.

At the present time, while the kingdom of heaven is in mystery form, the kingdom of God is manifest in God's moral rule in the church. But the *two purposes/two peoples* theory required classical dispensationalism to posit only an *analogy* between the moral rule of God in the heavenly people and the moral rule of God intended for the kingdom of heaven, the rule of life for God's earthly people. By virtue of this analogy, classical dispensationalism could find a "moral application" for the church of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. But it was only an analogy. The Sermon on the Mount was kingdom teaching, legal religion for an earthly people, not for the church.<sup>12</sup>

### Revised Dispensationalism

In the 1950s and 1960s a new form of dispensationalism came on the scene. I call it *revised dispensationalism*, taking the title from the revision of the Scofield Reference Bible in 1967. Revised dispensationalism represents a modification of classical dispensationalism in response to several pressures and criticisms. One was the dispute with covenantalism which had flared up in the 1930s and 1940s centering on the soteriological implications of the *two purposes/two peoples* theory, as well as its implications for the church's relationship to Old Testament law and the ethical teaching of Jesus.<sup>13</sup> Revised dispensationalists maintained most of the structure of classical dispensationalism but reworked the *eternal dualism* of the two purposes theory. Revised dispensationalists proposed a common goal of eternal salvation for the two peoples of God and attempted to support the historical outworking of classical dispensationalism's two purposes on that basis.<sup>14</sup>

This seemed to solve the problem of two kinds of salvation in the ultimate sense.<sup>15</sup> But it essentially destabilized the classical dispensational system. Once the divine purpose was declared to be ultimately one, there was no reason why that purpose should not work its way back into the interpretation of Biblical history, thus dissolving the dualism which classical dispensationalism had postulated. In order to prevent this from happening, revised dispensationalism maintained an *eternal anthro-*

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<sup>12</sup>*The Scofield Reference Bible* (1917), n. 2 on Matthew 5:2.

<sup>13</sup>For a summary of this controversy, see C. Blaising, "Lewis Sperry Chafer," *The Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, 92-95.

<sup>14</sup>C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody, 1965), 146-148; J. D. Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), 561-62.

<sup>15</sup>Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 110-31.

*pological dualism* within the now unified redemption purpose. There would be one purpose, but still two peoples, specifically known as Israel and the church, two classes of humanity sharing essentially the same salvation.

In order to maintain the distinction of two peoples, however, some aspect of salvation had to be differentiated. This distinction was thought to be found in the New Testament description of the church as the Body and Bride of Christ, metaphors thought to denote an eternal blessing unique to the church and serving to distinguish it from the eternal salvation given to saints from other dispensations (notably redeemed Israel).<sup>16</sup>

Another factor leading to the revision of dispensationalism was the impact of the developing field of Biblical eschatology, especially as the issues raised in that international discussion were brought into a critique of dispensational eschatology by George E. Ladd.<sup>17</sup> The most interactive response to these issues came from Alva J. McClain, founder and first president of Grace Theological Seminary, who offered a revised dispensational eschatology drawing upon the ideas of Consistent Eschatology.<sup>18</sup> McClain rejected Scofield's and Chafer's lexical distinction between the kingdom of heaven and kingdom of God, not to mention the use of that distinction to organize the New Testament teaching on the eschatological kingdom. Instead, he suggested understanding the Biblical teaching on God's kingdom in relation to its *universal* and *mediatorial* aspects. These he simply called the universal and mediatorial kingdoms. The universal kingdom is God's unchanging sovereignty. The mediatorial kingdom is the accomplishment of that sovereignty through a political ruler on earth. He then postulated a succession of mediatorial kingdoms from Abraham to the future reign of Christ. In keeping with the two peoples theory, however, he disassociated the church from that kingdom succession. The kingdom which Jesus preached is said to be entirely apocalyptic, not envisioning the present age of the church. Rather than being a mystery form of the kingdom, this age is the interregnum, devoid of any mediatorial kingdom manifestation.

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 154.

<sup>17</sup>G. E. Ladd, *Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952).

<sup>18</sup>A. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1959).

Revised dispensationalism was not able to agree on any one interpretation of the kingdom of God. Although appreciative of McClain, competing views were offered by John Walvoord, Charles Ryrie, and J. Dwight Pentecost, all of Dallas Theological Seminary and disciples of Lewis Sperry Chafer.<sup>19</sup> In each of their proposals, they tried to include the spiritual reality of the church today as a form of divine kingdom (in contrast to Scofield, Chafer, and McClain). However, their precommitment to the two peoples theory made it impossible for them to integrate this insight into a *unified* kingdom doctrine. In their thinking, the kingdom which is the church today stands isolated as an independent reality unrelated to the kingdom (or rather kingdoms) of past and future dispensations. Of the three, Pentecost comes closest to the elusive goal by including the church in a historical succession of *theocratic kingdoms*. However, the church as a theocratic kingdom is only *nominally* related to theocratic kingdoms in other dispensations. Subverting the similar terminology is the same old two peoples theory.

And yet, recognizing the church as a divine kingdom reality (even to the point of giving it the same name) was an important change in dispensational thought. The rigid distinction of classical dispensationalism was softening. Similarities and even relationships were beginning to be recognized. A key example is the Biblical theological theme of the new covenant. Chaferian dispensationalism had so differentiated the two peoples/two purposes as to deny the New Testament teaching that the church is a fulfillment of the new covenant predicted by the Old Testament prophets. Chafer claimed that the new covenant mentioned in 2 Corinthians and in Hebrews is an entirely different covenant than that predicted by Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel.<sup>20</sup> Revised dispensationalists, however, had to recognize that certain blessings of this covenant predicted for Israel were in fact taught by New Testament writers as being fulfilled in the church today.<sup>21</sup> Under this covenant, eschatological Israel and the New Testament church share the same common spiritual blessings. With the blessings in common, dispensationalists began to find it impossible to maintain the eternal

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<sup>19</sup>For an overview of revised dispensationalist theories on the kingdom, see C. Blasing and D. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993), 39-46.

<sup>20</sup>Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 7:98-99.

<sup>21</sup>J. F. Walvoord, *Major Bible Prophecies* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 188-91.

distinction between Israel and the church in either its classical or revised forms.

Why did vestiges of the two peoples theory last so long? One reason of course is the sheer momentum of classical dispensationalism's vast influence, a tradition not easily altered once it has achieved institutional form. Another is the political, social, and cultural context of the 1950s—1980s. The events of these decades seemed to support the popular speculations of classical dispensationalists concerning modern Israel on the one hand and the moral and religious deterioration of Western society (Christendom) on the other.

In the 1960s and 1970s, social unrest, the cold war with its nuclear confrontation, various conventional wars, rising tensions in the Middle East, along with Israel's military successes and territorial expansion appeared to be confirming signs of the two peoples theory. God seemed to be preparing the world for a return of divine favor to God's earthly people. During the 1970s Hal Lindsey became the most well-known of a group of popular apocalyptic writers working with dispensational presuppositions. Their work and themes were caught up in the evangelical revival of the early 1970s, appearing in films and the new Christian rock music as well as in popular paperback books.<sup>22</sup> This popularized apocalypticism, which among other things was very specific in identifying the events of that decade as *the* fulfillment of Biblical prophecy and apocalyptic vision (even going so far as to predict the date of Christ's return by the fortieth year of Israel's statehood), came to be the public meaning of dispensationalism by the decade of the 1980s. The momentum of this popular movement retarded, but did not completely prevent the critical assessment of the two peoples theory. However, by the early 1980s, the exegetical problems of the theory and the number of modifications being made were too numerous to ignore.

### **Progressive Dispensationalism**

In 1986 the Dispensational Study Group, a colloquy of dispensationalist and other interested Biblical scholars and theologians, had its

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<sup>22</sup>Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970); idem., *There's a New World Coming; A "Prophetic Odyssey"* (Santa Ana, CA: Vision House, 1973); idem., *The Terminal Generation* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Revell, 1976); idem., *The 1980's: Countdown to Armageddon* (New York: Bantam Books, 1980). For an overview of popular apocalypticism, especially since 1945, see P. Bouyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1992).

first annual meeting.<sup>23</sup> It began by considering changes and developments in dispensational thought and the problems of definition for the term dispensationalism.<sup>24</sup> Through such meetings it became clear that the hostilities and polarizations that defined dispensationalism in the 1940s and 1950s were not shared by younger dispensationalists. Their hermeneutical methods and concerns were common to evangelical Biblical scholarship generally, and many already had come to the point of expressing their dispensationalism as a modified form of redemption history, seeing interconnections between the dispensations just as much as difference and change.

After several years in the making, the book *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition* was published in 1992.<sup>25</sup> Following an introduction on the problem of defining dispensationalism in light of developments and changes in the dispensational tradition, the book presents ten exegetical and Biblical essays on the relationship of Israel and the church in New Testament theology. Through these essays a new kind of dispensationalism comes to light and is interpreted in the book's conclusion. This is what we call *progressive dispensationalism*. It is addressed in two books released in 1993.<sup>26</sup>

Progressive dispensationalism shares with classical and revised dispensationalism a high regard for Biblical authority, but it manifests a greater interest in the historical and literary interpretation of Scripture. Progressive dispensationalists affirm the relevance of Biblical prophecy and apocalyptic and continue to affirm a future for Israel nationally in the plan of God. But they reject the excesses of popular apocalypticism that frequently mishandle the literary genre of apocalyptic and often presume prophetic authority for itself in proclamations on how and when Biblical

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<sup>23</sup>R. Clutter, "Dispensational Study Group: An Introduction," *Grace Theological Journal* 10 (1989): 123-24.

<sup>24</sup>C. Blaising, "Developing Dispensationalism. Part 1: Doctrinal Development in Orthodoxy," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145 (1988): 133-40; idem., "Developing Dispensationalism. Part 2: Development of Dispensationalism by Contemporary Dispensationalists," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145 (1988): 254-80.

<sup>25</sup>See note 3.

<sup>26</sup>R. Saucy, *The Case For Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993); C. Blaising and D. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993). For a summary of progressive dispensationalism, see the latter work, pp. 46-56. Also see Blaising and Bock, eds., *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, 380-85.

prophecy will be fulfilled. Progressive dispensationalists view Biblical history as a succession of divine dispensations and believe that the sequence of the dispensations do mark significant changes in God's relationship to the human race. However, progressive dispensationalists reject the *two purposes/two peoples* theory in both its classical and revised forms and see the changes in redemption history as progressive stages toward the accomplishment of a unified, holistic plan of redemption.

The most significant difference between earlier and progressive dispensationalism is the rejection of the two peoples theory. Progressive dispensationalists do not see the church as a separate people group existing in eternity *alongside* redeemed Jews and Gentiles. But neither has the church replaced Israel in redemption history as a substitute people fulfilling the promises of God. In progressive dispensationalism, the church is not an ethnic, political category to be put alongside or substituted for other ethnic, political groups.

The church is a stage in the progressive revelation of God's salvation for humankind. Humankind is characterized by both individual and corporate existence, with the latter expressing itself in ethnic, cultural, political, and social structures. In the past dispensation, God revealed concern for both individual justification and blessing as well as national and political redemption. Also, a principle of mediation was transferred to the king of Israel by which he was to mediate God's blessing to Israel and to the Gentiles.

In this dispensation, God has revealed Jesus as his Son, the heir of Israel's kingly office, and mediates through him certain aspects of eternal salvation in inaugural form to both the Jews and Gentiles who believe in him. These aspects include blessings of the Holy Spirit, a down payment on new covenant promises (the same new covenant predicted by the Old Testament prophets). In their inaugural form they are, and in their final fulfillment they will be given equally to Jews and Gentiles. The phenomenon of Jews and Gentiles being blessed in Christ during the time of his ascension and prior to his return is what is called the church.

Both redeemed Israel and Gentiles of the past dispensation and the church of the present dispensation look forward to the culmination of redemption in which Jews and Gentiles will be blessed individually and nationally (here is the hope offered to Israel and Gentile nations in the past dispensation) and united by the Holy Spirit as an eternal dwelling place for God (the culmination and perfection of what in this dispensation

is called the church). There will be one redeemed humanity existing in individual and corporate plurality. Its corporate plurality is its ethnic and national reality: Israel and Gentiles. The church of this dispensation is not a third group alongside them but that part of this very same redeemed humanity which has come into final salvation from the present dispensation. The blessing of their relationship to Christ will then be shared in its completed form by all the redeemed from all dispensations. Furthermore, they will enter into the dimensions of multiethnic, multinational blessing along with the rest of redeemed humanity, in fulfillment of the holistic promises of God made and reaffirmed through the history of redemption. The controlling motif is eternal redemption that blesses human reality both individually and in all its corporate structures (national, ethnic, and political) with equal sanctification by the Holy Spirit and intimate communion with the triune God. To summarize:

In progressive dispensationalism, the political-social and spiritual purposes of God complement one another. The spiritual does not replace the political nor do the two run independent of each other. They are related aspects in a holistic plan of redemption. The final dispensation will reveal all these aspects in complementary relationship to each other. Prior to that, different dispensations may reveal more of one aspect or more of another, but each dispensation is related to the final dispensation in which the plan culminates. Because they all have the same goal, there is a real, progressive relationship between them. As each leads to the goal of final redemption, Scripture draws various connections between them which relate them together in a truly progressive fashion. It is from this progressive relationship of the dispensations to one another that the name progressive dispensationalism is taken.<sup>27</sup>

On the matter of the eschatological kingdom, progressive dispensationalism accepts the basic framework of inaugurated eschatology common in evangelicalism today.<sup>28</sup> Contrary to classical dispensationalism, no substantive distinction is made between the phrases *kingdom of heaven* and *kingdom of God*. Against revised dispensationalism, progressive dispensationalism argues that the eschatological

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<sup>27</sup>Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 48-49.

<sup>28</sup>The widespread acceptance of this view, at least in its overall features, has been noted by Craig Blomberg, "A Response to G. R. Beasley-Murray on the Kingdom," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 35 (1992): 31-32.

kingdom predicted by the prophets and typified by the Davidic theocracy is *one* kingdom with that which Jesus preached and about which his apostles taught. It is the historical fulfillment of past revelations of God's kingdom (in the theocratic monarchy of Israel). But it is qualitatively greater than those past revelations as seen first of all in the relationship between God and the Davidic king. Now God has become incarnate in the Davidic house. As a consequence, the eschatological kingdom begins the history of its fulfillment in the first appearance of Jesus and moves toward its consummation in both its millennial and final phases at his return. Most importantly for progressive dispensationalism, the revelation of the church between the advents is a vital stage in the revelation of the kingdom affirming and guaranteeing that kingdom's fulfillment in the future.

Progressive dispensationalism is still young in the dispensational tradition, but it carries important implications which need to be explored further. Progressive dispensationalism represents a more profoundly Christocentric theology than has been seen in dispensationalism heretofore, one which is directly related to its holistic anthropology. It draws upon both divine and Davidic aspects of Christ's person for understanding the church today and in the future. From this perspective progressive dispensationalism should be able to address the social and political aspects of redemption as revealed in the current dispensation without falling into the problem of simply equating Christianity and culture. It should seek a ministry of social renewal tied directly to individual renewal in the corporate and social transformation of the Christian community itself—a ministry of renewal in preparation for the coming of Christ. It should be carried out in view of the holistic redemption yet to be received at Christ's return.<sup>29</sup>

## Conclusion

Dispensationalism is a theological tradition undergoing development in the form of a changing hermeneutical process, proposing, critiquing, and reformulating an initial interpretive grid—the *two purposes/two peoples* theory. In the process of testing, reformulating, and even abandoning this theory, a pattern of themes, concerns, and emphases have unfolded which mark the direction of this theological tradition. They

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<sup>29</sup>For preliminary thoughts in this direction, see Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 284-301.

include a high regard for the exposition of Scripture, a developing sense of the diversity revealed in redemption history, an emphasis on Biblical prophecy, the uniqueness of the church, and a future for national Israel in the plan of God.

Through controversies in times past, dispensationalists have sometimes been guilty of a stridency and even a gnostic-like arrogance regarding what they have called “dispensational truth.” I believe there is a new openness today in dispensational theology to affirm the necessity of the role of the full body of Christ in the search for theological knowledge. In fact, I believe this was an insight that, though perhaps only dimly seen, nevertheless motivated the spread of dispensational theology in the Bible conferences in the mid- to late nineteenth century. We now are recapturing and refining that perspective. To that end I cite a few sentences from the conclusion of *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*:

Knowledge about Christ and the dispensations of his blessings are the property of the church universal (Eph. 4:11-16 in the context of 1:10, 15-23 and 3:9). This means that dispensational theology should be a dialogic phenomenon inclusive to the extent of all who are in Christ. It is aided by an inclusive hermeneutic that is reflected upon for improvement in its deployment. It is in fact a hermeneutic that is aware of the communal and dialogic nature of understanding. It is carried forward by the practical steps of offering our proposals and studied conclusions to others in Christ for critical evaluation and then reversing the procedure as we hear back from them. The key point is listening, hearing: hearing the Scripture, hearing each other, and then listening to the Scripture, listening to each other, and hearing the Scripture again. It is a process that is neither embarrassed by nor impatient with disagreement, diversity, or pluralism, but rather expects such and puts it to work for the mutual benefit of the body of Christ.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Idem., *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, 384-85.

## BOOK REVIEWS

Leslie Parrott. 1993. *The Olivet Story: An Anecdotal History of Olivet Nazarene University. 1907-1990*. Newberg: Barclay Press. viii, 189 pp. ISBN 0-913342-76-9.

Ronald E. Kirkemo. 1992. *For Zion's Sake: A History of Pasadena/Point Loma College*. San Diego: Point Loma Press. xxii, 414 pp. No ISBN.

Barry L. Callen. 1992. *Guide of Soul and Mind: The Story of Anderson University*. Anderson: Anderson University and Warner Press. xiv, 472 pp. ISBN 0-87162-605-5.

Reviewed by David Bundy, Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, Indiana.

The genre of college/university histories has rarely moved beyond the wistful accounts written for alumni by development departments. The three volumes reviewed together here, although quite different from each other, are exceptions to that generalization. They provide important vistas on the history and culture of the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition, in addition to documenting the history of three of the most influential Wesleyan/Holiness universities. They will also function as both primary and secondary literature for any eventual comprehensive analysis of educational structures, philosophies, and goals of the Holiness movement of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Two of the volumes deal with institutions of the Church of the Nazarene—Olivet Nazarene University and Point Loma College. *The Olivet Story* is authored by Leslie Parrott who served as president of this school from 1975-1991. As the second generation president (his father A. L. Parrott served from 1938-1949), Parrott, long related to the school, is nonetheless remarkably unsentimental in presenting the narrative, includ-

ing the tale of the fifteen presidents in the decade 1910-1919. Among those hired and fired by a micro-managing board was A. M. Hills who was forced to resign on 14 March 1910 after less than seven months on the job. The reason was his post-millennial view.

This objectivity is buttressed by continuous reference to the national and regional economic and social developments, both within the nation as a whole and in the Church of the Nazarene. In some ways the volume is also a memoir of the two Parrotts, and provides insight into the rationales and motives of many decisions made during their presidencies. The volume reflects careful scholarly research and a disciplined analysis of published and archival resources. Unfortunately, perhaps because of the intent to use the volume as an institutional promotional instrument, it is undocumented. One also laments the lack of attention given to theological developments at the University (granted that is a delicate subject!).

Kirkemo's analysis of Point Loma Nazarene College, San Diego, California, is a carefully and skillfully crafted history of the institution with which the author has had a long association as student and professor (since 1969) of political science. The volume traces the development of the college from its founding in 1902 by Phineas Bresee, through its stages in Pasadena as Pacific Bible College and Pasadena College, and the move to Point Loma.

In addition to Bresee, among the presidents were formative theologians in the Church of the Nazarene, including E. P. Ellyson (1911-1913), H. O. Wiley (1913-1916, 1933-1949), and W. T. Purkiser (1949-1957). Other prominent Holiness persons, including C. W. Ruth and Seth Rees, influenced the early development of the college. At each point the interaction of the college with the trends of American religious culture is carefully documented, including the early conflict with famous Holiness revivalists for control, the efforts of wealthy businessman George Pepperdine to purchase an institution to name after himself, and the move toward Fundamentalist attitudes and doctrinal positions after World War II.

Apart from being a model of the genre, this volume has implications for the history and present experience of both the Church of the Nazarene and the larger Holiness movement. For historians of American religious culture, it constitutes a diachronic analysis of the evolution of a precisely delimited corporate entity through the first nine decades of its existence. For fans of Nixon trivia, Pasadena College won the 1934 Southern California Public Speaking Conference debating championship, beating among others a team from Whittier which included the future President.

The volume contains the requisite academic apparatus of index, bibliography, and scholarly references.

The third volume deals with the first seventy-five years of the history of Anderson University. The author, Barry L. Callen, also has had a long association with his subject, having served as Dean of the School of Theology from 1974-1983 (also, acting Dean, 1973-74, 1988-90) and Dean of the College from 1983-1988. He has been a member of the faculty since 1966 and has established himself through a series of earlier books as a prolific author and scholar of Church of God (Anderson) theology and educational history. Callen presents a carefully crafted and detailed history of the institution, setting its story within the framework of higher education history in the United States, as well as within the social, theological, and educational development of the Church of God (Anderson). Indeed, one could do far worse in choosing an introduction to the history of this movement! The volume is also very sensitive to the changing scholarly and theological perspectives of both the University and the Church of God (Anderson).

Once again, the history of the institution is integrally linked to major figures of the sponsoring movement. Among the leadership and faculty of the university discussed here who have had crucial roles in the development of the Church of God, and influence beyond its boundaries, are Boyce W. Blackwelder, Russell R. Byrum, James Earl Massey, John A. Morrison, Robert A. Nicholson, George Russell Olt, Robert H. Reardon, John W. V. Smith, and Joseph T. Wilson. This well-written and attractive volume is enhanced by many excellently reproduced photographs, numerous appendices, careful documentation, and a bibliography (pp. 454-458) which is comprehensive with regard to Anderson University and Church of God (Anderson) educational issues.

All three university histories will be essential for any library with a collection purporting to document the role of religion in American culture or with an Evangelical and/or Holiness constituency. They provide case studies in the understudied field of the development of private Holiness and Evangelical higher education. It is to be hoped that these and other case studies will be the basis for broadly conceived examinations of Wesleyan/Holiness educational history and development in the context of American higher education.

Rob L. Staples. 1991. *Outward Sign and Inward Grace: The Place of Sacraments in Wesleyan Spirituality*. Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill. 304 pp. ISBN 083-411-3783.

Reviewed by Randy L. Maddox, Sioux Falls College, Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

A proper appreciation of this work is dependent on recognizing its context and agenda. Staples writes specifically from (and to) the Holiness branch of the broader Wesleyan tradition. In this context his work is innovative and provocative. As he makes very clear, the Holiness movement has been characterized by a reactionary “low” theology and a correspondingly marginal practice of the sacraments. Against this setting, Staples’ rather courageous goal is to challenge his colleagues to recover the more vital sacramental theology and practice of their forefathers—John and Charles Wesley.

Significantly, this purpose could not be achieved simply by expounding the Wesleys’ sacramental theology and practice, because their precedent is not accepted as an unquestioned norm in many Holiness circles (witness the debate concerning the Baptism of the Spirit mentioned on pp. 153-4). This explains the time devoted to placing the Wesleys within the broader Christian sacramental tradition, particularly that of the magisterial Reformers. Staples wants his audience to see that those who would reject the Wesleys reject Luther and Calvin too!

Of course, there are Protestant traditions besides the magisterial. Not only is Staples aware of this, he uses it to explain why the Holiness movement strayed from its Wesleyan sacramental roots. He repeatedly attributes this departure to the mixing of “Anabaptist” currents into the original Wesleyan stream. This point needs to be made more precisely. Staples notes that John Wesley’s teachings on sacramental theology affirm both the primacy of the Spirit and the role of mediating structures or agencies (pp. 24-5). While Wesley strove to hold these two principles in tension, other streams of Western sacramental theology tended to place them in opposition. Staples uses the term “Anabaptist” to denote those streams that placed one-sided emphasis on the Spirit (apart from mediating structures). He then argues that it was cooperation with such “Anabaptists” that led early Wesleyan-Holiness folk to dissolve the tension in Wesley’s sacramental teachings by rejecting mediating structures. His plea, in response, is a recovered view of the sacraments as conveying the work of the Spirit *via* structure.

While the general outlines of this argument are on track, the specific identification of the culprit is open to some question. The distinctive nature of the historically specific Anabaptist tradition is its call for uncompromising voluntary obedience to the model of Christ. While it indeed emphasizes the primacy of the Spirit in empowering such obedience, it was not necessarily at the expense of all “structure.” For example, most Anabaptists gave great prominence to the mediating structure of community life. Theirs was not a religion of “just the Spirit and me”! Meanwhile, the one more likely to deny explicitly the need for any structure to convey the Spirit—Ulrich Zwingli—was not an Anabaptist.

I would suggest that it was actually the rationalist tendency to confine the Spirit to only “intellectual” means of grace (e.g., preaching, prayer, and praise), a tendency that Zwingli exemplified and that has spread in Western Christianity ever since the Reformation and Enlightenment, that has distanced Wesley’s descendants from their founder. This tendency is not confined to Anabaptists (nor uniquely characteristic of them). It was prominent among American Methodists long before the Holiness Movement. Moreover, hints of it remain in Staples’ depiction of the sacraments more as forms of proclamation to “accomplish spiritual ends” than as material means that truly convey spiritual grace (cf. 76ff, 97ff). Until the intellectualist reduction of the means of grace is identified and contested more explicitly, it seems unlikely to me that Staples’ laudable goal of recovering a more vital role for the sacraments in the spirituality of the Holiness movement will be achieved.

As one might expect, Staples’ overall agenda leads him to some specific emphases that place him in considerable tension with his peers. One of these is his identification of the ironic loss of the eucharist as a “converting ordinance” in Holiness models of evangelism. More provocative is his call for making baptism more integral to conversion, conjoined with a defense of infant baptism (cf. 161ff)! This is not the place to debate the details of Staples’ argument for accepting infant baptism more integrally into Holiness practice (most Holiness traditions technically allow it already). It is worth noting, however, that his driving concern is that the current dominance of believer’s baptism fosters a model of conversion that calls into question the value of religious nurture of children in the church (cf. 193-4). Whether infant baptism provides the best way to address this concern surely remains open to debate (for an alternative, see Marlin Jeschke, *Believer’s Baptism for Children of the Church* [Herald Press, 1983]). By now it should be obvious that Staples’ work is likely to

arouse internal debate within the Holiness movement. One of the benefits of the book is that it helps draw the broader Protestant discussion of sacraments into that debate. One of the unfortunate limitations of the book is that it does not interact with the concurrent debates over sacraments taking place in the larger Wesleyan family. For example, Staples hardly mentions the question of the connection between infant baptism and confirmation—a question at the heart of current United Methodist debate over baptism.

This first limitation might be explained by the very simultaneity of the debates. The more perplexing limitation lies in Staples' summaries of the Wesleys' own sacramental theology. Put briefly, Staples relies too heavily on a single secondary source: Ole Borgen, *John Wesley on the Sacraments* (Abingdon, 1972). Borgen's study is a standard in the field, but Staples' near exclusive reliance on it often gives the impression of more consistency in the Wesleys' views and practice (and more unanimity in Wesley Studies) than actually exists. To cite just one example, there is no interaction with the dramatically different analysis of infant baptism in Bernard Holland, *Baptism in Early Methodism* (Epworth, 1970). What this means is that readers interested primarily in an up-to-date analysis of the Wesleys' sacramental theology (and scholarly debates over this topic) would be advised to look elsewhere (e.g., Henry Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life* [Scarecrow, 1992]). Likewise, readers who assume from the subtitle that this book speaks from, and for, the broad Wesleyan tradition will be disappointed. But for outsiders seeking an introduction to the sacramental practices and debates in the Wesleyan-Holiness movement, there is no better source than this. And for those within the movement, this is an important book that demands to be taken into consideration, and may just help spark a recovery of a more truly Wesleyan experience of holiness—nurtured in and through the full range of the means of grace.

R. David Rightmire, *Sacraments and the Salvation Army: Pneumatological Foundations*. Metuchen, N. J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1990, 327 pages. ISBN 0-8108-2396-9.

Reviewed by Barry L. Callen, Anderson University, Anderson, Indiana.

The fact is clear enough. The Salvation Army quickly evolved a spiritualized interpretation of sacramental reality in the church's life as the Army began its existence in the context of Victorian England. Rightmire's first two chapters review the Army's rise in the Victorian milieu and, in that intellectual frame of reference, the development of an essentially non-sacramental theology.

The primary question addressed by Rightmire involves why this type of theology evolved and soon became formalized. *Sacraments and the Salvation Army* is a published revision of Rightmire's doctoral dissertation on this subject and joins the "Studies in Evangelicalism" series of The Scarecrow Press. It is written clearly and includes an excellent bibliography.

The author offers a cogent and helpful explanation for why the Army has deemphasized an understanding of the church as the locus of Word and sacrament. William Booth's 1883 decision to abandon sacramental practice "had a determinative effect on Salvation Army sacramental self-understanding" (205). The reason for the shift from traditional sacramental practice is said to lie primarily in the Army's "pneumatological priority and the practical orientation of its missiology" (ix). The Army "insisted that methods, organization, and institutions must be judged in relation to their ultimate effectiveness in reaching evangelical goals under the guidance of the Holy Spirit" (269). William Booth is pictured rightly as a theological pragmatist. Through him the Army saw its ministry as a "spiritual offensive" requiring "a theology of action rather than reflection" (71). The Army's postmillennial theology highlights holy living, sacramental existence and action, as a present eschatological sign of the future kingdom. In part, the Army's non-sacramental position also is said to rest on the precedent of the Society of Friends (explored in chapter four), where the inner is prior to the outer in religion.

Why the evolution of a non-sacramental theology by the Army? Pneumatological priorities dominated ecclesiological ones. Rightmire, accepting the sacramental theology of John Wesley as the "operative standard" for this discussion, points out that the Army's case is not an iso-

lated one in its virtual abandonment of a traditional sacramental theology in favor of a pneumatological focus. The nineteenth-century Holiness movement as a whole tended this way (see chapter five). The primary justification for the abandonment lies in the Army's holiness theology. In-depth experience of the Spirit, it was assumed, "eclipsed any need for sacramental practice" (271). Rather than an elimination of sacramental language and interest, the view shifted from its ritual practice to "the reality of new life in Christ, experienced spiritually" (196). This was seen as possible only in an experience of entire sanctification.

Rightmire concludes with the suggestion that the "regaining of a truly Wesleyan understanding of entire sanctification, involving both crisis and process, should lead to a re-evaluation of sacramental theology within the movement" (272). The challenge is to keep in balance both pneumatological and ecclesiological concerns, something that can be done without weakening the practical mission focus of the Army. Wesley is presented as the model available to all inheritors of the American holiness tradition, a model who champions what the Army has rightly emphasized, without weakening what the Army and many others have excessively de-emphasized. Rightmire points in a fruitful direction.

Such a re-balancing process can be seen, e.g., in the "Open Forum" dialogue proceeding at the national level in recent years between the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana) and the Independent Christian Churches/ Churches of Christ. The sacramental focus of the "restorationist" body (Christian Churches) is helping to rebalance a pneumatologically driven sacramental deemphasis by the holiness body (Church of God).

Randy L. Maddox, editor. 1990. *Aldersgate Reconsidered*. Nashville: Kingswood Books/Abingdon Press. 181 pp. ISBN 0-687-00984-7.

Reviewed by Richard B. Steele, Milwaukee Theological Institute, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Religious communities are notoriously prone to both hero worship and myth making. A group which venerates someone as its "founder" or eponymous "saint" is apt to regard certain spiritually transformative experiences through which he or she passed as definitive for their collective religious identity. They cherish it in memory, perhaps embroider it with legend, and yearn to undergo it for themselves. Surely this is how

Methodists have long regarded John Wesley's famous "Aldersgate Experience" of May 24, 1738.

Someone was reading Luther's "Preface to Romans," in which "the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ" is described, when suddenly Wesley felt his own heart "strangely warmed" by the assurance that God's love had been personally extended to him. His followers ever since have tirelessly recited the record of that moment, and have often assumed that spiritual rebirth, which Wesley certainly advocated, depends on undergoing a similar experience. Aldersgate was an event in the life of Wesley that became a central myth in the religious consciousness of Methodism.

Of course, "Methodism" is no longer a single community, but a diverse clan of denominations that share certain distinctively Wesleyan characteristics (e. g., a broadly "Arminian" doctrinal position, a high view of sanctification, a fondness for "Christian conferencing," etc.), but differ over various matters of theology, polity, ethos, and morals. Naturally, each group wants to show that it is the true heir to the founder's spirit, and since that spirit is generally assumed to have descended mightily at Aldersgate, each group has tended to "interpret" that event in a manner which reflects and/or underwrites its own theological agenda and ecclesiastical program.

Aldersgate has proven to be a flexible, all-purpose myth which has been variously used to symbolize the centrality of conversion experiences in the Christian life, authorize the rejection of liturgical formalism and clerical pomp, validate the use of religious experience as a source for theological reflection, legitimize the retrieval of orthodox Reformation doctrine, illustrate the necessity for "entire sanctification," insist on commitment to the "liberation" of the poor, etc. After 250 years of being all things to all Methodists, Aldersgate the myth had become Aldersgate the cipher. The sheer diversity of incompatible interpretations, each corresponding to the party line of its promulgators, revealed that more was being brought to the event than taken from it. The time had come to "reconsider" Aldersgate—both the event itself and the history of its various interpretations and uses among Wesley's followers—from fresh perspectives.

That is the aim of this volume of seven essays. The authors understand that no final, definitive, and "objective" reading is possible. But they employ the critical tools of historical scholarship and constructive theology, rather than the weapons of denominational rivalry, in the task. The results are refreshing. They allow Aldersgate to retain its rightful role

in the religious identity of Methodism, while preventing it from being used as everyone's ideological brickbat.

The volume opens with an introductory essay by the editor, Randy Maddox, who describes the need for a "paradigm shift" in the interpretation of Aldersgate. Although Aldersgate has been read in so many ways, there is a common assumption that it brought an abrupt and total *volte face* from something (bad) to something else (good . . . even "perfect"). This obscures the important continuities between the pre- and post-Aldersgate Wesley in matters of doctrine and discipline, as well as the spiritual doubts and psychological struggles that persisted afterward. The new paradigm offered in this volume views Aldersgate not "as the decisive experience that marked the beginning of Wesley's authentic Christian life, [but as] an important further step in his spiritual development when his intellectual convictions about God's gracious acceptance were appropriated more deeply at an affectional level" (18).

In the second essay, Roberta Bondi shows that by hankering for the pure and simple faith that Wesley allegedly received at Aldersgate, we not only misread the record of the event itself, but blind ourselves to the rough-edged reality of human life and chase after a spiritual will-o-the-wisp. Next, David Lowes Watson compares Wesley's Aldersgate experience with his General Rules. These stand, respectively, for the "power" and the "form" of the Methodist brand of godliness. Watson argues that we today will be unable to achieve the vibrant spirituality of early Methodism unless we renew the practice of the disciplines stipulated in the Rules.

In these analyses we see keen pastoral insights that all Wesleyans should heed. But there is something logically fuzzy about Bondi's appeal to the destructive effects of the conversionist model of spirituality on us as evidence that it could not have been Wesley's own mature understanding. And while Watson's distinction between the power and the form of godliness is a useful heuristic device, it would be a mistake to assume that the everyday activities of actual congregations ever possess one without the other—though Watson himself does not assert this.

The longest and finest essay in the volume is Richard Heitzenrater's study of the events in Wesley's life from 1738 through 1740, and especially his relationship with the Moravians. Heitzenrater shows how Wesley's contacts with the Moravians infused his early theology with a "dynamic pneumatology." This new ingredient persisted and grew as Wesley matured, even though he subsequently abandoned or modified many of the very practices and doctrines that helped to precipitate his

spiritual crisis of 1738 (e. g., the Moravians' notion that those who do not yet possess saving faith should refrain from using the "means of grace," and their denial that faith may come "by degrees"). This is why in his later writings Wesley did not "hearken back to Aldersgate as a model experience to the universalized" (91).

Heitzenrater's conclusions are buttressed from the side of systematic theology by Theodore Runyan's analysis of the mature Wesley's religious empiricism. Runyan argues that the spiritual growth and theological maturation which Aldersgate inaugurated led ultimately to an understanding of religious experience that was characterized by four factors: (1) God is its cause and content; (2) God has an aim (*telos*) in granting it to a person—authentic religious experience is not a random psychological event, but is part of God's grand plan to renew creation; (3) This *telos* is transformative, the progressive restoration of the divine image in the individual; and (4) This transformation is marked by distinctive religious "feelings," which are vehicles, but not conditions for God's action in our hearts and lives.

The last three essays, by Jean Miller Schmidt, Stephen Gunter, and Randy Maddox, provide a splendid overview of how Aldersgate has been variously read in the Methodist traditions and increasingly used as a talisman in our tribal festivals. They establish the need for the more nuanced and less ideologically freighted readings offered in the other articles.

Something like a consensus has emerged from these studies of Aldersgate. As Maddox writes: "At the moment, it appears that the most adequate reading of Aldersgate is that which focuses on the place of assurance in Christian life" (146). That is, Wesley was changed at Aldersgate, as the various older readings claimed. But this change consisted, not in his instantaneous transformation from a curmudgeonly Pharisee into a radiant Evangelical, or from a spiritual hypochondriac into an entirely sanctified superman. Aldersgate did not cause Wesley to repudiate the spiritual and intellectual disciplines that he had practiced earlier, nor exempt him from subsequent doubts and mistakes, nor tempt him to make similar emotionally charged experiences the litmus test for authentic regeneration. Rather, it enabled him to put aside his feverish effort to prove something (to himself? to his parents? to his neighbors? to God?) and take up the task of sharing what God had proven to him.

Of course, scholarly consensus is always fragile. Further historical study and the changing needs of the various Methodist churches may eventually alter the interpretation of Aldersgate that Maddox and company provide here. But this book will at least prevent later hero worshippers and myth makers from being mere eisegetes and ideologues.

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