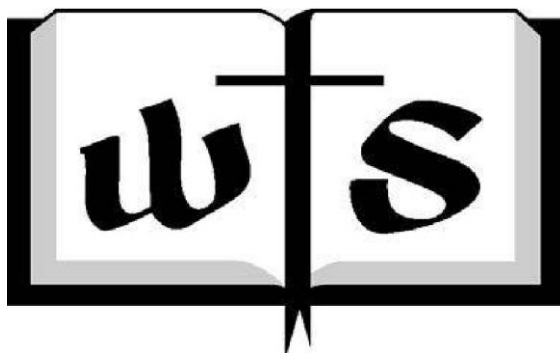


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Presidential Address: History and Hermeneutics: A Pannenbergian Perspective

Laurence W. Wood

7

John Wesley's Approach to Scripture in Historical Perspective

R. Larry Shelton

23

The Devotional Use of Scripture in the Wesleyan Movement

William Vermillion

51

A Wesleyan Interpretation of Romans 5 — 8

Jerry McCant

68

Charles Williams' Concept of Imaging Applied to the "Song of Songs" Dennis Kinlaw

85

A Problem of Unfulfilled Prophecy in Ezekiel: The Destruction of Tyre

David Thompson

93

Notes on the Exegesis of John Wesley's Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament

Timothy L. Smith

107

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HISTORY AND HERMENEUTICS: A PANNENBERGIAN PERSPECTIVE

by
Laurence Wood

What is the relation of history and hermeneutics? This has been a question of much debate in contemporary theology. It is well known that the theological giants of this century-Barth, Bultmann, and Tillich-believed that critical history raised serious problems for Christian faith. In order to protect the purity of faith from the onslaughts of critical history, revelation was identified exclusively with the Word of God. Not history but language was thus the primary locus of revelation. In this way the truth of faith could not be put at the mercy of the critical historian.

In Bultmann's kerygmatic theology and Barth's theology of the Word of God, the primary locus of revelation was centered in the Word, thus putting revelation outside the possibility of critical inquiry. Though Barth added historical elements to his dogmatics, revelation itself did not come under the general category of verifiable truth. Thus, revelation was seen as the self-authenticating Word of God. Ebeling and Fuchs have modified Bultmann's "demythologizing" into the understanding of the linguisticity of reality, i.e., language is not a secondary objectification, but the reality of revelation itself coming into verbal expression. Revelation thus occurs through and in words, for words let reality be. This experience of faith is called a language event. However, this language event preeminently exemplified and grounded theologically in the historical Jesus is not an assertion that can be objectively analyzed, but rather, it is a communication between persons as an encounter, an "appraisal."¹

In contrast to this neo-orthodox understanding of revelation as encounter through word, Wolfhart Pannenberg (the now well-known professor of Munich) radically redefines revelation in terms of history as the comprehensive whole of reality. Here the emphasis is not upon linguisticity, but upon the historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*) of all reality.² Critical history is thus not a problem for Pannenberg. Rather, it is the solution to the problem of the negative alliance set up between faith and history by the neo-orthodox champions of the Word of God theology. Of course, he has radically overhauled critical history as it had come to be practiced. He specifically rejected its positivistic presuppositions and its absolutizing of

the principle of analogy which precluded the possibility of any absolutely unique event occurring in history. His positive attitude toward critical history has been like a breath of fresh air. I would like to focus my address on his use of the historical method in doing theology.

The central motif of his theology is-theological knowledge is critical historical knowledge. The knowledge of revelation is not a supra-historical knowledge as though revelatory events occurred in a historical vacuum. The knowledge (i.e., insight)³ which faith presupposes is a knowledge of history which is accessible to human comprehension. To set the knowledge of revelation over against natural knowledge “is in danger of distorting the historical revelation into a gnostic knowledge of secrets.”⁴ Pannenberg is thus projecting a theology of reason in which it is asserted that God has made Himself known within the context of our natural processes of thought. In thus emphasizing a theology of reason, Pannenberg dislikes the category of a supernatural order of knowledge as opposed to a natural order⁵ an exaggerated manner, his polemic is: “THE HISTORICAL REVELATION IS OPEN TO ANYONE WHO HAS EYES TO SEE.”⁶ Pannenberg further polemicizes a strong methodically-objective approach in this way:

Nothing must mute the fact that all truth lies right before the eyes, and that its appropriation is a natural consequence of the facts. There is no need for any additional perfection of man as though he could not focus on the “supernatural” truth with his normal equipment for knowing. The event, which Paul witnessed, took place totally within the realm of that which is humanly visible. In particular, the Holy Spirit is not an additional condition without which the event of Christ could not be known as revelation.⁷

This means a knowledge of revelation is a knowledge of history, i.e., what factually happened in the space-time spectrum. What cannot be ascertained in the biblical traditions by means of the historical-critical method cannot be true for Christian faith. This means what is theologically true cannot be historically false⁸ But, it is also saying that only those theological truths which can be sufficiently verified according to a critical reconstruction of the biblical traditions are to be considered valid.⁹ In this way, Pannenberg intends to overcome the trend in theology which locates revelation in the moment of faith’s experience rather than in a reasoned knowledge of what is transient and concrete. Thus, “Christian faith must not be equated with a merely subjective conviction that would allegedly compensate for the uncertainty of our historical knowledge about Jesus.”¹⁰ This would only make faith indistinguishable from superstition. Pannenberg thus sees the task of the theologian to be one of critically assessing the truth-claim of Christian faith.

For much too long a time faith has been misunderstood to be subjectivity’s fortress into which Christianity could retreat from the attacks of scientific knowledge. Such a retreat into pious subjectivity can only lead to destroying any consciousness of the truth of the Christian faith.¹¹

This leads Pannenberg to say: "Faith can breathe freely only when it can be certain, even in the field of scientific research, that its foundation is true."¹² For example, the historical character of the resurrection of Jesus (without which Pannenberg argues that there can be no Christology cannot be ruled out a priori. It cannot be deprived of its historical pastness and then be reinterpreted existentially. If there is any present significance to the resurrection kerygma, then the kerygma must be taken seriously when it reports an event that happened in the past. Thus, Pannenberg points out that faith in its claim to absolute certainty must reckon with the probabilities of historical knowledge. In other words, there can be no absolute dualism of the subjective certainty of truth and the objectivity of knowledge (i.e., insight). That is, one must not speak of the resurrection kerygma solely in terms of its existential relevance without also a critical assessment of its historical factuality, even as in philosophy Hegel (whose categories are decisive in Pannenberg's theology of history) has argued that one cannot divorce appearance and reality as though what appears is relevant while the question of its reality is irrelevant. Such a dualism, Pannenberg would argue, is not any less unacceptable to philosophy than a dualism of faith and a historical knowledge of facts is to theology.

In arguing for the corporeality of Jesus' resurrection (which is the central event in his theology of universal history), Pannenberg pursues a closely reasoned argument which includes: (1) Delineating the Old Testament and Jewish eschatological expectation of the general resurrection of the dead, (2) a historical-critical analysis of the resurrection traditions, (3) a careful exegesis of the resurrection texts, (4) a philosophical reflection on the possibility of Jesus' resurrection, and (5) anthropological considerations concerning man's hope for life beyond death.¹³

There are, however, two especially significant factors Pannenberg considers in establishing the resurrection as a historical event. First, there is the language of the Old Testament and the Jewish eschatological expectation in which Jesus' resurrection was expressed. This prior expectation of the general resurrection of the dead presupposes that the Jewish community possessed a distinctive thought-pattern in which the resurrection as an expression of an imperishable life was clearly distinguished from this worldly-transitory experience of life. Hence the encounters with the risen Lord were expressed in already-existing thought-patterns, such as "resurrection from the dead," "rising from sleep," etc. (Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2; 1 Thess. 4:13ff.; 1 Cor. 11:30; 15:6, 20, 51).

The historical occurrence of Jesus' resurrection thus did not need to be interpreted for His-contemporaries, but its interpretation was inherent in the event itself because the disciples already had a prior conception of the resurrection from the dead. Consequently, the resurrection of Jesus is described not as a mere resuscitation of the dead to a temporal life, but the transformation of an old body into a "spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15:35-56). This is to say, the early Christian community knew the difference between "the intended reality and the mode in which it is expressed in language."¹⁴ Without intending to negate the facticity of the resurrection of Jesus, Pannenberg thus designates it as a "metaphor" insofar as its linguistic expression is concerned. This means that the event happened in space-time, though the language itself is analogical because it speaks of reality beyond

man's present experience. Further, the term, "resurrection of the dead," is an "absolute metaphor," for it is "the sole expression for a definite subject matter, and is neither interchangeable with other images."¹⁵

In addition to the Old Testament apocalypticism, Pannenberg delineates the significance of Jewish apocalypticism in attempting to set forth an apologetic for showing how it was possible for the disciples to confess the reality of the resurrection. He wants to show that this confession was not an arbitrary or mythological interpretation, but a valid historical statement based on what factually happened. The disciples were reporting what they had seen and not confessing what they merely believed. This is to say, in arguing for a theology of reason, Pannenberg intends to show that what the disciples reported did not require a supernatural enlightenment. Instead, the resurrection event can be seen for what it factually was by anyone as a natural (and not a supernatural) appropriation of the facts.

Whether or not Jewish apocalypticism can serve the apologetic purpose Pannenberg wishes is debatable. In fact, the Pannenbergian group, especially Rolf Rendtorff, Ulrich Wilkens, and Pannenberg in *Revelation as History*, is criticized for its interpretation of Jewish apocalyptic theology in establishing a theology of universal history. In appealing to Dietrich Rossler, Gesetz und Geschichte (Neukirchen Kreis Moers: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Erziehungsvereins, 1960,¹⁶ they argue that God's self-revelation took place in past decisive events, such as the Exodus and the Conquest, but with the exilic and postexilic prophets the idea of revelation was shifted to a future perspective, and finally in Jewish apocalyptic theology revelation was expected to take place at the end of history.¹⁷ Over against this, it has been asserted that Jewish apocalypticism comes from astrological determinism and ontological dualism, derived from Persia and Babylon. It is further contended that the apocalypticists were not concerned with history as the sphere of God's revelatory activity, but with the eschaton when this present evil world would be done away with.¹⁸

However, Pannenberg's appeal to Jewish apocalyptic theology in the present context is to point out that the conception of the resurrection of the dead was not immediately formulated with Jesus' own resurrection. But that in fact there already had existed a prior conception of the resurrection. Thus, Pannenberg's apologetic use of the prior conception of the resurrection from the dead is to point out that the disciples knew how to express the reality of Jesus' resurrection (though it was necessary to recast this prior conception in the light of what actually happened), and thus they were not resorting to mythological conceptions as such.

The second factor to be considered in establishing the resurrection as a historical event is the authenticity of the Pauline account of the appearances of the risen Lord to certain members of the Christian community (1 Cor. 15:1-11). In contrast to the Gospels' accounts of the appearances of Jesus which Pannenberg (in his highly rationalistic methodical approach to the study of Scripture) thinks "have such a strongly legendary character that one can scarcely find a historical kernel of their own in them,"¹⁹ he finds strong historical evidence of such appearances in Paul. Pannenberg writes:

In view of the age of the formulated traditions used by Paul and of the proximity of Paul to the events, the assumption that

appearances of the resurrected Lord were really experienced by number of members of the primitive Christian community and not perhaps freely invented in the course of later legendary development has good historical foundation.²⁰

It is this context of apocalyptic tradition and the appearances of Jesus as reported by Paul that Pannenberg considers decisively significant for ascertaining the resurrection as a historical event. However, the question arises whether Pannenberg has in fact “proved” the resurrection itself, or proved that Paul and those to whom he appeals as witnesses, whose testimony could be checked by Paul’s contemporaries, merely *said* that Jesus was raised on the basis of their having *remembered* certain appearances of the risen Lord. Whether or not the mere fact that it can be proved that Paul said Jesus was raised from the dead constitutes a “historical demonstration” of the resurrection itself is problematic. If one understands history in Collingwood’s sense, then Pannenberg’s proof is not a historical demonstration of the resurrection. For Collingwood, what is merely remembered does not qualify as scientific history. Paul’s statement of the resurrection is based on the “memory” of those who witnessed the appearances of the risen Lord, but there was no present concrete evidence that Paul could appeal to, excepting of course the empty tomb which Paul does not ever mention.

Collingwood, whose epistemology of history Pannenberg in general remembered certain appear follows,²¹ defines scientific historical knowledge in terms of what can be conclusively known comparable to the certainty that one can attain in mathematics. It leaves “nothing to caprice,” and allows “no alternative conclusion, but proved its point as conclusively as a demonstration in mathematics.”²² However, Collingwood does not define all reality as history.²³ In this respect, a biography is not defined as historical knowledge insofar as it relies on memory and not concrete evidence. To be sure, Collingwood does not deny that a biography is genuine knowledge, but it is not historical knowledge inasmuch as there is no immediate appeal to tangible evidence but only an appeal to one’s memory.²⁴ Precisely what historical knowledge is for can be seen when he writes:

If I say “I remember writing a letter to So-and-so last week”, that is a statement of memory, but it is not an historical statement. But if I can add “and my memory is not deceiving me; because here is his reply”, Then I am basing a statement about the past on evidence; I am talking history.²⁵

Thus, scientific historical knowledge is imaginatively re-enacting the past on the basis of what is currently given as concrete evidence.

On the other hand, whenever it is asserted that historical conclusions represent degrees of probability, then Collingwood says that one is resorting to scissors-and-paste history, which relies on memory and authority of others.²⁶ However, Collingwood affirms that we may accept as true some things even though we cannot appeal to the grounds upon which they are based. But this “information” is not scientific historical knowledge, even though it may be said that such is real knowledge and not mere belief.²⁷

Thus, when Pannenberg states that the resurrection of Jesus has “good

says that one is resort historical foundation” on the basis of those who saw the appearances of the risen Lord and that faith has its point of departure “on an event which we can know historically only with probability,”²⁸ then he is not providing a scientific historical demonstration of the corporeality of the resurrection, but rather he is only historically demonstrating that Paul and the early Christian community “said” that Jesus was raised on the basis of their memory of His having appeared to them. If this is to be called a historical demonstration, then clearly in Collingwood’s terms this is a scissors-and-paste history, based on the memory and authority of those who reported the appearances.

It is because theology has to do with degrees of probabilities in regard to history that causes the real rub for faith. This is why Kierkegaard and subsequent neo-orthodox theology refused to put faith at the mercy of historical research. For Kierkegaard, faith has its point of reference in history, but its sole condition is found in God Himself. That is, faith is solely the work of God. Though Pannenberg clearly distinguishes between the certainty of faith and the certainty of historical knowledge and shows that they lie on different levels.²⁹ nevertheless, his exclusively critical-historical is at best problematic from an apologetic standpoint. For the scriptures are primarily kerygmatic in intention and only secondarily can be appealed to as “historical sources,” though this is not to reject in principle Pannenberg’s goal of historically vindicating the knowledge of revelation which is logically prior to faith. Thus, insofar as Jesus’ resurrection is concerned, perhaps it would be more correct to say the resurrection as a historical event can be shown to be genuine knowledge and not mere belief, though it does not qualify as a historically verifiable “scientific” knowledge merely from the standpoint of the Pauline kerygma. According to Collingwood’s epistemology, Paul’s re-enactment of the resurrection event would have to elicit the support of public concrete evidence (such as the empty tomb) and not merely the memory of witnesses before it could qualify as scientific knowledge.

To be sure, Pannenberg appeals to the tradition of the empty tomb and sees in this tradition a valid historical account.³⁰ Consequently, in theory Pannenberg can assume that the resurrection event can be historically demonstrated (even according to Collingwood’s idea of “scientific” history), inasmuch as there is not only the tradition of the appearances of the risen Lord but also the tradition of the empty tomb as well. This is to say, “scientific” historical knowledge based on what is public concrete evidence (and not mere memory) can be claimed for the resurrection event itself, if in fact the tradition of the empty tomb is authentic. But on the other hand, when Pannenberg argues that (1) the Jewish apocalyptic expectation (which provided the language for expressing what is meant by the resurrection) and (2) the Pauline kerygma constitute in themselves a historical demonstration,³¹ it is debatable. Only if the tradition of the empty tomb can be supported (which Pannenberg argues in favor of) can the resurrection in theory be called a “scientific” historical demonstration.

However, to restrict the term “historical knowledge” to Collingwood’s definition is more confusing than instructive for the Christian believer whose faith has to do with historical events. Furthermore, the question arises whether or not Collingwood’s so-called “scientific” history is more a

subjective assertion rather than an objective possibility. To be sure, history should be “wholly a reasoned knowledge of what is transient and concrete.”³² But is it really possible to assert that “scientific” history proves “its point as conclusively as a demonstration in mathematics”?³³ This is to say, can historical knowledge ever advance beyond the concept of probability?

In contrast to Collingwood’s epistemology and from a more “practical” (rather than “scientific”) perspective, the believer can speak of the resurrection as a historical event on the basis of Jesus’ appearance to the disciples and can refer to this knowledge as *historical* knowledge inasmuch as the appearance was an occurrence that happened in space and time. At the same time it is to be acknowledged in accordance with Collingwood’s epistemology that there can be no “scientific” historical verifiability of the resurrection (if indeed there be such history at all!) merely from the standpoint of the Pauline kerygma, especially since Paul (1 Cor. 15:1-11) only appeals to the memory of those who witnessed the appearances of the resurrected Lord. One might further suggest that in the light of what Paul says of the reality of Jesus’ resurrection that to disbelieve that Jesus was raised from the dead reflects a particular Weltanschauung rather than what Paul’s resurrection kerygma actually affirms on the basis of eye-witness testimony, whose testimony could be checked.

Pannenberg’s emphasis in this regard has been to point out that the knowledge upon which faith has its point of departure is objective. It is his quest for the objectivity of knowledge that so characteristically differentiates the Kantian presupposition that reason can cognize no valid theological content which rather must be referred to faith as a subjective postulation. Pannenberg’s ontology is in fact a clear rejection of the Kantian dualistic definition of reality. In thus respect, he cannot accept a dualistic epistemology in which history is dichotomized into the sacred and the profane. There are not two kinds of historical reality, for God works in the ordinary world of profane history. Thus Pannenberg criticizes Richard Rothe for making the distinction between the manifestation of God in the external events of history and the inspiration of the biblical witnesses whose interpretation is essential to a correct understanding of those revelatory events. Likewise he criticizes Paul Althaus for holding to the view that the meaning of Jesus’ history as revelation is only accessible to faith.³⁴ Pannenberg writes:

Such a splitting up of historical consciousness into a detection of facts and an evaluation of them (or into history as known and history as experienced) is intolerable to Christian faith, not only because the message of the resurrection of Jesus and of God’s revelation in him necessarily becomes merely subjective interpretation, but also because it is the reflection of an outmoded and questionable historical method. It is based on the futile aim of the positivist historian to ascertain bare facts without meaning in history.³⁵

Pannenberg rightly insists upon the primordial unity of fact and meaning, event and interpretation. Every event imposes its own meaning to each inquirer. To be sure, not every event possesses equal clarity, but its clarity

will be disclosed in proportion to the knowledge of its “context of occurrence and tradition in which it took place and through which it is connected with the present and its historical interest.”³⁶ Here it can be seen that Pannenberg is not resorting to a simplistic epistemology in which the mind passively receives reality. Rather, one must critically evaluate events in the light of their contexts.

This context of tradition extends from the present moment of each particular inquirer into the past event. One must not simply inquire into the past as though it were a dead past. The historian is no cemetery caretaker.³⁷ This reciprocal relationship of past and present means that our present thought-world is not to be sacrificed to a previous world view, but at the same time our own world view is not to be considered inflexible or absolute. Pannenberg is not embracing an absolute relativism of historical knowledge, but rather he is pointing out that any one event has its inherent meaning only as it is seen in the context of universal history. Obviously truth in any absolute sense of the word cannot be rationally comprehended by finite man, but this does not minimize the fact that the greater a knowledge of the tradition-historical context of any event, the greater one’s understanding of the event will be.

Pannenberg is careful to guard against permitting one’s own subjective interpretation to be injected into an event of the past. Though an event must be interpreted in the context of universal history, this does not mean one can inject whatever interpretation he likes into the event. “If we are to take these facts seriously, nothing ought to be inserted so as to allow them to be seen in a way different from what would naturally emerge.”³⁸

That one does not see the events correctly does not mean that they are beyond human reason to know. It could be that one does not have sufficient historical data to see the meaning of an event. At any rate, insofar as the meaning of the Christ event is concerned, that certain men do not see Jesus as the revelation of God does not indicate this unique event is above reason to know. “If the problem is not thought of in this way, then the Christian truth is made into a truth for the in-group, and the church becomes a gnostic community.”³⁹

It can be seen that Pannenberg distinguishes between faith and knowledge in a comparable way to the Reformers’ distinction of *notitia*, *assensus*, and *fiducia*.⁴⁰ Faith is trust in Jesus and His message. It is this fiducial faith that creates fellowship with God. But this faith is not blind gullibility. It is based on knowledge, i.e., insight (*notitia* plus *assensus*). Faith has its frame of reference in historical events which can be sufficiently verified thus satisfying the demands of our critical rationality, while the experience of faith itself, on the other hand, has its sole condition in the free grace of God. This means faith is logically preceded by knowledge and thus presupposes its basis is true. But the condition for faith is the work of God. To be sure, this knowledge of faith’s basis may not be psychologically antecedent to faith, i.e., faith may not have a scientific knowledge of its basis, but it at least must presuppose that this basis is true.

It would thus not be accurate in the strict sense of the word to say that Pannenberg is trying to prove faith. Pannenberg is quite willing to subsume knowledge under the category of faith in the Reformer’s terminology. Faith, in this respect, includes *notitia*, *assensus*, and *fiducia*. But even here

notitia and *assensus* logically precede *fiducia*.⁴¹ Pannenberg further points out the relationship of faith and knowledge when he writes: "One cannot really know of God 's revelation in Jesus Christ without believing. But faith does not take the place of knowledge."⁴² Thus faith has its sole condition in the work of God and is not the accomplishment of man, though at the same time Pannenberg contends that the knowledge which faith presupposes must be open to critical historical research. Thus it is trust in Jesus which creates fellowship with God and not theoretical knowledge.

He who believes in Jesus has salvation in Jesus whom he trusts, without regard to the question how it stands with his historical and theological knowledge of Jesus. The presupposition is, of course, that fellowship with Jesus really mediates and assures salvation. The research and knowledge of theology, or at least of the theoretical disciplines of theology, deal with the truth of this presupposition of faith. Such knowledge is thus not a condition for participating in salvation, but rather it assures faith about its basis. It thereby enables faith to resist the gnawing doubt that it has no basis beyond itself and that it merely satisfies a subjective need through fictions, and thus is only accomplishing self-redemption through self-deception.⁴³

Kierkegaard, in dichotomizing faith and history, had said that any attempt to substantiate faith through proving its historical basis was a sign that one did not believe. The greater the historical uncertainty the greater the passion of faith. By contrast, Pannenberg says the refusal to examine the historical basis of faith is a sign one has not truly believed. The unexamined faith which deliberately refuses to know its bases is indistinguishable from a works righteousness which accomplishes self-redemption through self-deception.

To be sure, the certainty of faith lies on a different level from the probability of historical knowledge. In this respect, faith is a gift of God, but critical history is not necessarily the work of the devil.

This emphasis upon history as the locus of revelation which is open to rational inquiry stands in radical contrast to all forms of dialectical theology. Pannenberg readily admits that this exclusively historical approach puts faith at the mercy of historical research. In this respect, one must reckon with the possibility that the knowledge upon which faith is based could be shown to be false in the light of future research. To be sure, Pannenberg does not take this possibility to be a probability: "I see no occasion for apprehension that such a position of research should emerge in the foreseeable future. But in principle it cannot be excluded."⁴⁴

Since the only means of ascertaining the revelation of God in Jesus of Nazareth is through the historical method (i.e., the historian must investigate what the facts are behind the kerygma),⁴⁵ Pannenberg cannot subscribe to any form of an authoritative "Word of God" theology which would have the effect of merely suppressing critical rationality and compelling belief. Until the Enlightenment, the Bible had been more or less identified as the Word of God, which was conceived as supernaturally inspired. In neo-orthodoxy, revelation was no longer identified with the Bible, but with the Word of God as kerygmatic proclamation (Bultmann) or

as Jesus Christ who is the source of the preached and the written word (Barth).⁴⁶ Pannenberg says this shift from the orthodox concept of revelation nevertheless left intact the idea of authoritarianism. “But for men who live in the sphere in which the Enlightenment has become effective, authoritarian claims are no longer acceptable.”⁴⁷ Pannenberg in this way is seeking to point out the inadequacy of all authoritarian theologies which in essence would exempt the truth-claim of Christian faith from critical rationality. He thus says: “It was for this reason that I finally turned away from the ‘theology of the Word of God’ in its different present-day forms.”⁴⁸

To be sure, Pannenberg admits that authoritarianism is a characteristic feature of both the Old and New Testaments, that the prophets conceived of their message as the authoritative Word of God and that the apostles (especially Paul) identified their message as the authoritative Word of God. Such authoritarianism is characteristic of episcopal and papal claims, as well as the Reformers’ sola scriptura. However, Pannenberg sees in the Enlightenment’s demand for individual freedom over against all forms of authority the mature result of Christian faith itself.⁴⁹ Pannenberg thus wants to separate the authentic (in the sense of being verifiable) biblical experiences of God from the authoritarian claims of the Bible itself. In this respect, Pannenberg speaks of the dissolution of the Protestant Scripture principle. What is normative for valid theological statements is not the biblical texts themselves, but the historically verifiable events which the texts reports.⁵⁰

Thus, what Pannenberg calls for is a “depositivization” of the “pre- modern Christian tradition.”⁵¹ This depositivization would render useless the idea of demythologizing, especially in the light of the fact that Pannenberg thinks demythologizing in Bultmann did not completely abandon the outmoded authoritarianism of the church tradition.⁵² Thus, his basic disagreement with the theology of the Word of God is its suppression of rational inquiry into revelation:

The question concerning the revelation of God, as it has been reformulated on the basis of the Enlightenment, is not seeking for some authoritarian court which suppresses critical questioning and individual judgment, but for a manifestation of divine reality which meets the test of man’s matured understanding as such.⁵³

He thus says that “thinking which has appropriated the questions of the Enlightenment can no longer be content with asserted authorities.” Rather, modern man “must ask about the adequacy of the claims of authority.” Otherwise, if authoritarian claims compel belief then faith will “deteriorate into the ‘work’ of an illusory redemption of oneself.” This would mean that “the believer who thinks that he can give the answer to the trial of gnawing doubt through the act of faith itself is already on the road to such a self-deceptive works-righteousness.”⁵⁴ In thus rejecting any authoritarian feature insofar as the idea of revelation is concerned, Pannenberg is trying to guard theology against the charge of illusion in Feuerbach’s or Freud’s sense.⁵⁵

Pannenberg, however, makes it quite clear that he is not intending to lessen the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. In reply to

John Cobb's criticism that Pannenberg draws "attention away from the question of God's immediate dealings with individuals,"⁵⁶ Pannenberg says: "Far be it from me to contest the immediacy of contingent divine activity in individuals."⁵⁷ Cobb's criticism is prompted by Pannenberg's insistence that a direct self-manifestation (not a direct self-revelation) of God,⁵⁸ i.e., God directly manifesting Himself to someone in the form of a verbal communication, is not truly revelation for us, except as it can be "confirmed" to be true on the basis of its traditio-historical context. This is to say, a direct self-manifestation of God which takes the form of "prophetic inspiration" does not have "an autonomous status as revelation,"⁵⁹ so far as it relates to our critical consciousness today.

In effect, it would thus certainly appear, despite his denial, that Pannenberg has minimized the prophetic word which is so characteristic of the Old Testament. He clearly rejects the idea of any inspired word even if it should be the Old Testament prophets. Only as the prophetic word conveys what has happened in the past and from this announces provisionally what will happen in the future does it have any theological validity today. Thus Pannenberg clearly suggests that he will not allow for the validity of any divinely inspired communication to the prophets, for words are the vehicles which convey selves are not to be seen as revelation.

To be sure, Pannenberg correctly points out that a direct experience of God as well as all consciousness "is itself mediated through the previous history of individuals within their environment, as well as through their relation to the future toward which their anxieties and hopes are directed."⁶⁰ And of course, his emphasis upon the inseparable relationship of historical experience and language is intended to be directed against the Barthian theology of the Word of God which says quite plainly that revelation is not concerned directly with the question of historical understanding. But, if the Barthian theology placed one-sided emphasis upon the "word" as the medium of revelation, it is clear that Pannenberg has one-sidedly emphasized historical events as the medium of revelation.

Further, if Pannenberg so strongly insists that the revelatory events are open for anyone who has eyes to see that the interpretation of these events is self-evident to historical reason, why is there no general consensus of opinion concerning the revelation of God in Jesus of Nazareth? Pannenberg's answer is found in Paul's statement that "the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers" (2 Cor. 4:4)⁶¹ If this is so, then historical reason can hardly qualify as the sole means of ascertaining the proper interpretation of revelatory events. Instead, one must rely also upon the Holy Spirit "who will guide you into all the truth" (John 16:13). This is not to introduce the Holy Spirit as a "stop-gap" for ignorance, but a fundamental biblical recognition that man's powers of reason also come under the curse of the Fall.

This related question must also be put to Pannenberg. If he does not discount the direct influence of the Holy Spirit upon the believer, why must it be asserted that only through the historical method can God's revelation in history be established. To be sure, revelation must show itself to man's critical rationality as being valid. But if God's Spirit is really operative in the life of the believer, then cannot "contemporary Christian experience"

be a *decisive* factor? If God really acted in the past events to make Himself known, can He not likewise confirm His past activity in our “contemporary Christian experience”? Is this not the significance of the Reformers’ teaching concerning the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum*, that one is brought to fiducial faith through the inward motion of the Holy Spirit, who likewise guarantees the certainty of what is the basis of faith? John Calvin put it this way:

But I answer, that the testimony of the Spirit is superior to reason. For as God alone can properly bear witness to his own words, so these words will not obtain full credit in the hearts of men, until they are sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit. The same Spirit, therefore, who spoke by the mouth of the prophets, must penetrate our hearts, in order to convince us that they faithfully delivered the message with which they were divinely intrusted.⁶³

Does he not in effect allow for at least the partial legitimation of the knowledge of revelation through the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum* when he says that one can have fellowship with Jesus without regard to his theological and historical knowledge? Thus if one can say that the Holy Spirit imparts the inward certainty of the truth of revelation, is not Pannenberg’s heavy reliance upon the historical method a one-sided neglect of the cognitive aspect of faith?

To be sure, Pannenberg deserves the credit for pointing out so cogently that the biblical texts must be treated as historical sources if faith is not to be made suspect. He has thus impressively shown in his major book, *Jesus—God and Man*, that the believer’s subjective certainty of God’s revelation can be seen to be objectively true. But in thus stressing the exclusively historical method for getting at the actual course of revelatory events, has he not depreciated the theological intention of the biblical texts? This devaluation of the theological intention of the biblical texts is especially seen in his negative judgment concerning the passion narratives. To be sure, Pannenberg’s desire for the rational purity of faith accounts for this devaluation, and thus much of the theological interpretation of the gospel writers looks too much like a subjective and arbitrary projection into the actual course of events of Jesus’ life.

Is this presupposition valid? Are many of the theological interpretations of the gospel evangelists arbitrary and mythological? This question reveals the basic flaw of his theological method. All theological knowledge is not historically controllable knowledge. What is needed in theological reflection is a balance between revelation as word and *Revelation as History*. Pannenberg has rightly insisted on this point as well, especially in his stress upon the ontological unity of events and meaning. But many events biblical history are not historically demonstrable, even though they are brought into conjunction with other events which are verifiable in principle. Furthermore, some events would not have been revelatory unless they had been accompanied by the inspired word of God, as for example when God’s word preceded and followed the Exodus event in order that Moses might understand what the event meant (Exodus 14).

I agree with Pannenberg that the primary locus of revelation resides in

historical events in which the work of God is grounded. And I agree that critical history can be an important aid to faith. But the knowability of revelation and its reliability resides first and foremost in the witness of the Spirit of Christ poured out upon the Church at Pentecost.

In this respect, the confirmation of the truth of God's Word through the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit refers both to the Spirit's testimony in the experience of each believer and also in the experience of the Church as a corporate community. In other words, the confirmation of divine truth occurs personally and corporately. That is, the testimony of the Spirit occurs within the experience of the Church and within the experience of the individual believer. Hence Wesley's stress upon experience and tradition as sources for doing theology are closely connected with the doctrine of the internal testimonies of the Spirit. This corporate and public emphasis upon the doctrine of the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit thus avoids an arbitrary subjectivism.

Otherwise if the experience of faith is not a way of knowing, then Martin Kaehler's question raised toward the end of the last century is all the more relevant: "How can Jesus Christ be the authentic object of the faith of all Christians if the questions what and who he really was can be established only by ingenious investigation and if it is solely the scholarship of our time which proves itself equal to this task?"⁶⁴

Practically, Pannenberg says faith is mediated to the believer without regard to his comprehension of critical history. Yet, he altogether disallows at the theoretical level any connection whatever between what the scholar does in establishing the nature of truth on the one hand and what he confesses as a practicing believer on the other hand. But if faith is informed by critical history, as Pannenberg maintains, surely critical history must itself also be brought under the discipline of faith.

Pannenberg thus does not fully succeed in integrating faith and history. In his method for doing theology, critical history is an aid to faith, but faith is not an aid to critical history.

It seems to me that the proper relationship between history and hermeneutics does not lie wholly with Pannenberg or with Karl Barth. A mediating synthesis which is so much needed in theology today would maintain the interdependency history and hermeneutics while giving priority to the Word of God which is nonetheless informed by critical history. I believe such a synthesis would reflect the spirit of Wesley's theological method-the primacy of scripture supported by reason, experience and tradition.

Notes

1. Gerhard Ebeling, *Word and Faith*, trans. J. W. Leitch (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1960), pp. 318, 326, 331; Ernst Fuchs, "The New Testament and Hermeneutical Problem," *The New Hermeneutic*, ed. James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr. (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), pp. 116-19, 124-25.

2. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theology as History*, ed. James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr. (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 242.

3. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, trans. David Granskeu and Edward Quinn (London: Sheed and Ward, 1969), p. 198.
4. Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, p. 135.
5. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Basic Questions in Theology*, trans. G. H. Kehm (London SCM Press, 1970), 1:13.
6. Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, p. 135.
7. Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, p. 136. It is this premise that God's revelation is self-evident to historical reason that has justly occasioned the criticism that in effect Pannenberg does not sufficiently clarify "the transition from historical fact to faith" (Helmut G. Garder and W. Taylor Stevenson, "The Continuity of History and Faith in the Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg: Toward an Erotics of History," *The Journal of Religion*, LI, no. 1 [January 1971], 51). Cf. L. Steiger, "Revelation-History and Theological Reason: A Critique of the Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg," trans. J. C. Weber, *History and Hermeneutic*, ed. Robert W. Funk (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 126.
8. Karl E. Braaten, *History and Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), p. 92.
9. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1968), pp. 99, 109; *Basic Questions in Theology*, 1:38-39, 50, 198-99.
10. Pannenberg, *Theology as History*, p. 131.
11. Pannenberg, *Theology as History*, p. 131.
12. Pannenberg, *Theology as History*, p. 131.
13. Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, pp. 53-114.
14. Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, p. 75.
15. Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, p. 187.
16. Cf. Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, p. 62.
17. Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, pp. 47-48, 59-66, 111-12, 128; *Basic Questions in Theology*, 1:20-21.
18. Cf. Robert North, "Pannenberg's Historicizing Exegesis," *The Heythrop Journal*, II, No. 4, 377-400; H. D. Betz, "The Concept of Apocalyptic in the Theology of the Pannenberg Group," *Journal for Theology and the Church*, 6 (1969): 192-207; William R. Murdock, "History and Revelation in Jewish Apocalypticism," *Interpretation*, 21 (1967): 167-87. It should be pointed out that Pannenberg has acknowledged that his idea of the Jewish apocalyptic theology of history must be revised (*Basic Questions in Theology*, 1:xviii).
19. Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, p. 89.
20. Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, p. 91.
21. Pannenberg, *Basic Questions in Theology*, 1:70-72, 78-80.
22. Robin G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: University Press, 1962), p. 262.

23. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, pp. 210, 302.
24. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, p. 304.
25. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, pp. 252-53.
26. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, pp. 257-63.
27. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, pp. 256-57.
28. Pannenberg, *Theology as History*, p. 273.
29. Pannenberg, *Theology as History*, p. 273.
30. Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, pp. 99-106.
31. Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, p. 98.
32. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, p. 234.
33. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, p. 262.
34. Pannenberg, *Theology as History*, pp. 125-216.
35. Pannenberg, *Theology as History*, p. 126.
36. Pannenberg, *Theology as History*, p. 127.
37. Pannenberg, “Hermeneutics and Universal History,” *History and Hermeneutic*, p. 126.
38. Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, p. 137.
39. Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, p. 137.
40. Pannenberg, *Basic Questions in Theology*, 2:30ff.
41. Pannenberg, *Basic Questions in Theology*, 2:30.
42. Pannenberg, *Theology as History*, p. 128.
43. Pannenberg, *Theology as History*, p. 269.
44. Pannenberg, *Theology as History*, p. 274.
45. Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, p. 99; *Basic Questions in Theology*, 1:139, 160, 195-98.
46. Pannenberg, *Theology as History*, p. 226.
47. Pannenberg, *Theology as History*, p. 226.
48. Pannenberg, *Theology as History*, p. 227. It is not altogether justifiable for Pannenberg to charge that Barth’s theology of the Word of God is merely subscribing to an uncritical acceptance of authority. Barth (as well as Bultmann) is just as concerned with the truth-claim of Christian faith as Pannenberg is. Instead of suggesting that Barth equates faith with blind gullibility, it would be more accurate to say that Barth locates the validation of Christian faith in God’s authentication of, His Word in Holy Scripture (i.e., *testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum*), whereas Pannenberg thinks the historical-critical method is entirely adequate for such purposes.
49. Pannenberg, *Theology as History*, pp. 227-228
50. Pannenberg, “La signification de l’eschatologie pour la comprehension de l’apostolicite et de la catholicite de l’Eglise “ *Istina*, 12 (1969):163. Cf. *Basic Questions in Theology*, 1:4, 6, 7, 12; *Theology as History*, p. 228.

51. Pannenberg, *Theology as History*, p. 228.
52. Pannenberg, *Theology as History*, p. 228.
53. Pannenberg, *Theology as History*, p. 229.
54. Pannenberg, *Theology as History*, p. 270.
55. Pannenberg, *Theology as History*, p. 239.
209. 56. Cobb, "Past, Present, and Future," in Pannenberg, *Theology as History*, p. 238.
57. Pannenberg, *Theology as History*, p. 238.
58. A direct self-revelation would be the full disclosure of God's essence, whereas a direct self-manifestation involves only the appearance of God without any reference to a disclosure of His essence. Cf. Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, p. 9.
59. Pannenberg, *Theology as History*, p. 238.
60. Pannenberg, *Theology as History*, p. 238.
61. Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, p. 136.
62. Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, pp. 99, 109.
63. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1879), 1:72.
64. Martin Kaehler, *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic, Biblical Christ*, trans. Carl Braaten (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), p. 102.

JOHN WESLEY'S APPROACH TO SCRIPTURE IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

by

Larry Shelton

Various appeals have been made recently for a renewed and vigorous assertion of an historically valid and presently relevant Wesleyan theology.¹ It is with the motivation to contribute to this goal that this hermeneutical analysis is undertaken. The way in which John Wesley used Scripture and his understanding of the nature of its authority are foundational issues. This analysis will note major issues in the hermeneutical heritage of the Church, Wesley's kinship to this heritage, and suggestions for the application of these findings in contemporary Wesleyanism.

The focus for research has been primarily in the forty-four sermons and Notes upon the New Testament, sources generally accepted as the "standard Wesley" and which he felt were the most representative expressions of his position.² More specifically, explicit statements in the Notes which Wesley made with reference to his view or use of Scripture are explored, and his sermon, "The Means of Grace," is examined.

Since his hermeneutical principles closely resemble those of the Fathers and Reformers, a brief historical and hermeneutical survey will be used as a context for gaining perspective on the biblical approach of Wesley himself.

I. Historical Hermeneutical Perspective

Several hermeneutical issues which are relevant to the task at hand are the authority and inspiration of scripture, the purpose of Scripture, key interpretative principles, and the relationship of the Holy Spirit to Scripture. These issues will be examined in the work of several selected churchmen in order to provide a historical framework for the analysis of Wesley himself.

A. Irenaeus

In the patristic period, an era of controversy and serious attacks upon Scripture and the Church, Irenaeus brought competent and balanced theological leadership to bear upon the heretical Gnostics. He asserts that a basic reason for the corrupt Scriptural interpretations of these heretics is found in their immorality and evil intent toward Scripture.³ They use glaring hermeneutical distortions to pervert Scripture to their own devious

ends.⁴ They interpret the obscure passages by other, obscure and ambiguous ones and thus weave “ropes of sand,” and ignore the proper context of passages and bring their own interpretative system to the text and thus dismember and destroy the truth.⁵

Briefly, Irenaeus’ principles of authority and interpretation are seven: the redemptive message of Scripture, progressive revelation, the unity of Scripture, historicity, textual study, literary interpretation and perspicuity.⁶ With regard to the last principle, perspicuity, the enlightening work of the Holy Spirit is necessary within sinful hearts before the truth can be clearly perceived. The spiritual person is guided by the Holy Spirit to discern the unity and clarity of Scripture.⁷ Thus, it is because presbyters are spiritual men and the heretics are not that the interpretations of the former have merit.⁸

Furthermore, with regard to authority, Irenaeus notes that Scripture is the written form through which the Holy Spirit speaks. Scripture is trustworthy because of its spiritual origin, and the apostolic tradition of the Church serves to confirm the witness of the Bible.⁹ Traditions safeguard Scripture from corruption and interprets it in the apostolic sense. In the authentic apostolic Church, the Holy Spirit, as the vicar of Christ, would not permit Christians to hold a different faith from that preached by the apostles.¹⁰ Thus, there is a close interaction between Scripture and tradition. They function concomitantly to validate each other. Both are means by which revelation is transmitted to the Church. ¹¹ It is, therefore, the Holy Spirit, working through both the Scriptures and the apostolic tradition, who authenticates the truth of revelation. This he calls the *regula veritatis*, the truth itself which is ultimately the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and His teaching.¹² It is the truth behind both Scripture and tradition, and its authenticity is guaranteed by both the apostolic succession of bishops and the Holy Spirit who endows them with a charisma *veritatis certum*. ¹³ Thus the theological teaching of the apostles is guarded by the Holy Spirit who works through the means of the apostles, prophets, and teachers.¹⁴ This internal testimony of the Holy Spirit forms the key authority for the maintenance of theological integrity in the Church’s life.¹⁵ The authority and interpretation of Scripture for Irenaeus both rest on the vital function of the Holy Spirit working within the Church and through Scripture itself. It is thus the function of the Spirit through Scripture which provides religious certainty, not the form of Scripture or its autographs. Heretics are the truth through the Holy Spirit. When Irenaeus speaks of Scriptures “without falsification,” he means that doctrine comes to us by reading the Word of God diligently and “without falsification” of the interpretation by the reader or Church.¹⁶

B. The Alexandrian School

In response to attacks upon the Christian faith by those who would characterize it as immoral, trivial, and absurd, the Alexandrian School with Pantaeus and Clement of Alexandria developed allegory as a hermeneutic to see the underlying truth in biblical passages when the obvious or literal meaning was ambiguous or objectionable to the orthodox point of view.¹⁷ Clement notes that it is the literal sense that was the basis of misuse

of Scripture typical of heretics. He distinguished between the body and spirit of Scripture, with each corresponding respectively to the literal and allegorical interpretations.

The most distinguished of the Alexandrian School is Origen, Clement's successor. He continued developing allegories in an attempt to understand the ultimate mystery contained in Scripture. In doing so he concerns himself less with the literal meaning than the mystical meaning which he insists is the intended meaning for all of Scripture. The spiritual sense contains the essence of divine revelation and is of highest importance.¹⁸ Furthermore, Origen feels that only through Himself in the exegete does the Holy Spirit reveal the inner, spiritual truth. He sees the need for spiritual illumination in order to understand and apply the meaning of the Spirit of Scripture.

Although attempts were made to show that the literal sense was basic to the spiritual one, allegory remained the order of the day in Alexandrianism. The trend continued toward treating the literal sense as inferior in practice. The Holy Spirit who conveyed the real meaning to the inspired writers of Scripture enabled the exegete to apprehend the spiritual mean. The grammatical, literal sense was the husk containing the inner kernel of truth, and the illuminating grace of the Holy Spirit was necessary in order for the exegete to extract the original meaning intended by the Holy Spirit.¹⁹

Although the allegorical method was limited in its understanding of adequate literary canons, linguistic knowledge, and familiarity with Hebrew literary style, it was not without satisfactory results in winning the respect of the secular philosophers who did not wish to forfeit their reason in matters of faith.²⁰ And while allegorism tended to the development of an elite body of interpreters and doubtless contributed to the rise of authoritarianism in biblical interpretation it did point out the importance of the intentionality of the writers and the illuminating role of the Holy Spirit in the interpretative process.²¹

C. The Antiochian School

In opposition to the allegorical excesses of the Alexandrians, the Antiochian School, founded by Diodorus of Tarsus in the late third century, asserted several basic hermeneutical points. These issues were most clearly represented by Theodore of Mopsuestia, known as "The Exegete." First, he recognizes more clearly the distinction between the Old and New Testaments, and refuses to read Christian doctrines back into the Old Testament. He insists on taking it in its historical sense while the Alexandrians see Christ in every passage of the Bible and call Theodore a "Judaizer." Second, Theodore studies a passage as a whole and in both its narrower and broader contexts. He does not build doctrines on isolated passages. Third, he takes a more independent attitude toward Church tradition, in contrast to the authoritarian tendencies of Irenaeus, Tertullian, and the Alexandrians. The Antiochians see Scripture not as one vast mystery, but believe it can be understood if one searches it humbly, patiently, wisely, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Here we are able to see the foreshadowing of the principles of *sola Scriptura*, the perspicuity or clarity of Scripture and the need for the illumination of the Holy Spirit in interpretation—all

issues strongly stressed by the Reformers.²² Finally, Theodore and the Antiochians see the distinction between the Jewish and Alexandrian theories of inspiration. Some of the more thoughtful Jews saw inspiration as being ethical in character and consisting of the expansion and ennoblement of the individual consciousness by the Holy Spirit. The Alexandrians were influenced by Plato and viewed inspiration as a pathological suspension of the individual consciousness. Theodore sees the fallacy in the latter and argues for the retention of the individuality and humanity of the biblical writers.²³

Thus, Theodore, as well as John Chrysostom and Jerome, does not rule out the spiritual sense of Scripture, but grounds it on the historical.²⁴ As will be seen, these emphases find fruit later in Luther's exaltation of the grammatical sense, in Zwingli's exegetical methods, and in the historical emphasis of Calvin. And although Wesley does not systematically develop a hermeneutical program, it is difficult not to find echoes of these issues in his expositions.

D. Augustine

Labeled by F. W. Farrar as "the oracle of thirteen centuries, Augustine's personal and theological influence has greatly affected the Church until the present. His strengths are as an apologist and theologian, and not necessarily as an interpreter of Scripture. He presents excellent hermeneutical principles in *De Doctrina Christiana*, but often falls woefully short of implementing them in his commentaries and sermons.²⁵ The principles are, however, quite valuable and useful. First, he points out the need for a knowledge of Hebrew and Greek because of the variety and uncertainty of the Latin versions. The sound interpreter must be able to criticize these versions by comparison with the original. Second, he emphasizes the need for interpreting the obscure passages in the light of plain ones. Third, the serious exegete should be acquainted with sacred geography, natural history, music, chronology, numerology, natural science, dialectics and rhetoric and the writings of ancient philosophers.²⁶

Furthermore, the spirit and attitude of the interpreter must be meek and lowly and not puffed up with much knowledge. He must be purified from pride, for the spirit and intent of the gospel must be reflected in the interpreter if the words are to be rightly interpreted.²⁷

Finally, he adopts the seven rules of Tychonius the Donatist, the best known of which is recapitulation which would explain the Genesis creation accounts as repetitions with different emphases rather than evidence of diverse documents.²⁸

In his concepts of the inspiration and authority, Augustine sees Scripture as "the revered pen of thy (i.e. God's) Spirit. "29 For him, Scripture is so profound that it must be approached in faith if it is to be understood at all. Faith must, therefore, precede understanding. He says, "Understand in order that thou mayest believe my words; believe in order that thou mayest understand the Word of God."³⁰

Faith in Scripture, however, is based on one's conviction of the authority of scripture. This authority is related to the Church as the key to faith and understanding.³¹ For Augustine, the Church mediates between him and the Bible. Both revelation and grace are mediated by the Church, so that

man in his sinfulness may receive through faith the knowledge of divine truth which brings salvation. The Church thus occupies the role of witness to and interpreter of Scripture, the function which the Reformers ascribed to the illumination of the Holy Spirit.³² This does not mean that the Church is infallible, for bishops and councils may err.³³ The Church is greater than the bishops, however, for it is the congregation of believers throughout history.³⁴ It is in the context of the Church that Christ interprets, illuminates, and expounds the Scriptures. It is Christ who is the guarantor and interpreter of Scripture, and He is the witness from which Scripture derives its authority.³⁵ This Christological hermeneutic functions only in those leaders of the Church whose intellectual faculties have been regenerated by grace sufficiently to perceive the depths of divine truth and to teach according to the Scriptures.³⁶ Thus, while Augustine does not formally admit that the Scriptures are vested with authority by the Church, he does functionally and formally ascribe to the Church the final authority in matters of interpretation. All matters of interpretation must be submitted to the *regula fidei*, which is ultimately the authority of the Church.³⁷ As the summary of the entire teaching of Scripture, the *regula* supposedly reflected faithfully the teaching of the apostles, but human interpretations within the *regula* soon found ways of diverging from the Bible, and the process of the authority of the Church usurping the authority of Scripture was accelerated.

Not only is Scripture authoritative because of the Church's attestation and interpretation of it, but because of the function of Scripture in bringing its readers to salvation. Augustine fully believes the Bible to be inspired,³⁸ but sees its purpose as bringing the message of salvation. It is not a textbook for science, but for matters profitable for salvation. He warns Christians not to take their "science" from the Bible, for such appeals would "expose the Bible to ridicule and inhibit non-Christians from hearing the saving truths that Scripture proclaims with authority."³⁹ He realizes that there is need for scholarly investigation of problems in the biblical text, but this is not a problem for faith, for the truth found in Scripture is in the thoughts and intentions of the writers, not simply in the form of the words. He says:

In any man's words the thing which he ought narrowly to regard is only the writer's thought which was meant to be expressed, and to which the words ought to be subservient . . . And we ought not to let the wretched cavilers at words fancy that truth must be tied somehow or other to the jots and tittles of letters; whereas the fact is, that not in the matter of words only, but equally in all other methods by which sentiments are indicated, the sentiment itself, and nothing else, is what ought to be looked at.⁴⁰

Thus, the intention of Scripture must be discerned in order to understand it, and that intention and the thought conveyed from it is what is authoritative. The purpose of the Bible is bringing the message of salvation. It is authoritative because the Spirit works through it to accomplish this very purpose.

Finally, although some insist that Augustine bases the authority of

Scripture on its inerrancy, such a basis is problematic. In a response to Jerome, he declares, "For I confess to your charity that I have learned to yield this respect and honor only the canonical books of Scripture: of these alone do I most firmly believe that the authors were completely free from error."⁴¹ As Rogers and McKim point out, the context of this statement relates to Jerome's Commentary on Galatians in which he had represented Paul as lying deliberately for expediency. Jerome was apparently trying to silence Porphyry who had emphasized the quarrel between Peter and Paul to the point of distortion. In doing so, Jerome portrayed the apostles as acting parts at Antioch in regard to the food laws, with both thus deceiving the converts and Paul deceiving his readers. Augustine says he would rather admit that Peter had done wrong and that Paul had honestly told of it, than to believe that he had deliberately written what was not true. In this sense of ethical trustworthiness, the authors of Scripture are free from error, and the integrity of their intentions is a matter of faith for Augustine.⁴² To ascribe the twentieth century version of inerrancy to Augustine is both anachronistic historically and problematic contextually.

In short, Augustine formalizes a careful approach to biblical interpretation in which the individualistic tendencies of the reader are subordinated to the *regula fidei* of the Church. He emphasizes strongly the inspiredness of Scripture and the necessity of faith for understanding divine truth. For him, Christ is central both to the message and application of Scripture and the Church is the context in which He functions to illuminate the truth of Scripture. The authority of Scripture lies primarily in its saving function in the Church, and its infallibility lies in the integrity of the intentions of the writers, while the Church fills the role of witnessing to its authority.

E. Medieval Hermeneutics

For the purposes of this study, a brief overview of medieval hermeneutical developments will suffice. From the fifth to the fifteenth centuries the authoritative role of the Church in interpretation of Scripture waxed and waned. In spite of the emphasis of Theodore, Jerome and others on the importance of the literal and historical sense of Scripture as having primary importance for doctrine, the popularity of the allegorical method increased and literal-historical exegesis fell into disuse. The Alexandrian methodology dominated the Middle Ages.

This emphasis on the spiritual-allegorical sense of the text to the detriment of the literal meaning is challenged by Hugh of St. Victor in Paris. He still emphasizes the threefold sense of Origen and Augustine in his textbook on biblical study, the Didascalicon, but differentiates between the three senses in a way which greatly enhances the stature of the historical sense. He does not subordinate the letter to the spirit, but shows that both letter and allegory pertain to knowledge, while the tropological sense pertains to virtue. This relating of the literal sense to truth on the same level as allegory increased interest in the literal meaning.⁴³ For him, the historical-literal method is the basis for grasping the intention of the writer, and it is only the author's intention which can provide any certain clue to such things as prophecy and metaphor.⁴⁴

The emphasis on the literal sense by Hugh and the Victorines is more precisely and adequately developed a century later by St. Thomas Aquinas.

He points out that all the meanings of Scripture must be based on the literal sense, which is the intended meaning of the author.⁴⁵ This literal sense involves more than merely the outward form of words or the historical meaning as understood by modern critical scholarship.⁴⁶ The full intent of the writer's original meaning was to convey the whole message of God as he was inspired to write it.⁴⁷ The spiritual sense, though based on the literal, was the explication of the intention of the divine Author. Aquinas says:

That God is the author of Holy Scripture should be acknowledged, and he has the power, not only of adapting words to convey meanings (which men also can do) but also of adapting things themselves. In every branch of knowledge words have meaning, but what is special here is that the things meant by the words also themselves mean something. That first meaning whereby the words signify things belongs to the sense first-mentioned, namely, the historical or literal. That meaning, however, whereby the things signified by the words in their turn also signify other things is called the spiritual sense; it is based on and presupposes the literal sense.... Now because the literal sense is that which the author intends, and the author of Holy Scripture is God who comprehends everything all at once in his understanding, it comes not amiss, as St. Augustine observes, if many meanings are present in the literal sense of one passage of Scripture.⁴⁸

Thus, although he utilizes allegorical interpretations, he establishes the literal sense as primary, and stresses the intentionality of the message of the inspired writer. Furthermore, he emphasizes the cooperation between the human and divine authors. The human author is an instrument of God who responds to divine enlightenment through the means of his own human limitations and imperfections. He expresses the divine revelation through his own thoughts and words. In Aristotelian terminology, God is the Primary Cause (Author), and the human writer is the secondary cause (author). God moves upon own intellect, but which express the revelation through his own natural abilities, activities, and modes of expression. The human author is thus much more than merely a pen in the hands of the Holy Spirit, for he participates in the revelation by expressing or interpreting it through his own faculties. He thus infers a distinction between the event of revelation, and inspiration, the process of interpreting and recording it. Scripture is not simply a divine mystery communicated through the passive agency of an uncomprehending writer. The writer may not know all that the Holy Spirit intends, for the prophet's mind is a "defective instrument."⁴⁹ Thus, the finished product of inspiration, Scripture, is the communication of the divinely intended message through the interpretation of an admittedly "defective instrument." In spite of the deficiency of the human author, the intended message comes through, for the literal meaning of Scripture is not limited to the outward form of the specific words used by the human author. Although he thus discredits dictation theories of inspiration in this way, he does see that the intention of the writers, both human and divine, can be discerned in the text, thus disallowing the claims of those

interpreters who claimed inspiration for their own allegorical exegetical procedures to the neglect of the literal meaning. In his method, the intention of the literal sense is based on context, historical connections, and correspondence between persons, places, things, and events in the Old and New Testaments. He places exegesis and interpretation upon a scientific basis and forms a rational approach for discerning and interpreting truth. He sees revelation as providing divine truth which cannot be apprehended by reason. But some truths which rest only on faith are demonstrable by reason.⁵⁰ Therefore, reason can be useful in discerning the intended meanings of the literal sense of Scripture. In actual practice, however, Aquinas tended to allow objective exposition to be shaped by his concern for the orthodoxy of canonical dogma and the priority of reason over faith. With this tendency to base his exegetical outcomes on the dogma and a rational system, he placed his interpretations in jeopardy of being discredited if his rational system and the orthodox dogma came into question. Nevertheless, his contributions formed both the apex of medieval Scholasticism and the beginnings of its demise.

The influence of Hugh and Andrew of St. Victor is reflected in the fourteenth century work of the Franciscan, Nicholas of Lyra. He is independent in his exegetical methodology and stresses the primacy of the literal-historical sense. He gained a mastery of Hebrew grammar from the Jewish scholars Rashi and Maimonides. Insight concerning the corruption of the manuscripts, the need for better texts, and the difference between true exposition and the chaos of subjective opinion also came from his application of principles laid down by Rashi.⁵¹

Nicholas shows the influence of his predecessors in stressing that God is the primary author of Scripture, and follows Aquinas in noting that the literal sense develops the intention of the author and the spiritual sense expounds the meaning of the things signified by the words of the human author. Although he submitted all his works to the decision and correction of the Church, he effectively broke down the tyranny of ecclesiastical tradition and with the doctrinal and practical soundness of his exposition demolished the reign of bad methodology. Farrar says of him that he was “one green island among the tideless waves of exegetic commonplace . . . the Jerome of the fourteenth century.”⁵²

In reaction to the Scholasticism which synthesized faith and reason and eventually made reason the arbiter for evaluating tradition, John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham assert that reason is inadequate to express the living tradition of the Church.⁵³ Duns Scotus’ insistence on the impossibility of proving many dogmatic and traditional assertions led to skepticism, the dissolution of the Medieval Synthesis of faith and reason, and a separation between faith and science.⁵⁴ Since he sees issues of faith as inaccessible to rational examination, he sees the tradition of the Church as the final basis for authority.

William of Ockham, a student of Duns Scotus, continued the attack and denied medieval realism, seeing the concepts behind individual objects as merely mental percepts.⁵⁵ They are only symbolic “terms,” hence he becomes known as a “terminist” or “nominalist.” He refuses to allow reason the power to elicit the theological conclusions of faith, and refuses to see theology as a science which can be controlled by principles drawn from

metaphysics. Since he believes philosophy to be irrelevant to the substantiation of faith, he asserts that the revelation of Scripture as the infallible Word of God is the basis for faith. This does not require or admit the proofs of reason for its validation.⁵⁶ Since doctrine is not amenable to rational inquiry, it is to be accepted on the basis of the authority of the Church. However, Ockham's conflicts with a derelict papacy and the absurdities, contradictions, and frivolities in the interpretations of the councils and the popes led him to assert that Scripture alone is the binding authority for the Christian.⁵⁷

F. Luther

1. Hermeneutical Heritage

In moving from the medieval period into the age of the Reformation, one can observe both a hermeneutical and a theological protest. In addition to theological issues such as justification by faith and the Word of God, there is seen also the culmination of a biblical hermeneutic which sets forth the historical-literal sense of Scripture in contrast to the classical exegesis which was bound to tradition. The principle figure in this hermeneutical revolution was Martin Luther. Although he certainly was influenced by patristic medieval hermeneutics,⁵⁸ his independence led to the replacement of ecclesiastical tradition with the Bible as the primary basis for faith and life. As his influence spread, the traditional exegesis which relied heavily on Church tradition and the Fathers began to decline.

A survey of the Index to the St. Louis edition of Luther's Works reveals references to many of the Fathers. Although the majority of entries relate to Augustine, it is clear that he is familiar with the work of Irenaeus, Origen, Tertullian, and many others. In fact, it is largely through Augustine and the Fathers that Luther is forced back to the Bible as an exclusive authority.⁵⁹

The principle influence which the medieval scholars had on Luther was the renewal of literal exegesis after Alexandrian allegory had dominated biblical interpretation for centuries. The rise of literal exegesis in this period provided both a precedent and an inspiration for Luther. He brings to maturity the trend toward a sound grammatical-historical hermeneutical method.⁶⁰

2. Authority of Scripture

What really distinguishes Luther from the Scholastics and Fathers is his tendency to deny the authority of the Church and Pope in matters of interpretation. What makes his speech at Worms revolutionary is not that it affirms the authority of Scripture, which all the Fathers and Scholastics do, but that it denies the authority of Popes and councils as exclusive and final arbiters of interpretation.⁶¹ *Sola Scriptura* thus becomes watch-ward of the Reformation.

Luther's disillusionment with the Church came when he observed the inconsistency between the doctrine taught by Scripture and the doctrine of the Church, indulgences being one example. Further, since the papacy has no basis in the New Testament and since he believes that councils and popes are both subject to error, Scripture was the only authority left as a reliable and irrefutable source of Christian doctrine.⁶²

The authority of Scripture is based on several issues for Luther. He , believes it has been given by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This is not mechanical, however. He does not see the Bible as a stereotyped collection of supernatural syllables. The sacred writers received some of their historical matter by research, and under the grace of the superintendence of the Holy Spirit they sifted and arranged it in proportion to the power and illumination they had received.⁶³ Luther is careful not to use the terminology of dictation and avoids such words as *calamus*, *secretarius*, and *dictare*, which were used by the medieval writers.⁶⁴

Another issue for the authority of Scripture is its reliability. For Luther, the Scriptures are reliable because they produce in the believer the conviction of God and salvation. This criterion is related to his own search for a gracious God. It was in the Bible that Luther found a God who justified the ungodly, and at the center of Scripture was Jesus Christ who was its theme.⁶⁵ Luther writes:

Holy Scripture possesses no external glory, attracts no attention, lacks all beauty and adornment. You can scarcely imagine that anyone would attach faith to such a divine Word, because it is without any glory or charm. Yet faith comes from this divine Word, through its inner power....⁶⁶

Thus, Luther emphasizes that although the Bible reflects genuine humanity, God uses weak and imperfect human speech to communicate adequately his divine message. The Scriptures speak clearly about salvation and the life of faith. He says, “The Holy Scriptures are a spiritual light far brighter even than the sun, especially in what relates to salvation and all essential matters.”⁶⁷ And again, “But such is the power of the Word of God that it restores to life the hearts that have died in this manner; the word of men cannot do this.”⁶⁸

Luther also strongly emphasizes the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit as a basis for trust in the authority of Scripture. For him, the Holy Spirit was both the inspirer of Scripture and the one who interprets Scripture in the present. This inner testimony witnesses to Christ and gives authority to Scripture.⁶⁹ Luther asserts, “It is the internal working of the Holy Spirit that causes us to place our trust in this Word of God, which is without form or comeliness.”⁷⁰ The Word and Spirit must always function together. Since Luther sees a difference between the subject matter (*die Sache*) and the form of Scripture, the living Word who is the content of Scripture can be mediated through the written form by the operation of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the Bible becomes the medium of salvation. He says, “The Word is the bridge, the narrow way (*semita*) by which the Holy Spirit comes to us,” and “it is in and through the Word that the Spirit comes and gives faith to whosoever He will.”⁷¹ Thus, for Luther, the authority of Scripture consists in its ability to accomplish the work of salvation through the Spirit in the hearts of those who hear it. It is Jesus Christ working in and through the Scripture who is the infallible and inerrant Word, and the Scripture faithfully reveals Him through the human instrumentality of the writers inspired by the Spirit.⁷² It is this content, not the form, of Scripture which is authoritative.

Although some scholars contend that Luther also based the authority

of Scripture on the inerrancy of the original autographs, this does not find support in Luther himself. Explicit statements about the autographs were not made by the Reformer, and his statements about Scripture not lying or containing falsehood are made in contexts which obviously refer to Scripture's doctrinal integrity. For example, when Luther says that there is no falsehood in Scripture, he is speaking about its ability to accomplish righteousness in believers. He says:

For we are perfect in Him and free from unrighteousness because we teach the Word of God in its purity, preach about His mercy, and accept the Word in faith. This does away with unrighteousness, which does not harm us. In this doctrine there is no falsehood, here we are pure through and through. This doctrine is genuine, for it is a gift of God.⁷³

It is readily seen that he means there is no falsehood in the fact that the Word of God does away with unrighteousness.

Thus, the conviction that Scripture is inspired and the evidence that the Holy Spirit effectively works through it to produce faith and reliably work salvation in the hearer is the foundation for biblical authority. It is the inner sense of the Christological content of Scripture which is infallible. And this sense is mediated by the Holy Spirit through its outer written form.

3. Principles of Interpretation

Luther was forced by his own study of the Scriptures and the history of doctrine to conclude that both councils and popes were subject to error in doctrinal matters. Therefore, Scripture is the only authority left, and his doctrine of **solā Scriptura** affirms that Scripture is the only reliable and effective source of Christian doctrine.⁷⁴ In order to apprehend clearly these doctrines, sound principles of interpretation must be applied. And since Scripture cannot be subjected to an external authority, the principles for its interpretation must be inductively derived from within the biblical test. His basic principles are six.

Personal Spiritual Preparation. Competence in languages, history, or theology is not sufficient to interpret Scripture accurately, for without the quickening of the Spirit, the interpreter cannot enter into the inner experience of the writers and discern vital reality instead of just words and phrases.⁷⁵ Luther says in his exposition on Psalm 68:15, “. . . the gatekeeper, the Holy Spirit, will open the door to those that enter. For if God does not open and explain Holy Writ. no one can understand it; it will remain a closed book, enveloped in darkness”⁷⁶ He told Spalatin “Therefore the first duty is to begin with a prayer of such a nature that God in His great mercy may grant you the true understanding of His Words.”⁷⁷

Clarity or Perspicuity of Scripture. In contrast to the medieval exegetes, Luther believes that each passage of the Bible contains one clear and definite meaning. He says, “If the words are obscure at one place, yet they are clear at another place.... But if many things still remain abstruse to many people, this does not arise from the obscurity of Scripture but from their own blindness and feebleness of understanding.”⁷⁸ He believes that each Christian has the duty and privilege to search the Scriptures for himself, for it must be released from bondage to the experts.

Scripture Is Its Own Interpreter (*Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*). This concept results logically from the principle of clarity. If one presupposes that Scripture is essentially clear, then it follows that Scripture should be compared with Scripture, so that obscure passages may be understood in the light of clearer ones. Luther says, “In this manner Scripture is its own light. It is a fine thing when Scripture explains itself.”⁷⁹

The corollary to this principle is the analogy of faith (*analogia fidei*), which means that all interpretations of parts must be in consistency with the whole tenor of Scripture.⁸⁰

Priority of the literal sense. He rejects the medieval fourfold sense of Scripture, the *Quadrigena*, which led to ingenious and extravagant interpretations. He often refers to the literal sense as the grammatical or historical sense, and recognizes the figurative nature of language. He closely relates the literal and spiritual senses, pointing out that the latter comes from the illumination of the Spirit and not from fanciful allegory.⁸¹

Letter and Spirit (inner and outer Word). Like Augustine, Luther notes the significance of the letter and spirit as it relates to the work of the Law and Gospel. He does not equate Law with the Old Testament, but notes that all of Scripture is Law without the Spirit, and with the Spirit all of Scripture is gospel. The spiritual sense is a new apprehension of the Word in faith, and therefore the Spirit gives a new interpretation which is based on the literal sense and which brings a deeper significance to it.⁸²

Christocentricity. Integrally related to the literal-spiritual principle is Luther’s final major hermeneutical principle, Christocentricity. “In the whole Scripture there is nothing but Christ, either in plain words or involved words.”⁸³ This principle resolves the tension between the inner and outer Word, the spiritual and literal senses, by synthesizing both through a dynamic understanding that Christ is both and both are one in Him. He becomes the context in which the alliance of letter and spirit is achieved, and in faith the believer’s spirit is united with the Spirit of Christ so that the Word becomes internalized and understood.⁸⁴

The subject matter or inner sense of the biblical text is illuminated by the Holy Spirit to provide the Christocentric or saving meaning. This is necessary in addition to the work of the exegete on the grammatico-historical level. Prenter summarizes Luther’s emphasis thus:

If God does not speak into the heart while the ear listens to the outward Word, the outward Word remains the word of man and law. When we hear the Word of Scripture, we are compelled to wait on the Spirit of God. It is God who has the Scripture in his hand. If God does not infuse his Spirit, the hearer of the Word is not different from the deaf man. No one rightly understands the Word of God unless he receives it directly from the Holy Spirit.⁸⁵

Thus, it is only through the Holy Spirit that one arrives at a proper understanding of Scripture. Says Luther, “No one can accept the Word unless his heart has been touched and opened by the Holy Spirit.”⁸⁶ Although this emphasis on the Holy Spirit’s illuminating of Christ, the inner sense of the Scriptures, may seem to minimize the objectivity of

inspiration, Luther's intention is to point out the blindness of natural man and his lack of spiritual perception without the Spirit.

G. Other Reformers

Huldrych Zwingli's doctrine of Scripture has two basic emphases. With regard to its authority, he points out that it is the Word of God because it has the ability to bring to pass that which it declares, the fulfillment of prophesy and salvation. And with regard to interpretation, he asserts that it has the ability to bring with it its own inward illumination so that it is clearly understood and interpreted by the reader.⁸⁷ Although he is a learned scholar and is fully aware of the importance of scholarly exegesis, he believes that since the Word of God was mediated through the documents of Scripture, the Holy Spirit needs to direct and apply this divine content to the faithful reader.⁸⁸ He says, "God reveals himself by his own Spirit, and we cannot learn of him without his Spirit."⁸⁹

As a theologian and expositor, John Calvin also emphasizes the need for both piety and learning in the study of Scripture. He feels that the Bible cannot be properly interpreted and applied without the illumination sealing witness of the Holy Spirit. He has been called "the theologian of the Holy Spirit."⁹⁰ It is upon the basis of the internal witness of the Holy Spirit the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum*, that he forms much of his doctrine of the authority and interpretation of Scripture.

Calvin seems to have developed the doctrine of the *testimonium* as the basis for biblical authority in the face of three problematic epistemological theories about the Christian faith. First, he objects to the Roman Catholic view that certainty of faith was given by the testimony of the infallible Church.⁹¹ Second, he opposes the Enthusiasts who attempted to verify faith by direct revelation. It is a "detestable sacrilege" to separate the Word and Spirit, a union which has been established by God. Revelation comes only by the Spirit through the Word.⁹² Finally, Calvin objects to a purely rational apologetics of the faith. Reason gives human certainty when divine assurance is needed.⁹³ The authority of Scripture is not based on reason, authority of the Church, nor subjective experience, but on the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit which attests to the divine authorship.⁹⁴

The Scriptures are thus self-authenticating, and the attempt by a number of Reformed scholars to show that rational arguments for Calvin work inseparably along with the Holy Spirit to authenticate Scripture as God's Word to the reader simply finds inadequate support in the primary sources.⁹⁵ Calvin is unconcerned with normal, human inaccuracies in minor matters. He says:

We know that, in quoting Scripture the apostles used freer language than the original, since they were content if what they quoted applied to their subject, and they were not over-careful in their use of words.⁹⁶

God's communication is accommodated to man's limited capacity and He often "lisp" in speaking to us as nurses do with infants.⁹⁷ God has chosen to use human means of communication to meet human beings at their point of need. His purpose is to persuade persons to be saved, and Scripture is quite adequate to accomplish that purpose when the Word and the Spirit are not separated.⁹⁸

Summary

In the Patristic Period, Scripture is seen as inspired by the Holy Spirit and trustworthy because of its spiritual origin. The authority of Scripture is attested to by the witness of the Church and the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. There is a distinction between the body and spirit, or inner and outer Word, of Scripture. The inner or spiritual sense of Scripture was often exploited allegorically, although the Antiochians and others attempted to reverse the trend and base doctrine and experience on the literal or grammatical sense. The illuminating role of the Holy Spirit in the interpretative process and the importance of understanding the intentionality of the biblical writers were stressed. The need for careful exegetical, historical, and contextual work was an important element.

In the Medieval Period, the Victorines, Aquinas, and others challenged the allegorical approach and insisted that the literal sense was the basis for doctrine and the historical-literal method was the superior approach for grasping the intention of the writer in the literal sense. For them, the literal sense included more than the outward form of the words, but the full intent of the writer to convey God's message. The authority of Scripture and interpretation was based primarily on the attestation and dogma of the Church.

The Reformers based the authority of Scripture on its inspiredness which was attested to by the internal witness of the Spirit and Scripture's reliability in accomplishing the purpose of salvation. While they took seriously the historical interpretations of Scripture, they refused to allow the Church to function as the arbiter of interpretation or the basis for authority. The inner subject matter as it reflected the intention of the inspired writer is authoritative and reason is not accepted as a basis for the authority of self-authenticating Scripture.

II. Wesley's Hermeneutical Orthodoxy

Wesley rests firmly in the mainstream of orthodox hermeneutics. Both his concept of biblical inspiration and authority and his methods of interpretation reflect the basic emphases of the Fathers and the Reformers. His statements about Scripture must be interpreted from within the context of eighteenth-century thought, and efforts to super-impose on various proof-texts the framework of twentieth-century fundamentalist epistemology must not be considered legitimate examinations of his positions on the Bible. His theological heritage involves Puritan and Anglican roots with a healthy amount of Patristic and Reformation theology.⁹⁹ Although he sometimes speaks in ways which may resemble Fundamentalism, his total context of thought is broader and more inclusive, as is seen in his sermons, "The Character of a Methodist," and "Catholic Spirit." Furthermore, the canons of biblical authority and interpretation of a rationalistic Fundamentalism had their roots in post-Reformation Protestant scholasticism, which Wesley does not seem to have known, and nineteenth-century Princeton theology,¹⁰⁰ which Wesley did not survive to encounter. His cautious approach to Aristotle and the Scholastics seem to suggest that he would not sympathize with theological systems which were heavily influenced by Aristotelian methodology, such as in Fundamentalism.¹⁰¹

Several areas in his approach to Scripture suggest his consistency with historic Christian hermeneutics.

A. The Holy Spirit and Scripture

Inspiration. Like the Fathers and Reformers, Wesley views Scripture as divinely inspired He writes:

... What the Son of God preached, and the Holy Ghost spake by the apostles, the apostles and evangelists wrote. This what we now style the Holy Scriptures: this it that “Word of God which remainth forever....”¹⁰²

He continues, “And the languages of His messengers, also is exact in the highest degree.”¹⁰³ He states in his comments on 2 Timothy 3:16: “The Spirit of God, not only once inspired those who wrote it, but continually inspires, supernaturally assists those who read it with earnest prayer.”¹⁰⁴ He sees, the inspired writers as the “immediate instruments” of God’s revelation, for the purpose that “evangelical faith must be partly founded on human testimony.”¹⁰⁵

Although this seems close to virtually a mechanical dictation approach, Wesley emphasizes the the process involves “impressions made upon their minds,” and notes human participation by saying, “For how really soever they were inspired, we need not suppose their inspiration was always so instantaneous and express as to supersede any deliberation in their own minds, or any consultation with each other.”¹⁰⁶

The nature of inspiration also involves accommodation of the truth of God to the limitations of the human minds. Ramm says, “To be meaningful. . . the revelation had to come in human language, in human thought-forms, and referring to objects of human experience.”¹⁰⁷ Wesley points out this necessity by indicating that “it is necessary that the Scripture should let itself down to the language of men.”¹⁰⁸

Authority. The primary basis for the authority of Scripture and the authentication factor of its inspiredness is the “internal testimony of the Holy Spirit.” He says, “Then a Christian can in no wise doubt of his being a child of God. Of the former proposition he has a fall assurance as he has the Scriptures are of God.”¹⁰⁹ Colin Williams says, “He is also at once with Luther and Calvin in relating the authority of Scripture to experience by the living witness of the Holy Spirit.” Hildebrandt points out that “Wesley takes his stand with the Classical Protestant view of authority of Scripture to experience by the living witness of the Holy Spirit who brings the gospel to the heart through the record of Scripture.¹¹⁰ Thus, the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum*, which functioned as an authenticating basis for scriptural authority becomes for Wesley an element in his use of experience as a basis for authority. Although the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England do not emphasize the *testimonium*, the Westminster Confession of 1647 does so, and it is unlikely that he wasn’t aware of the fact. In certainly reflected the prevailing thought on the issue at the time. It reads:

We may be moved and induced by the Church to a high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture... Yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallibly truth, and

divine authority, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.¹¹¹

It seems ironic that the clearest statements on the testimonium of the Holy Spirit can be found in Reformed creeds and that spiritual bases for the authority of Scripture are more clearly presented in some Reformed seminaries than in Wesleyan ones which emphasize a strong theology of the Spirit.

B. Inerrancy

Because of some of Wesley's statements about Scripture, some have concluded that the inerrancy of the original autographs was a basis for biblical authority for him. However, since this issue of autographs began to develop in Protestant Scholasticism after the Reformation and found its articulated form in the nineteenth-century Princeton Theology, it is problematic whether Wesley's statements can be interpreted within that context. The pedigree of inerrancy of the autographs can be unmistakably traced to the nineteenth-century Princeton dogmatism of A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield which had developed the theology of the Post-Reformation Scholastic, Francis Turretin, into a normative theological authority. And it was A. A. Hodge who first formalized the concept of autographs as the basis for infallibility of Scripture.¹¹² It was on this foundation that Fundamentalism built its system. And, as Paul Bassett points out, Wesleyanism has been trapped into "allowing its emotional ties with the aims of Fundamentalism to saddle it with a Fundamentalist doctrine of the Scripture that is quite out of place in Wesleyanism."¹¹³

Furthermore, it is anachronistic historically to project a nineteenth-century epistemology upon an eighteenth-century evangelist whose hermeneutics were strongly influenced by Patristic and Reformation sources.

Wesley makes statements like, "Nay, if there be any mistakes in the Bible, there may as well be a thousand. If there is one falsehood in that book, it did not come from the God of truth."¹¹⁴ He also says, "every part is worthy of God and all together are one body, wherein is no defect, no excess."¹¹⁵ These kinds of expressions relate primarily to his verbal dictation tendencies in inspiration, and are not used to establish an inerrantist basis for authority. His epistemology is different from that of Fundamentalism which bases biblical authority on an assumption of the nature of the external text of the autographs. The Classical Christian approach to authority was never to base authority or infallibility on the original autographs and neither was it to base doctrinal issues on even the external text alone. Luther, Calvin, and the Fathers looked at the inner spiritual content, ultimately Jesus Christ, as authoritative. The external text would surely be at one with the internal sense given by the Holy Spirit, but the form of the external text was by no means ever the criterion for infallibility, which was a spiritual issue.

C. Purpose of Scripture

Wesley's understanding of Scripture is most clearly seen in this use of it. For him, it has a saving purpose. That is its reason for being. The primary purpose for Scripture is to function as a means of bearing the

message of redemption. His famous “man of one book” statement clearly presents what he sees the Bible’s purpose to be:

I want to know one thing—the way to heaven; how to land safe on that happy shore. God Himself has condescended to teach the way; for this very end He came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! . . . Let me be *homo unius libri* . . . In His presence I open, I read His book; for this end, to find the way to heaven (italics mine).”¹¹⁶

The intent of Scripture is to provide information for salvation and Christian living. With his fascination with science and natural philosophy and his enthusiasm for the new scientific discoveries of the time, it might seem reasonable to expect him to use the Bible as a textbook to learn science if he felt that to be its purpose. Yet, he does not seem to believe Scripture to have that function.

For Wesley, Scripture functions sacramentally. In his sermon, “The Means of Grace,” he defines what he means by the phrase. “Means of grace” are “outward signs, words, or actions, ordained of God, and appointed for this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby He might convey to men, preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace.”¹¹⁷ These “means of grace” are prayer, searching the Scriptures, and the Lord’s Supper. These are means only. He says, “The whole value of the means depends on their actual subservience to the end of religion; that consequently, all these means, when separate from the end, are less than nothing and vanity.”¹¹⁸ There is no intrinsic power in these means. He notes:

We know there is no inherent power in the words that are spoken in prayer, in the letter of Scripture read, the sound thereof heard, or the bread and wine received in the Lord’s supper; but that it is God alone who is the Giver of every good gift, the Author of all grace; that the whole power is of Him, whereby, through any of these, there is any blessing conveyed to our souls.¹¹⁹

When the means of Scripture is focused on the need for salvation, its purpose is fulfilled. When one has need of salvation, “We have only to consult the oracles of God; to inquire what is written there; and if we simply abide by their decision, there can be no possible doubt remain.”¹²⁰ God works infallibly through the means of Scripture to bring salvation.

Wesley then adds another criterion to evaluate the effectiveness of the means. In order to use the means, one must trust them. How can one do that? By believing that if I wait in faith for the blessing of God, I will receive it. And when I do receive His blessing I know He is faithful to perform, and the means of grace by which I have received His blessing can be trusted,¹²¹ for it is reliable to accomplish what God has promised through it. But there is no *opus operatum* in the mere using of the ordinances. It is only through the power of His Spirit and the merits of Jesus Christ that the means of grace are reliable. Thus, the authority of Scripture is based firmly on the work of Christ, the testimony of the Holy Spirit and the reliability of Scripture as a channel through which the Spirit applies the grace of salvation. “Scripture is thus a means to this end,” says Wesley, “that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished to all good works.”¹²²

If Wesley had considered the inerrancy of the autographs to be essential for trust in Scripture as a means of grace, it would seem that he would have directly connected the two. In fact, he indicates that the opposite is true. In the comment on the genealogies of Matthew 1 in his Notes, he points out that the failure of the writer to correct errors in his sources has no deleterious impact on Scripture's purpose. He says:

If there were any difficulties in this genealogy, or that given by St. Luke, which could not easily be removed, they would rather affect the Jewish tables, than the credit of the evangelists: for they act only as historians setting down these genealogies, as they stood in those public and allowed records. Therefore they were to take them as they found them. Nor was it needful—they should correct the mistakes, if there were any. For these accounts sufficiently answer the end for which they are recited. They unquestionably prove the grand point in view, that Jesus was of the family from which the promised seed was to come.¹²³

It is also relevant that Adam Clarke states a similar position. He notes in his commentary on Matthew 1:3:

This circumstance the evangelist was probably aware of; but did not see it proper to attempt to correct what he found in the public accredited genealogical tables; as he knew it to be of no consequence to his argument... St. Matthew took up the genealogies . . . which, though they were in the main correct, yet were deficient in many particulars.¹²⁴

Thus, the inspiration and authority of Scripture did not require the correction of error in the sources nor was the inerrancy of autographs a necessary foundation for authority. If by Scripture's having no error or defect or excess means for Wesley that the sources had to be corrected by inspiration, then he contradicts himself by saying errors in the sources do not make Scripture's purpose ineffective. Fundamentalism requires that errors in sources be corrected by inspiration, as is evidenced by the debate between James Orr and the Princeton Theology.¹²⁵ That Wesley does not function as a Fundamentalist is evidenced by his emphasis on the saving purpose of Scripture, its sacramental function, the *testimonium* and reliability as canons for authority, and his attitude for catholicity. Therefore, his use of Scripture should not be analyzed by the means of Fundamentalist canons, but by the canons of Classical Christian orthodoxy. Not only is he pre-critical in his approach to Scripture, but he is also pre-Fundamentalist. Inerrancy for him has to do with Scripture's function as a means for bringing the gospel of salvation which is effected in the believer by the Spirit. Even though his statements on inspiration border on a verbal dictation theory, and his pre-critical approach allows him to make statements in which he declares Scripture to be without error in the received text, except where the writers used defective sources, his emphasis was neither on the inerrant nature of the autographs nor was biblical authority based on the form of the biblical text.

D. Interpretative Principles

The hermeneutic behind Wesley's biblical interpretation is love.¹²⁶ In examining Scripture from this perspective, his methodology is primarily inductive, historical-literal, and soteriologically motivated. His motivation and method are summarized in the "Preface" to his sermons:

I want to know one thing,-the way to heaven . . . God himself has condescended to teach the way . . . He hath written it down in a book . . . In his presence I open, I read his book; for this end, to find the way to heaven. Is there a doubt concerning the meaning of what I read? Does anything appear dark or intricate? I lift up my heart to the Father of Lights . . . I then search and compare parallel passages of Scripture . . . If any doubt remains, I consult those who are experienced in the things of God. ¹²⁷

In his "Preface" to the Old Testament Notes, he further explains his inductive approach:

If you desire to read the Scriptures in such a manner as may most effectually answer this end (to understand the things of God), would it not be advisable (1) to set apart a little time, if you can, every morning and evening for this purpose? (2) At each time, if you have leisure, to read a chapter out of the Old and one out of the New Testament; if you cannot do this, to take a single chapter, or a part of one? (3) To read this with a single eye to know the whole will of God, and a fixed resolution to do it? In order to know His will, you should (4) have a constant eye to the analogy faith, the connection and harmony there is between those grand, fundamental doctrines, original sin, justification by faith, the new birth, inward and outward holiness. (5) Serious and earnest prayer should be constantly used before we consult the oracles of God, seeing "Scripture can only be understood through the same Spirit whereby it was given . . ." (6) It might also be of use, if while we read we were frequently to pause and examine ourselves by what we read. ¹²⁸

Thus, Wesley exhorts to read the text thoroughly, to examine the context to interpret the obscure passages in light of the clearer ones, to follow the analogy of faith, to seek in prayer the assistance of the Holy Spirit in correctly interpreting and understanding Scripture, and to apply faithfully to life what God teaches through Scripture.

In addition to these principles, Wesley emphasized the primacy of the literal sense:

Every thinking man will easily discern my design in the following sheets. It is not to write sermons, essays or set discourses upon any part of Scripture. It is not to draw inferences from the text, or to show what doctrines may be proved thereby. It is this: To give the direct literal meaning of every verse, of every sentence. and as far as I am able, of every word in the oracles of God . . . (It is my design) to assist those who tear God, in hearing and reading the Bible itself, by showing the natural sense of every part, in as few and plain words as I can.¹²⁹

He notes that the literal sense of every text is to be followed, if it is not contrary to other texts, in which case the obscure text is to be interpreted by those which speak more plainly.¹³⁰ He does not wish to depart from the plain, literal sense unless it implies an absurdity¹³¹

Wesley's literal interpretation is not "literalism," but the same kind of literal approach championed by Theodore and the School of Antioch. It deplors allegorism, while maintaining the validity of the spiritual or devotional sense of the Word. It is the same method followed by Luther and the Reformers who refused to base doctrine on the allegorical sense, and emphasizes that the plain rules of grammar and syntax give the meaning of any statement without recourse to any esoteric spiritualizations.¹³²

Wesley's historical and exegetical techniques come into play as he works to determine the correct literal meaning. In addition to using the original languages, one needs "a knowledge of profane history, ancient customs, natural philosophy, geometry, and the writings of the Church Fathers.¹³³ Further, the application of this literal methodology in, for example, the sermon, "Justification by Faith," bears strong resemblance to Luther's approach and to one of Archbishop Cranmer's Homilies.¹³⁴

A corollary to the literal approach is his use of the analogy of faith, by which he means the general themes of the Bible as they are correctly interpreted. This provides a balance and control for the literal interpretation and insures that the exegesis of parts of Scripture are harmonious with the entire theme.¹³⁵ By this analogy of faith, he is able to criticize the Roman Catholic Church for adding doctrines which could not be found in Scripture, such as transubstantiation and purgatory.¹³³

Finally, his emphasis that Scripture must be interpreted in the context of prayer is noteworthy. This awareness of the illumination of the Word through the Spirit is basic to Wesley's hermeneutic, as it was for the Fathers and Reformers. Although the Spirit does not enable the interpreter to intuit meanings which are not inherent in the literal sense itself, as is often done with an allegorical approach, He does make alive the truth already in the text and inwardly applies it. Scripture thus works in harmony with experience.

Thus, although his hermeneutic of love makes his hermeneutical conclusions distinct. Wesley's basic approach to interpretation and to the authority of Scripture is solidly in the historical-literal, Patristic and Reformation interpretative tradition.

III. Implications for Contemporary Wesleyanism

This historical survey speaks to what Mildred Wynkoop calls a need for a resurgence of a "Wesley Wesleyanism,"¹³⁷ and to the need for recovery of the perspective of the total heritage of the Christian Church. Hermeneutically, the issue involves the basis for biblical authority and interpretation and the distinction between the historic Patristic-Reformation-Wesleyan approach in contrast to the influence of the attenuated and scholasticized Calvinism of Princeton Theology and Fundamentalism upon twentieth-century Wesleyanism. Paul Bassett has shown that the Wesleyan theologians, W. B. Pope, Miner Raymond, John Miley, and H. Orton Wiley resisted the Princeton-Fundamentalist trend to reduce the bases for biblical authority from the classical three-point basis of divine

inspiration, the traditional witness of the Church, and the internal testimony of the Spirit in the believer to a single basis, namely, infallibility because Scripture is inspired.¹³⁸ Ironically, it may be that the emphasis on experience as a basis for authority in theological matters may have been so prevalent in Wesleyan circles in the last one hundred-fifty years, that the resulting lack of theological structure may have predisposed the movement to adapt prevailing theological structures which are antithetical to Wesley's. The infatuation in many Wesleyan circles with Gothard's hierarchical system, Lindsey's eschatology, Schaeffer's epistemology, and Lindsell's rationalism may be symptomatic of this phenomenon.

Wesley's emphasis on the historic issues of the inspiration of Script the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit, and the tradition and experience of Scripture's reliability to "show the way to heaven" direct us recovery of the total hermeneutical heritage of the Christian Church. In gaining this historical perspective, it is crucial that we employ methods of historical study which allow previous historical eras to speak without having twentieth-century presuppositions read back into them. Wesley and Luther, for example, must be interpreted apart from the scholastic bias of Fundamentalist epistemology. Wesley's criteria for doctrine of Scripture, reason, and experience simply cannot be reconciled with methodologies of interpretation which seek to elevate dogmatic principles derived from Scripture by reason alone without the participation of Christian experience.

Finally, the irenic nature of Wesley's motive of love and his soteriological emphasis on the Holy Spirit's use of Scripture as a means of grace to prepare the believer for heaven call us to reject the prevailing trend for shibboleths and divisiveness which exists in American Evangelicalism. Rather it calls us in genuine fellowship to focus on the undisputed Wesleyan reason for existence, namely preaching the biblical message of full salvation to the whole world which is our parish.

Notes

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2. John Deschner, *Wesley's Christology* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1960), pp. 7-9.

3. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. I, A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), Book I, 11, 2; and 13, 1-6.

4. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, I, 26, 1-2; I, 27, 1-2.

5. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, II, 10, 1-2; II, 8, 1, "They strive to weave ropes of sand, which they endeavor to adapt with an air of probability to their own peculiar assertions the parables of the Lord, the saying of the

prophets, and the words of the apostles, in order that their scheme may not seem altogether without support.”

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12. Flesseman-van Leer, *Tradition and Scripture*, p. 127.

13. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, IV, 26, 2-5; Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 37.

14. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, III, 38, 1.

15. Herbert T. Mayer, “Scripture, Tradition, and Authority in the Life of the Early Church,” *Concordia Theological Monthly*, 38 (1967):22.

16. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, IV, 33, 8.

17. A. Berkeley Mickelson, *Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1963), p. 32; and E. C. Blackman, *Biblical Interpretation* (London: Independent Press, Ltd., 1957), p. 92.

18. Blackman, *Biblical Interpretation*, p. 100.

19. Don Jean Leclerg, “From Gregory the Great to St. Bernard,” *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, Vol. II, G. W. H. Lampe, ed. (Cambridge: University Press, 1969), pp. 213f; also Lampe, “To Gregory the Great,” *Cambridge History of the Bible*, 2:163.

20. Robert M. Grant, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1963), pp. 87-88.

21. R. Larry Shelton, “Martin Luther’s Concept of Biblical Interpretation in Historical Perspective” (Th.D. dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1974), pp. 81, 84.

22. Shelton, “Martin Luther’s Concept,” pp. 87-89.

23. Blackman, *Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 103-05; F. W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1886), p. 217.

24. Grant, *A Short History*, pp. 93-97.

25. Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, p. 234.
26. David W. Kerr, "Augustine of Hippo," *Inspiration and Interpretation*, Walwood, ed., p. 70; see Shelton, "Martin Luther's Concept," for specific references which are numerous and are found in *De Doctrina Christiana*, II.
27. Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, II, 41, 62.
28. Kerr, "Augustine of Hippo," pp. 71-72.
29. Augustine, *Confessions*, VII, 21, 27.
30. Augustine, *Sermones*, 43, 7, 9.
31. Albert H. Newman, footnote, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. IV, Philip Schaff, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), p. 131, says, "This is one of the earliest assertions of the dependence of the Scriptures for authority on the Church." See Augustine, *Contra Epistolam Manichaei Fundamenti*, 5, 6.
32. Kerr, "Augustine of Hippo," p. 77
33. Augustine, *De Baptismo Contra Donatistes*, 2, 12.
34. Augustine, *Sermones*, CCXII, vii, 7, cited by Kerr, "Augustine of Hippo," p. 78.
35. C. E. Schuetzinger, *The German Controversy on St. Augustine's Illumination Theory* (New York: Pageant Press, 1960), pp. 15-16.
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37. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 47; Augustine, *Contra Epistolam Manichaei*, 6; *De Doctrina Christiana*, III, 2, 2-12; *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*, 22, 79.
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62. Herman Sasse, "Luther and the Word of God," *Accents in Luther's Theology*, Heino O. Kadai, ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967), p. 51.
63. Sasse, "Luther and the Word of God," p. 84; Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, p. 340; Johann Michael Rev. *Luther and the Scriptures* (Columbus, O.: Wartburg Press, 1944; reprint Springfield, O. F. Stahlke, ed., 24, 1960, pp. 9-111), p. 60 (references from reprint).
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67. D. Martin Luthers Werke, 18, 653.28-35, cited by Rogers and McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation*, p. 79.

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72. For an extensive treatment of Luther's hermeneutic, see Shelton, "Martin Luther's Concept," Chapters III, IV, V.
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81. Shelton, "Martin Luther's Concept," pp. 231-34.
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97. Calvin, *Institutes*, I, xiii, 1.
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116. Wesley- Works, 5:3
117. Wesley, "The Means of Grace," Forty-Four Sermons (London: Epworth Press, 1944), p. 136.
118. Wesley, "The Means of Grace," p. 137.
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121. Wesley, "The Means of Grace," p. 145.
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123. Wesley, Explanatory Notes on the NT, p. 15.
124. Adam Clarke, Commentary (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, n.d.), 5:36.
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THE DEVOTIONAL USE OF SCRIPTURE IN THE WESLEYAN MOVEMENT

by

William H. Vermillion

Introduction

Before exploring the Devotional Use of Scripture in the Wesleyan Movement, one must have an understanding of what “devotional” means. In the Old Testament, the word translated “devotional” refers to things forbidden for common use and comes from *charam*.¹ In the New Testament several terms are used to indicate “worship” or “dedication.” Those related to *sebomai* indicate the idea of “distance” while those related to *eulabes* indicate “caution” or “circumspection.”² Both rootages are concerned with the believer’s attitude and actions toward God. The Latin provides the very root *devoueo* for the English word and indicates a vow that is made. When applied to the study of Scripture, devotional means two things. First, it represents an attitude of dedication to God by the believer. Second, it represents an attitude of desire on the part of the believer to center attention and activities on God so that the believer may be God’s person.

This personal application of Scripture for the purpose of individual spiritual growth-maturity as a child of God-even developed into a methodology for interpreting Scripture.. Farrar notes that there was a devotional method of interpretation Middle Ages which was primarily practiced by several of the mystics of whom Richard of Victor and Bernard of Clairvaux are among the better known.³ This devotional method received serious development as a way of interpreting Scripture in the late seventeenth century by Spener, founder of the Pietistic movement. “The devotional interpretation of Scripture is that method of interpreting Scripture which places emphasis on the edifying aspects of Scripture, and interpreting with the intention of developing the spiritual life.”⁴ Under the direction of later proponents such as Francke and Bengel, the Pietist movement continued to grow and mature. The Pietist school with its stress on the primary study of scripture appears to have arisen in direct response to the dogmatic confessionalism of the post-Reformation period.⁶ The Scripture was not serving as primary text for study and when Scriptures were studied it was to bolster the scriptural foundation of a particular confession. The Pietists, for the most part, practiced grammatical and historical interpretation, recognizing

that themselves. However, their study of Scripture did not stop there but went on to include the application of Scripture to their spiritual life. The Pietists believed that the Scripture had this personal application despite the passage of at least 1600 years since its writing. This was because they believed that God had an expressed desire to communicate Himself in Scripture and that man's needs were the same regardless of time and culture.

With this brief review of the historical setting and definition of the devotional use of Scripture, one may now turn attention to an examination of how the Wesleyan movement has handled the devotional use of Scripture.

The Wesleyan Movement

John Wesley

Among the recipients of this pietistic heritage was John Wesley.⁶ The writings of Francke and Bengel are cited frequently by Wesley.⁷ Indeed, Wesley calls Bengel, “. . . that great light of the Christian World . . .” and translated Bengel's *Gnomon Novi Testamenti* which Wesley used as the basis for his *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*.⁸ The Pietistic emphasis on the primacy of the study of Scripture and its personal application in the life of the believer fit well into Wesley's repeated emphasis on “Scripture, reason, and experience.”

Wesley's emphasis on the primacy of Scripture as well as his use of Scripture in personal study is seen in his now famous *homo unius libri* statement.

RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE AND AUTHORITY

I want to know one thing—the way to heaven; how to land safe on that happy shore. God Himself has condescended to teach the way; for this very end He came from Heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God! I have it: here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be *homo unius libri*. Here then I am, far from the busy ways of men. I sit down alone: only God is here. In His presence I open, I read His book; for this end, to find the way to heaven. Is there a doubt concerning the meaning of what I read? Does anything appear dark or intricate? I lift up my heart to the Father of Lights: “Lord, is it not Thy word, ‘If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God?’ Thou ‘givest liberally, and upbraidest not.’ Thou hast said, ‘If any be willing to do Thy will, he shall know.’ I am willing to do, let me know, Thy will.” I then search after and consider parallel passages of Scripture, “comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” I meditate thereon with all the attention and earnestness of which my mind is capable. If any doubt still remains, I consult those who are experienced in the things of God; and then the writings whereby, being dead, they yet speak. And what I thus learn, that I teach.⁹

Wesley stressed the importance of direct personal private study of the Scripture to find “the way to heaven.” If I do not understand what I am reading, then I am to pray to the Father for wisdom. Then I search the Scripture doing correlation studies of parallel passages. If I still lack understanding, I consult with those who walk with God. This emphasis on the direct private personal study of Scripture, involving prayer, correlation of scripture, and corporate consultation was a consistent approach of Wesley in the devotional use of Scripture.¹⁰

In his preface to *Explanatory Notes Upon the Old Testament* Wesley wrote:

This is the way to understand the things of God: “Meditate thereon day and night”; so shall you attain the best knowledge, even to “know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent.” And this knowledge will lead you “to love him, because he hath first loved us”; yea, “to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” Will there not then be all “that mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus”? And in consequence of this, while you joyfully experience all the holy tempers described in this book, you will likewise be outwardly “holy as He that hath called you is holy, in all manner of conversation.”

If you desire to read the Scriptures in such a manner as may most effectually answer this end, would it not be advisable, (1) To set apart a little time, if you can, every morning and evening for that purpose? (2) At each time, if you have leisure, to read a chapter out of the Old, and one out of the New Testament; if you cannot do this, to take a single chapter, or a part of one? (3) To read this with a single eye, to know the whole will of God, and a fixed resolution to do it? In order to know his will, you should, (4) Have a constant eye to the analogy of faith, the connexion and harmony there is between those grand, fundamental doctrines, original sin, justification by faith, the new birth, inward and outward holiness: (5) Serious and earnest prayer should be constantly used before we consult the oracles of God; seeing “Scripture can only be understood through the same Spirit whereby it was given.” Our reading should likewise be closed with prayer, that what we read may be written in our hearts: (6) It might also be of use, if, while we read, we were frequently to pause, and examine ourselves by what we read, both with regard to our hearts and lives. This would furnish us with matter of praise, where we found God had enabled us to conform to his blessed will, and matter of humiliation and prayer, where we were conscious of having fallen short. And whatever light you then receive should be used to the uttermost, and that immediately. Let there be no delay. Whatever you resolve, begin to execute the first moment you can. So shall you find this word to be indeed the power of God unto present and eternal salvation.¹¹

I am to read morning and evening in both the Old and New Testament. I should read a chapter-size portion in each if possible. As I read, I should seek to know God's will and perform it. Prayer should precede and follow my study which is to include correlation of Scripture. I should also examine-myself-soul and walk-as I read, so that I might rejoice in work accomplished or be humbled and pray for work that needs yet to be accomplished. To know God's will demands obedience and once I know God's will, still further obedience is demanded.¹²

This emphasis on prayer, understanding, obedience, and the personal application of Scripture is further illustrated in Wesley's note on 2 Timothy 3:16.

All Scripture is inspired of God-The Spirit of God-The Spirit of God, not only once inspired those who wrote it, but continually inspires, supernaturally assists those that read it with earnest prayer. Hence it is so profitable for doctrine, for instruction of the ignorant, for the reproof or conviction of them that are in error or sin; for the correction or amendment of whatever is amiss, and for instructing or training up the children of God in all righteousness. ¹³

While Wesley stressed personal study, he also allowed for and encouraged corporate or conference study. Turner has pointed out that:

Conference was an important and rather characteristic feature of early Methodist Bible study. Much like the early Christians in Acts 15, the preachers who were associated with the Wesleys gathered periodically to seek in group discussion a solution to problems which in isolation seemed difficult. Their doctrine of the Spirit in the individual and in the group made them eager to confer and discuss before they decided what constituted the truth.¹⁴

This emphasis on corporate study and support was undoubtedly an influence in Wesley's organization of small groups.¹⁵ While the study of Scripture was not the mainstay of the class or the band, discipline, obedience, confession, accountability, and prayer were. All of these were part of Wesley's understanding of the practical and plain teaching of the Scripture. ¹⁶

A further practical use of Scripture is seen in Wesley's continued work with hymns and congregational singing. In this medium, the Scriptures and their teachings came alive. Here was a way to aid the common man in the study of Scripture and assist him in the knowledge of God's will. Singing was even an integral part of the classes and bands.¹⁷

Hymnody and small groups provide practical means to encourage the faithful in their study and application of Scripture. Wesley knew that nothing could replace the personal private study of Scripture. Wesley's burning desire was that people who believed in "the way to heaven" might follow in the way through the exercise of personal study and application of the Scripture.¹⁸ However, without support, conference, corporate and personal prayers and poetic teaching, the faithful might become indolent or fall into error. Wesley then did not merely transfer on the Pietistic heritage but significantly adapted and modified it.¹⁹

Adam Clarke

Wesley's emphasis on the personal study of Scripture, the support of small groups, and the use of hymnody continued to mark the Methodist Church during the late 1700s and early 1800s. One of the influential Methodist leaders during this period was Adam Clarke. In his "Letter to a Methodist Preacher," Adam Clarke gave rules for the preacher to follow, four of which apply to this discussion.

1. Pray much, read much, write much. Have always some essay, dissertation, &c., upon the anvil; and be sure you finish whatever you undertake. Beginning a number of things, and finishing none of them, begets in the mind a habit of indecision and carelessness.

2. Read the book of God. Read it regularly through, at least once in the year; and take down in order every text you think you have light sufficient to preach from. By these means you will ever be acquiring new subjects, and be preserved from the curse of harping on the same string in all the circuits where you preach.

3. Always carry a New Testament about you; and let God's word be your constant companion. Read the Scriptures as the word of God: read them with deep attention, and read them with reverence. Read a chapter or two every day upon your knees; and earnestly beg the Father of lights to give you the spirit of wisdom in the revelation of himself, that you may know, feel, and preach the whole truth as it is in Jesus.

In this work every morning should be employed; and then take care to mark down the texts which you may have occasion to preach on in the course of the day. Never leave this subject to any other part of the day: you may be called upon unexpectedly to preach when there is not time for you to go and search for a text. In such a case, if you are not prepared, confusion is the least evil you can expect to meet with. Therefore, see that the morning always provides for all the possible calls of the day on this head. It is a sore evil to see the preacher, who should himself accompany the people in every act of worship, employing the time they are singing the high praises of God, in fumbling through his Bible to get some text to preach from.

4. But while you read the Bible as the revelation of God, and the fountain of divine knowledge, don't let your reading end there. I said before, read much; but take care that all your reading be directed to the increase of your knowledge and experience in the things of God.²⁰

Here again is the emphasis on prayer and direct personal study of the Bible.

In comments directed to the laity, Clarke gave some guidelines for devotional use of Scripture.

After the sermon is over, get as speedily home as you can, and spend a few moments on your knees in private prayer. Meditate on what you have heard.

Pray for your preachers, that God may fill them with the unction of his Spirit.

And, when you read the Holy Scriptures, consider that it is God's word which you read, and that his faithfulness is pledged to fulfil both its promises and threatenings.

Read the whole Bible, and read it in order; two chapters in the Old Testament, and one in the New, daily, if you can possibly spare time.

Think that the eye of God is upon you while you are reading; and remember that the word is not sent to particular persons, as if by name; and do not think you have no part in it, because you are not named there. It is not thus sent: it is addressed to particular characters; to saints, sinners, the worldly minded, the proud, &c. Therefore, examine your own state, and see to which of these characters you belong, and then apply the word spoken to the character in question to yourself; for it is as surely spoken to you as if your name were found printed in the Bible, and placed there by divine inspiration itself.

When you meet with a threatening, and know, from your own state, that this awful word is spoken against you, stop, and implore God, for the sake of the sufferings and death of his Son, to pardon the sin that exposes you to the punishment threatened. When you meet with a promise made to the penitent, tempted, afflicted, &c., having found out your own case, stop, and implore God to fulfil that promise.

Should you find, on examination, that the threatening has been averted by your having turned to God; that the promise has been fulfilled through your faith in Christ; stop here also, and return God thanks. Thus you will constantly find matter, in reading the book of God, to excite repentance, to exercise faith, to produce confidence and consolation, and to beget gratitude; and gratitude will never fail to beget obedience.

It is always useful to read a portion of the Scriptures before prayer, whether performed in the family or in the closet.

Keep the eye of your mind steadily fixed upon Him who is the end of the law, and the sum of the gospel.

Let the Scriptures, therefore, lead you to that Holy Spirit by which they were inspired; let that Spirit lead you to Jesus Christ, who has ransomed you by his death. And let this Christ lead you to the Father, that he may adopt you into the family of heaven; and thus, being taught of him, justified by his blood, and sanctified by his Spirit, you shall be saved with all the power of an endless life.²¹

Again, the areas that Wesley stressed are apparent, particularly prayer and reading. Like Wesley, Clarke reminds the laity that God watches them as they read the Scriptures and that what they read may personally apply to them. However, Clarke does provide an expansion of the directions for the reader of Scripture concerning the application of Scripture.

1. Examine your own state and/or character and see what the Scripture says about that state and/or character.
2. Confess sin, and seek pardon of God when convicted by Scripture of sin.
3. Claim promises and ask God to fulfill them.
4. Thank God when sins are pardoned and promises fulfilled.

If these principles are followed by the reader then Clarke has concluded that the Scripture will constantly provide “matter” which is applicable to one’s life.

Today: Post-Wesley and Clarke

During the past 125 years, aspects of the devotional use of Scriptures have continued to survive in the Wesleyan Movement. Hymnody still continues to be a mark of worship and education within the Methodist community.²² However, as Baker has noted, hymnody in America has become less congregational and more choral.²³ There is an increasing awareness among church leaders and scholars that there is still much work that could be done in using hymnody to teach and review the truths of Scripture for the faithful.²⁴ Interest in and conduct of small groups for support, prayer, and conference have waxed and waned. It appears that there is now a renewed interest even outside the Wesleyan tradition in the concepts and practice of the class and band with some adaptations.²⁵ One of these adaptations is the group study of Scripture. While interest in personal Scripture-reading has continued in some segments of the Wesleyan tradition, other segments are now experiencing a renewed interest in the direct personal study of the Bible.²⁶

At a time when it would appear that scholars, pastors, and laity are concerned with a more experiential approach to Scripture, the Wesleyan heritage of the devotional use of Scripture commends itself to our attention.⁷ However there appears to be a lack of teaching from church leadership on how the Scripture is to be used devotionally. In part this seems due to a misunderstanding of the devotional use of Scripture as defined in this paper and practiced within the Wesleyan tradition. Devotional use of the Bible does not mean a naïve approach but rather an experiential approach. Nonetheless many scholars characterize devotional reading as simplistic. Foster in his work titled *Celebration of Discipline* stated that:

We must understand, however, that a vast difference exists between the study of Scripture and the devotional reading of Scripture. In the study of Scripture a high priority is placed upon interpretation: what it means. In the devotional reading of Scripture a high priority is placed upon application: what it means for me. In study we are not seeking spiritual ecstasy; in fact, ecstasy can be a hindrance. When we study a book of the Bible we are seeking to be controlled by the intent of the author. We are determined to hear what he is saying, not what we would like him to say. We are willing to pay the price of barren day after barren day until the meaning is clear. This process revolutionizes our life.²⁸

Foster's comment indicates a linkage between devotional reading of the Bible and ecstasy which may or may not be based on what the author is saying. An illustration of this is seen in the following excerpt from a Wesleyan work.

There is a place for careful exegesis and exposition of the Scriptures. As a pastor, I have spent many hours in Bible study. But the deepest insights are apprehended in the secret place. Here, the Bible becomes a little sanctuary, its pages strewn with spiritual landmarks. Here are mysterious depths, beyond the grasp of words, where the adoring soul simply worships in the presence of mysteries too vast and deep for expression. The older tradition had a sense of mystery. It didn't have to have everything explained. Thousands of books have been written by inquiring minds about the Crucifixion, but who can understand it? We worship in the presence of mystery. It is in the mysteries that we catch a glimpse of the ineffable loveliness and the incomprehensible mercies of our Lord.²⁹

However, devotional reading of the Scripture does not have to be linked with a mystical or facile or touchstone approach to Scripture as the works of Francke, Bengel, Wesley, and Clarke aptly illustrate. It is true as Sproul has noted that personal study of the Scripture means private interpretation which has “. . . the clear and present danger of subjectivism in Biblical interpretation.”³⁰ To minimize this danger, principles of the devotional use of the Scripture must be taught. Careful study of the Scripture is not to be minimized. Principles of exegesis and devotional use of the Bible may go hand in hand.

This is indeed the emphasis and commitment that is seen in hermeneutical works by Michelsen, Ramm, and Traina.³¹ In addition works on a more popular level by Wald and the Navigators have contributed much to the sound devotional use of Scripture.³² Here there is a presentation of the inductive method of Bible study which includes a significant expansion of the application phase. ³³ Unfortunately most schools, Bible colleges as well as seminaries, seem to devote little time to teaching the students how to study the Bible devotionally. Even within the Wesleyan tradition this appears to be so. In a survey of colleges and seminaries within the Wesleyan and Free Church tradition, eleven colleges of the twenty-one that responded offered specific courses in the area of hermeneutics.³⁴ All twelve of the seminaries that responded offered courses in the area of hermeneutics. However if texts are any indication, only fifteen of the colleges and seminaries use any text which covers the devotional use of Scripture. Of those only three schools employ any works which have a primary emphasis on the devotional or the application stage of Bible study. Of the thirty-three schools that responded, only thirteen offer courses in devotional life and only one of those include any major attention to the devotional use of the Scripture. Lest this picture appear too dark, it should be noted that almost all the schools responding indicated that Bible study methods and devotional emphases are integrated in their English Bible courses. However, the question must still be seriously considered, “How much emphasis is being placed on teaching principles of devotional use of Scripture?”

Using the Scriptures Devotionally

What then are the principles for devotional use of the Bible? They are still basically what Wesley and Clarke presented.³⁵

In attitude, the believer must come to the Scripture:

1. Expecting to meet God.
2. Willing to obey Him.

In action, the believer must:

1. Pray for guidance and insight in reading the Scriptures.
2. Read the scriptures.
3. Correlate the Scriptures.
 - a. In context.
 - b. With understanding of the meaning then.
4. Examine him/herself.
5. Confess sins.
6. Claim promises.
7. Obey commands.
8. Consult with mature Christians on difficult passages.

To practice the attitudes and action principles of devotional Bible study requires discipline. To believe that one just happens into devotional study is naive. Those involved in teaching as well as those involved in pastoring must commit themselves to teaching the devotional use of Scripture.³⁶ To teach the devotional use of Scripture means to train the believer in a clear understanding of Scripture which leads to faithful and willing obedience. In addition there is a need to awaken the use of small groups for support and accountability. They are essential for the discipline of the believer to the rigors of devotional study.

Notes

1. M. H. Pope, "Devoted," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 1:838-39.
2. W. Mundle, "Godliness, Piety," *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. and trans. Colin Brown, *Theologisches Begriffslexicon Zum Neuen Testament*, 2:90-94. See also T.D.N.T. 2:751-54; 3:155-59; 7:173-84.
3. Frederic W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation. Eight Lectures* (N. Y.: Dutton, 1886), pp. 257ff.
4. Barnard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 3rd ed. rev. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1973), p. 60.
5. Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, pp. 357-59.
6. Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 61-62. see also Gordon S. Wakefield, *The Spiritual Life in the Methodist Tradition* (London, 1966).
7. Robert G. Tuttle, Jr., *John Wesley: His Life and Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1978), provides a vivid illustration through Tuttle's creative format.

8. John Wesley, "Preface," Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament, 18th ed. (N.Y.: Eaton and Mains, n.d.), p. 4.
9. Robert W. Burtner and Robert E. Chiles, *A Compend of Wesley's Theology* (N.Y.: Abingdon Press, 1954), pp. 17-18. "Preface to the Sermons," 1:31-32.
10. William M. Arnett, "John Wesley and the Bible," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 3 (Spring, 1968):7-8.
11. John Wesley, "Preface," Explanatory Notes Upon the Old Testament (1765), 1:viii. Also Burtner and Chiles, pp. 22-23.
12. George A. Turner, "John Wesley as an Interpreter of Scripture," *Inspiration and Interpretation*, ed. John F. Walvoord, ETS Pub. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1957), p. 174.
13. Wesley, Notes on N.T., 2 Tim. 3:16.
14. Turner, "John Wesley," p. 177.
15. For an interesting discussion see Howard A. Snyder, *The Radical Wesley and Patterns for Church Renewal* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity, 1980), pp. 53-64. Some of these thoughts had appeared earlier in *The Asbury Seminarian*, 33: 1 and 33:3
16. Wesley, "Preface," Notes on N.T., pp. 3-4. See also Turner, "John Wesley," p. 173, and Martin Schmidt, *John Wesley: A Theological Biography*, II:2, trans. Denis Inman (N.Y.: Abingdon, 1973), pp. 194-96.
17. Tuttle, p. 278.
18. Wayne McCown, "Towards A Wesleyan Hermeneutic," an unpublished paper delivered at the Watson Colloquium for Professors of Religion, November 30-December 2, 1979, Winona Lake, Indiana, p. 8. McCown notes the parallels between Wesley's use of Scripture and the inductive method of Bible study.
19. McCown, "Towards a Wesleyan Hermeneutic," p. 6, where he notes Wesley's significant development in the use of the Bible.
20. Adam Clarke, *The Preacher's Manual including Clavis Biblica and A Letter to a Methodist Preacher* (N.Y.: Phillips and Hunt, 1820), pp. 116-17.
21. Adam Clarke, *Christian Theology* (1835; reprinted, Salem, Ohio: Convention Bookstore, 1967), pp. 338-39.
22. Carton R. Young, "American Methodist Hymnody: A Historical Sketch," *The History of American Methodism*, ed. Emory S. Bucke (N. Y.: Abingdon, 1964.), 3:631-34). Leslie R. Marston, *From Age to Age A Living Witness* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Light and Life Press, 1960), pp. 345-48.
23. Frank Baker, *From Wesley to Asbury: Studies in Early American Methodism* (Durham, N. C.: Duke University, 1976) p. 194.
24. McCown, "Towards a Wesleyan Hermeneutic," p. 29.
25. Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, pp. 124-42.
26. Murray H. Leifer, "Renewed Interest in the Bible," *The History of American Methodism*, 3:563.
27. Witness the new hermeneutic movement; lay renewal and relational theology such as advocated by Keith Miller and Bruce Larson; small groups emphases of Ray Stedman, and Ray Ortlund.

28. Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978), p. 60.
29. J. D. Harvey, *The Wesleyan Way Today* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Light and Life Press, 1979), p. 51.
30. R. C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity, 1979), p. 37. Turner, "John Wesley," p. 159, makes a similar comment, "The stress upon the inwardness of religion makes for vitality, but it also tends to subjectivism and facilitates distorted emphases."
31. A. Berkely Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1963); Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 3rd ed. rev.; and Robert A. Traina, *Methodical Bible Study* (by the author, 1952).
32. Oletta Wald, *The Joy of Discovery in Bible Study*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg, 1975); Walter A. Henrichsen, *A Layman's Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Nav Press, 1978); *Search the Scriptures* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: The Navigators, 1974); and *The Navigator Bible Studies Handbook* rev. ed. (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Nav Press, 1979).
33. McCown, "Towards a Wesleyan Hermeneutic," pp. 23-24.
34. See Appendix I.
35. See Appendix II for a copy of the principles presented by the Navigators and note how they compare with Wesley's and Clarke's.
35. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture*, p. 41.

APPENDIX I

	Response	Hermeneutics*	Dev. Life*
	Received	Hermeneutics*	Dev. Life*
Aldersgate College	X	X	
Asbury College			
Asbury Theological Seminary	X	X	X
Azusa Pacific College	X	X	
Bartlesville Wesleyan College			
Bethany Bible College	X		
Bethany Nazarene College	X	X	
Bethel Theological Seminary	X	X	
Canadian Nazarene College	X		
Central College	X		
Central Wesleyan College	X		
Drew University			
Earlham School of Religion			
Eastern Mennonite Seminary	X	X	X

	Response Received	Hermeneutics*	Dev. Life*
Eastern Nazarene College			
Emmanuel School of Religion	X	X	
Evangelical School of Theology	X	X	
Evangelical Theological Seminary			
George Fox College	X		
Goshen Biblical Seminary			
Greenville College			
Hillcrest College	X		X
Houghton College	X		
Lincoln Christian Seminary			
Lorne Park College			
Marion College	X	X	X
Mennonite Biblical Seminary	X	X	X
Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary			
Mid America Nazarene College	X	X	
Mountainview Bible College			
Mt. Vernon Nazarene College	X		X
Nazarene Bible College	X		
Nazarene Theological Seminary	X	X	
Northwest Nazarene College	X	X	
Olivet Nazarene College	X	X	
Point Loma College	X	X	
Queen's Theological College			
Roberts Wesleyan College	X		
Saint Paul School of Theology (Methodist)	X	X	X
Seattle Pacific University	X	X	
Spring Arbor College			
Talbot Theological Seminary	X	X	X
Trevecca Nazarene College	X	X	X
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School	X	X	X
United Wesleyan College	X	X	X
Wesley Biblical Seminary	X	X	X
Western Evangelical Seminary	X	X	X
Wycliffe College			

Summary

- I. 48 schools contacted: 30 colleges, 18 seminaries.
33 schools responded: 21 colleges, 12 seminaries.
33 responses for 69% return-1 mailing
- II. Schools offering courses in hermeneutics:
11 colleges-52% of colleges responding.
12 seminaries-100% of seminaries responding.
23 Total: 70% of schools responding.

- III. Schools offering courses in devotional life:
 5 colleges-24% of colleges responding.
 8 seminaries-67% of seminaries responding.
 13 Total: 39% of schools responding.

*Area is checked only if responding school indicated a specific course in the area.

SURVEY INFORMATION (HERMENEUTICS)

Only those schools that listed specific courses are included.

School	Course	Texts
Aldersgate College	Bible Study Methods Study,	Vos, Howard F. Effective Bible Clark, Dahl, and Gozenbach. Teach Me, Please Teach Me
Asbury Theological Sem.	Numerous Courses	See Catalogue
Azusa Pacific Coll.	Seminar in Biblical Interpretation	Mickleson, Interpreting the Bible
Bethany Nazarene College	Bib. Lit. - Hermeneutics Bible	Mickelsen, Interpreting the Schultz and Inch, Interpreting the Word of God Marshall, New Testament Interpretation
Bethel Theo. Sem.	Biblical Prolegomena	Mickelsen, Interpreting the Bible
Eastern Menn. Sem.	Biblical Interpretation	Michelsen, Interpreting the Bible; Krentz, The Historical-Critical Method; Morris, I Believe in Revelation
Emmanuel Sch. of Rel.	Intro. To Biblical Exegesis	Danker, Multipurpose Tools for Bible Study; Scholer, A Basic Bibliographic Guide for N.T. Exegesis
Evan. Sch. of Theo.	Bible Study Method Biblical Hermeneutics	Traina, Methodical Bible Study Jenson, Independent Bible Study Ladd, New Testament Criticism
Marion College	Biblical Interpretations Methods of Study	Earle, Ralph. Word Meanings in N.T. Vol. 3; Wesleyan Bible Bible Commentary, Vol. 5
Menn. Biblical Sem.	Biblical Hermeneutics	Biblical Interpretation in the Life of the Church; Keck, The Bible in the Pulpit: The Renewal of Biblical Preaching; Krentz, The Historical-Critical Method; Marshall, New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods; Yoder, Toward Understanding the Bible: Hermeneutics for Lay People; Petersen, Literary Criticism for New Testament Critics

School	Course	Texts
Mid-America Naz. Col.	B. Litl 464 (Hist. & Task of interp.)	Ramm, Protestant Biblical Interpretation; Nee, Watchman. Ministry of God's Word; Henry, C. Revelation and Bible; Ladd, New Testament and Criticism
Naz. Theo. Sem.	Biblical Hermeneutics Bible;	Mickelsen, Interpreting the Bright, The Authority of Old Testament
Northwest Naz. College	Biblical Hermeneutics	Michelsen, Interpreting the Bible; Ladd, I Believe in the Resurrection
Olivet Nazarene Col.	Biblical Hermeneutics	Not Indicated
Point Loma College	Exegesis of the Greek N.T.	Howard I. Marshall, New Testament Interpretation
Saint Paul School Of Theology	Biblical Hermeneutics	Survey of contemporary options in Biblical Interpretation-no Text indicated
Seattle Pacific U.	Religion Dept. Biblical Theology	Childs, Biblical Theology in Crisis; Hassel, O.T. Theology: Current Issues in the Debate; Sanders, Torah and Canon
Talbot Theo. Sem.	Hermeneutics Genesis	Ramm, Protestant Biblical Interpretation Rossup, J. E. (Detailed syllabus Genesis, produced at Talbot Seminary)
Trevecca Nazarene College	Biblical Interpretation Greek Exegesis	Smart, Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church; Keck, Taking the Bible Seriously, & Bible in the Pulpit
Trinity Ev. Div. Sch.	Hermeneutics Interpretation;	Hirsh, E.D. Validity in Terry Milton. Biblical Hermeneutics
United Wesleyan Col.	Principles of Bible Study	Cole, The Gospel According to Mark; Jensen, Mark: A Self-Study Guide; Sterrett, How to Understand Your Bible
Wesley Biblical Sem.	Biblical Hermeneutics	Not Yet Chosen
Western Evangelical Seminary	Bible Hermeneutics	Berkhof, Principles of Biblical Interpretation; Ramm, Protestant Biblical Interpretation; Henrichsen, Laymen's Guide; Wald, Joy of Discovery
	Biblical Exegesis	Michelsen, Interpreting the Bible

**SURVEY INFORMATION
(DEVOTIONAL LIFE)**

School	Course	Texts
Asbury Theological Sem.	Numerous Courses Attendance is required at a weekend retreat on "The Life of Devotion"	

School	Course	Texts
Eastern Menn. Sem. Hillcrest Christian Marion College	Spiritual Disciplines Discipline; Personal Devotions Worship	Foster, Celebration of Day, Discipline and Discovery NASV White, James F. New Forms In Worship
Menn. Biblical Sem.	Devotional Life	Day, Discipline of Discovery; Kelly, A Testament of Devotion
Mt. Vernon Nazarene College	Forms of Contemporary Ministry Local Church Ministries	
St. Paul School of Theology	Devotional Classics	Reading in sources of Christian spirituality and Devotion-Augustine-Aquinas Medieval Mystics, Luther, Book of Common Prayer, Bunyan, Law, the Wesleys, Edwards, Carey, Woolman, Kierkegaard, George MacDonald, Hannah Whitall Smith, Evelyn Underhill, P.T. Forsythe, Rufus M. Jones, C.S. Lewis, Bonhoeffer
Talbot Theological Sem.	Spiritual Formation Spiritual Life Prayer	Chafer, L.S. He That Is Spiritual; Packer, Knowing God; Hallesby, O. Prayer; Stott, J.R.W. Your Mind Matters; Schaeffer, Francis, The Mark of a Christian Bible
Trevecca Nazarene College	The Bible and Contemporary Issues: Temptation, Sactification, The Will of God, How to Study the Bible, What it Means to be a Christian, Prayer, Discipleship, Worship, The Christian Ethic.	
Trinity Ev. Div. Sch.	Personal Development For Ministry	Augustine, Confessions; Bounds, E.M. Power Through Prayer; Buttrick, George. So We Believe, So we Pray; Chafer, Lewis S. He that Is Spiritual; Chapman, J. Wilbur. Kadesh-Barnea; Edman, V. Raymond. The Disciplines of Life; Finney, Charles. Power From on High; Law, William. A Serious Call to A Devout and Holy Life; Lewis, C.S. Surprised by Joy; Marshall, Catherine. Beyond Ourselves; Murray, Andrew. With Christ in the School of Prayer

School	Course	Texts
		Pots, J. Manning, Ed. Listening to the Saints; Smith, Hannah W. The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life; Trueblodd, Elton. The Company of the Committed Music
United Wesleyan Col.	Public and Private Worship	
Wesleyan Biblical Sem.	The Doctrine and Practice of Prayer Pub., Great Classics on The Dev. Life	Murray, Andrew, Revell, With Christ in the School of Prayer; Research Class
Western Evangelical Sem.	Devotional Life	Foster, Celebration of Discipline; Taylor, The Disciplined Life
	Worship Prayer	

APPENDIX II

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Summary:

Unit One

Know Your Goal

The objective of Bible Study is to glorify God as you change into a more Christ-like person.

Getting Ready

1. A cleansed life
2. Prayer for illumination
3. Dependence upon the Holy Spirit
4. Willingness to obey

Basic Beliefs

1. The Bible is the literal Word of God.
2. The Bible is God's means to communicate truth to His people.
3. The Bible is authoritative.
4. For every passage there is one intended meaning and many applications.

Keeping On Track

1. Interpret your experience by the Scriptures; do not interpret the Scriptures by your experience.
2. Do not be dogmatic where the Scriptures are not.
3. Study a passage in its context.
4. Be careful in determining whether a passage is figurative rather than literal.

5. Do not rationalize the Scriptures.
6. Do not “spiritualize” the Scriptures.

Practicing The Essentials

1. Observation
2. Interpretation
3. Correlation
4. Application

Application

Application is putting God’s Word into practice—recognizing the voice of the Lord, and responding accordingly. “When I think of Thy ways, I turn my feet to Thy testimonies; I hasten and do not delay to keep Thy commandments” (Psalm 119:59, 60).

The benefit of Bible study is not derived from the method, the technique, or diligent efforts to decipher the text. The benefit is in obeying the voice of the Lord—receiving what He says and putting it into practice. Application doesn’t happen by osmosis nor by chance—application is by intent!

Application starts with the willing acceptance of truth. A right response to Scripture is characterized by trust, obedience, praise and thanksgiving. The application may include remembering an impressive truth, changing a wrong attitude or taking a positive action.

Respond to God, not a rule book! Responses are to be motivated by love. The goal is to glorify God by pleasing Him in every area of life. An unwillingness to apply the Scriptures personally may develop mere intellectual knowledge and spiritual insensitivity to the Lord and to people.

The following list of seven directive questions may help you to apply the Word to your life.*

1. Is there an example for me to follow?
2. Is there a sin for me to avoid?
3. Is there a command for me to obey?
4. Is there a promise for me to claim?
5. What does this particular passage teach me about God, or about Jesus Christ?
6. Is there a difficulty for me to explore?
7. Is there something in this passage that I should pray about today?

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A WESLEYAN INTERPRETATION OF ROMANS 5-8

by

Jerry McCant

Any assignment whose parameters are set by others can be threatening. After accepting this assignment, I found this one to be so. First, it was to be a Wesleyan interpretation. Given the many “Wesleyanisms”¹ and the problem Isbell² had in defining a “Wesleyan position” on the “old man,” I was not too hopeful. I was asked to interpret Romans 6-8 from this Wesleyan perspective. For reasons that I shall discuss below, I was not able to be that restrictive, but found myself forced to consider Romans 5-8 as a unit.

Some would place 5:1-11 with chapter 4;³ others would place the whole of chapter 5 with what precedes.⁴ One of the primary reasons for placing chapter 5 with chapters 6-8 is the nature of its contents: It is parallel by virtue of its substance with chapters 6-8, coinciding exactly with the logical sections. In each of the four chapters the first sub-section is a basic statement concerning the life promised for the man who is righteous by faith or concerning the meaning of justification: being justified means being reconciled to God, being sanctified, being made free from the law’s condemnation and being indwelt by the Spirit.⁵ Two formal matters may be considered. First, the occurrence of one or the other of the formulae “through our Lord Jesus Christ,” “through Jesus Christ our Lord” and “in Christ Jesus our Lord” at the beginning, in the end of chapter 5 and at the end of each of the three subsequent chapters, has the effect of binding the chapters together. Secondly, the solemn formula which concludes chapter 4 strongly suggests that 4:25 marks the end of a major division of the epistle.⁶

Other considerations argue for making Romans 5-8 the unit of material. Up to Romans 5:11, Paul has dealt with sin as guilt, but from 5:12 to 8:10, Paul discusses sin as revolt; *he hamartia* occurs twenty-eight times between 5:12 and 8:10. The sinfulness of man (5:12-21) is dealt with in terms of crucifixion with Christ (chapter 6), death to the law (chapter 7) and life in the Spirit (chapter 8). Through Adam, mankind stood under judgment (*katahrima*, 5:18), but in Christ, the judgment (*katakrima*, 8:1) is cancelled. The section opens (5:1-11) and closes (8:31-39) on the eschatological note of

hope “through (in) our Lord Jesus Christ.” Sin is personified throughout Romans 5-8.

I. Peace with God (5:1-11)

That this section is related to the preceding is clearly indicated by the phrase *dikaiosin hemon* at the end of 4:25 and the participle *dikaiothentes* as the first word in 5:1. With the beginning of Romans 5, justification is considered an accomplished fact and Paul is now prepared to consider its implications and consequences. This righteousness is a present reality, but Paul does not rob it of its forensic-eschatological meaning. The eschatological event is present reality. Rudolf Bultmann reminds us that “When God rightwises the sinner, ‘makes him righteous’ (4:5), that man is not merely ‘regarded as if’ he were righteous, but really is righteous-i.e. absolved from sin by God’s verdict.”⁷

Assurance of the future, eschatological life in Romans 5 emerges from the preceding chapters. In Romans 1:18-32, the heathen and Jew are confronted with both God’s righteousness and His wrath. Righteousness has been made available through the accomplished salvation event in Jesus Christ, according to Romans 3:21-31. It is needed by Jew and Gentile-*ou gar estin diastole*-(3:22). Romans 4 is scriptural proof of Paul’s thesis and 5:1-21 gives an affirmative answer to the question whether life is a present reality. Thus, Romans 5:1 is connected to what precedes³ and is the sum of chapters 1-4 as well as 5-8.9

As a consequence of being rightwised by faith, Paul affirms that *eirenen echomen pros ton Theon* (5:1). That *echomen* should be understood as an indicative rather than a subjunctive in this passage is indicated by v.10f.-*echthroi ontes katellagemen to Theo . . . katallagentes . . . ten katallagen elabomen*.¹⁰ If the subjunctive is read, it must have the sense of “Let us enjoy the peace we have.” J. B. Phillips tries to preserve this in his translation: “Let us grasp the fact that we have peace with God.” Peace with God means “God is for us” (8:31).

“Peace with God” (*eirenen pros ton Theon*) is not “peace of mind” because the psychological characteristics of salvation are foreign here.” That subjective feelings of peace (though these may, in fact, result) are not denoted is indicated by verse 10f.: *echthroi ontes katellagemen to Theo . . . katallagentes . . . ten katallagen elabomen*. Justification and reconciliation are related but not identical. Reconciliation is not a consequence of justification nor is it a different metaphor for the same fact. God’s justification involves reconciliation because God is what/who He is. The fact that we have been justified means we have been reconciled and have peace with God.

Peace with God and reconciliation are through Jesus Christ who gives access to this grace (5:2).¹² “Through whom we have received access of this grace in which we stand” is synonymous with “having been justified.” Even with the *kai*, it does not indicate a second work of grace.¹³ Having been justified, we rejoice (*kauchometha*, present tense; indicative or subjunctive?) in the hope of the glory of God. “Glory” is future because it is an eschatological term. But in Jesus Christ, the present has broken into the future and this hope which so transforms the present (vv. 3-5) “does not let

us down” (v.5). This hope in which we “exult” (RSV), “triumph” (Moffatt), or “glory” (Goodspeed) anticipates the mood of Romans 8:31-39.

Verses 3-5 form a concatenation of the paradoxical characteristics resulting from justification by faith. Exulting in hardships is based on the proverb that “tribulation works patience.”¹⁵ Patience produces character (*dokime*-RSV, but “experience” in KJV) and character hope. Hope has already been given in justifying faith, but is repeated here to mark its dynamic nature which must be continuously renewed. Such hope does not “disappoint us” (v. 5, RSV) because “God’s love has been poured out through the Holy Spirit” (v.5). This is the first mention of agape in Romans as well as the first mention of the Holy Spirit.¹⁶ One can hardly doubt the close relationship intended by the juxtaposition of these terms in this verse.¹⁷ Note that the Holy Spirit has already been given in justification and reconciliation.

That the *tu Theou* of 5:5 is a subjective genitive is indicated by 5:6-11. The “love of God” is proven by His act of giving His Son who “died for us” (vv. 6, 8, 10). With a kind of prevenient grace, God expressed love before man could-while we were “helpless” (v. 6), “ungodly” (v. 6), “sinners” (v.8), “enemies” (v. 10), Christ died for us. Justification was achieved “by his blood” (*en to naimati autou*, v.9).¹⁸ Tension and paradox characterize the Christian life-already God has justified (vv. 9, 10-11), but much more “we shall be saved” (vv. 9-10). Thus, we have the tension expressed by Oscar Cullman in another context as “already . . . not yet.”

II. Death and Life-Adam and Christ (5:12-21)

This section is considered the locus classicus for the aetiology of original sin.¹⁹ But, while the sinfulness of man is certainly implied, the point of 5:12-21 is not to prove the origin of sin but the origin of death, the “reverse side of sin.”²⁰ The primary theme of this section, however, is the origin of new life in Christ and this life is a present reality. The idea of the transmission of the penalty for Adam’s sin to the entire race is not mentioned in Genesis, nor does it appear explicitly anywhere in the Old Testament. That concept first appears only a century or so before Paul’s own time in apocryphal and pseudepigraphical literature (cf. Wisdom of Solomon 2:24; Ecclesiasticus 25:24; 2 Baruch 17:3 and most explicitly in 2 Esdras 7:111). Paul seems to be saying that death became universal not because of a universally sinful inheritance from Adam, but because “all men sinned” (v. 12). This was the usual rabbinical doctrine: “Though death since Adam reigns generally throughout the world, yet it only gains power over the individual on account of his own sin.”²

“Therefore” (*dia touto*) in v. 12 connects to verses 1-11 in this way: Because we have received our reconciliation through Christ, it is true that Christ, the bringer of life, is the contrast to Adam, the bringer of death. In His death, Christ has effected reconciliation and He has brought life through a “righteous act” (v. 12).²² Paul does not contrast sin and righteousness but death and life. Certainly only pious imagination can find any basis in this passage for needing to eradicate original sin.

Apparently Paul intended a contrast so that v. 12 would be concluded “. . . so through one man righteousness came into the world and life through righteousness, and so life became available to all men.”²³ If there is

a contrast in this paragraph, one must find it in v. 18. But vv. 13-14 are intended to support the phrase “because all sinned” (v. 12), and the argument loses some cohesiveness. Sin is in the world before Moses but cannot be counted as sin where there is no law (v. 13). But death, the consequence of sin, reigns from Adam to Moses, and is universally applied so that those whose sins (*hamartesan*) were not like the transgression (*parabasis*) of Adam also died. One can only conclude that sin was different from Adam to Moses. Sinners before Moses did not sin in the same way as Adam did. The law, then, is what makes sin really sinful.

In verses 12-14, Paul attempts to show the agreement between Adam and Christ; beginning with verse 15 he will show the differences between them.²¹ Over against Adam’s act of sin (*to paraptoma*) we have an act of grace on the part of Christ. The Pauline antithesis is again incomplete because “one man’s trespass” is contrasted not with “one man’s obedience,” but with “the grace of God and the free grace gift in the grace of that one man Jesus Christ” (v. 15). God’s grace (*charis*) is in contrast to the “one” (Adam). In chapter 6, Paul will show that the “much more” of God’s gift of grace was accomplished through Christ’s crucifixion.

Paul wants to show that Christ did more than simply balance the scales. What Christ did can only be described as “much more” (*pollo mallon*, vv. 15, 17). And what is more, where sin abounded, grace super-abounded (*hype reperisseusen*, v. 20). Through one man death spread “to all men” (v. 12) and through a second Adam “many will be made righteous” (v. 19). Note, however that in v. 15 the antithesis is “many died” because of Adam and grace “abounded for many” in Christ. Again, in v. 19 “many were made sinners” because of Adam and “many will be made righteous” because of Christ.

Barth believes that Romans 5:12-21 teaches universalism.²⁵ Generally, it has been assumed that through Adam sin and death passed to *pantas anthropous*, but that Christ’s role as the Second Adam applied only to *tous pollous*-to as many as believed. In this discussion we should remember that *pantes anthropoi* in verses 12 and 18, following Semitic usage means the same as *hoi polloi* ²⁶ Since Paul is dealing in comparison and contrast in this passage, to whatever extent Adam’s action had universal effects, so also Christ’s act must have universal implications.

The problem is our wrong-headed approach to this passage. It is not an attempted aetiology of sin. Paul intends here to speak primarily of Christ in His work of justifying and reconciling mankind to God. Our interpretation also seems to flounder because of our confusion at the point of the mythological character of the first Adam and mythical interpretation of the work of the Second Adam with whom we identify the historical Jesus. Condemnation results because “all have sinned” (v. 12) but righteousness results not because “all have obeyed.” Rather, it is to be received as something (Rom. 6:23) which Christ accomplished. It is prevenient grace and it opens us to the future so that the potential for righteousness is available to all.²⁷ As Irenaeus taught us, Christ reversed all the effects of Adam’s fall.²⁸

III. The New Life in Christ (6:1-7:6)

There is little justification for referring to Romans 6-8 as the “sanctification section” in a particularly Wesleyan sense, as holiness literature

often does.²⁹ The word “sanctification” appears only once (at 6:19) in this section and there certainly not as a second work of grace. Besides, 6:1 with its use of *oun* would indicate a connection between chapters 5 and 6. *oun* is inferential in usage and signifies that what is to follow is the conclusion drawn from the preceding verses.³⁰ In Romans 6-8, then, it is not so much a shift of emphasis as a deepening of emphasis.³¹ Paul is still talking about justification and reconciliation as they are effected by the death of Jesus.

Paul’s emphasis on the superabounding grace of God (5:20) led to the charge of antinomianism—a charge he had already addressed in 3:8. In diatribe style, Paul asks: “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase?” (6:1). An emphatic answer is given to this rhetorical question: *me genoito*—God forbid! Then, with an interrogative statement, a principle is enunciated: “How shall we who died to sin still live in it?” Essentially the same rhetorical question is asked in verse 15.³² The answer is the same as the first: *me genoito*. Justification as explicated in Romans 5 does not imply a Gnostic, libertarian antinomianism, but rather that sin, a personification of power has now been dethroned (6:14).

Stated positively, the principle in verse 2 is: We who have died to sin can no longer live in sin. Verses 3-5, then function as an explanation of the principle stated in verse 2. The rite of baptism is used metaphorically as a pedagogical tool. “All this Paul could have said without any appeal to baptism at all, for it follows directly from his teaching about Christ as the second Adam; but the reference to baptism is of great value pedagogically.³³ If the aorist verbs (*apethanomen*, v. 2; *ebaptisthemen* v. 3; *synetaphemen* v. 4) have any force at all, it seems they would reinforce the Christian’s identification with Christ as the New Adam who, by His death, has reversed the effects of the first Adam’s fall.³⁴

Hamartia can be considered “the action itself as well as the result.”³⁵ Whereas in the LXX “arrogance is regarded as the sin par excellence,”³⁶ Paul refers to it as master, men serve it and are slaves to it, it dies and revives, etc.³⁷ To make too much distinction between “sin” and “sins” is to miss the whole point. If the Romans remain in sin, they will commit acts of sin. Paul’s doctrine of abounding grace had been misconstrued to mean one might remain in sin. He wants to say rather emphatically that this is not so. Baptism³⁸ “into Christ Jesus” so clearly identifies the believer with Christ that he participates in the death and burial of Jesus. There is a kind of eschatological reserve, however, and resurrection is reserved for the future.³⁹ Identification with Christ in baptism has one result: “our old man was crucified with Christ” (6:6).⁴⁰ This paper is not the place to review the history of the arguments on the identification of the “old man”—whether it is the unregenerate self or the regenerate but unsanctified self.⁴¹ What is crucial is that here Paul is saying that in baptism we become participants in the death of Christ. He is coming very close to his argument in 5:12ff The “old man” who dies is the old Adam, which is bound in sin and death. He is raised to “newness of life,” belonging to the new humanity of which Christ is the head.⁴²

What is that “moment” when the “old man” dies? Is it the ritual of baptism, the faith-experience to which baptism witnesses or the moment of Christ’s death with whom the Christian in some real sense died, and with

which death, the Christian at the moment of faith identifies, which in turn is expressed by the ritual of baptism? The accent on the literal death of Christ (vv. 3-5) in the context would appear to favor the latter. Confirming this is 2 Corinthians 5:14: "One died for all, therefore all died." It is doubtful if Paul ever uses the metaphor of death to refer to the subjective experience of conversion or a second crisis, but to the death of Christ where something happened once for all to the potential Christian with which he identifies by faith (*pistouein*, v.8) and which he begins to realize in the conduct of daily life (*logidzesthai*, v. 11). The Christian's "death" occurred when Christ died and is a resultant quality of his existence which he appropriates in life (vv. 7, 11f.). A careful study of *ho palaios hemon anthropos* which is "Adam-or rather, ourselves in union with Adam,"⁴³ substantiates this judgment. The "old man" was crucified in order that (*hina* of purpose) the body of sin-"the body insofar as it is the organ (*werkzung*) of sin"⁴⁴-might be destroyed. Sin loses its power.

Verse 7 is enigmatic. Is Paul saying that dying with Christ removes one forever from the power of sin? The RSV translates: "For he who has died is freed from sin." The problem is that "freed" is not the best translation of *dedikaiotai*. Probably the verse refers to the believer rather than Christ: "he who died (with Christ) has been justified from sin"-guilt is gone. "The reality is that of the sanctification or transformation of life which Paul began to make obvious in 5:1 and will discuss until 8:39. Out of death has come a new life with Christ (v. 8) and thus to God (v. 10). With this life, sin is completely incompatible."⁴⁵ The meaning of verse 7 is clarified by verses 8-10.

No perfection of human character can be derived from this crucifixion metaphor, nor does Paul depict only an ideal. Verse 11 closes the discussion and at the same time opens the way for an application of the principle (cf. v. 2) in verses 12-14 with *logidzesthai*. The ethical implications cannot now be discussed. With verse 12 we get the Pauline "imperative in the indicative"⁴⁶-and throughout verses 12-14 the message is "Werde was du bist! (Become what you are!)."⁴⁷

Two other analogies are used to support the Pauline thesis: (1) New life is depicted as slavery (6:15-23) and (2) the new life is illustrated from marriage (7:1-6). Verse 15 begins with the same question and the same answer Paul gave in verse 1. Paul recognizes the weakness of his human analogy (v.19) but does not seem to notice that the metaphor of slavery is inconsistent with 8:15 where slavery is denied. There is a change of lordship with no diminishing of the moral responsibility. Christian freedom is paradoxical-to be bound to Christ is to be free indeed. His third analogy has problems as well-the husband does the dying, but the woman is set free. By the reasoning of verse 1, he is the one freed from the law. One probably does well not to press Paul's analogy and realize that the only point of comparison is that "death puts an end to obligations."⁴⁸

IV. The Law and Human Inability (7:7-25)

Undoubtedly, the most vexing problem in Romans 7 is the identification of the "I" who speaks in this passage.⁴⁹ Is it man under law or under faith? Is it man in general or Paul in particular who speaks? Historically, three positions have been taken: (1) Paul's reminiscence of life under the

law; (2) Paul's post-conversion experience; (3) his depiction of mankind in the general sense.⁵⁰ Origen and most of the Greek fathers took the first of these positions; the reformers took up the second position;⁵¹ while more recent scholars (W. G. Kümmel and Bultmann) take the third position.

James Arminius was accused of heresy because he disagreed with Calvin and Beza in applying Romans 7 to regenerate man. In his defense, Arminius gave an extended dissertation on Romans 7. He proposed a five-part treatment. (1) Paul is not speaking of himself or anyone else as under grace but under law. (2) This position has always had defenders in the church and has never been condemned as heretical. (3) No heresy, including Pelagianism, can be derived from it. (4) Positions taken by Calvin and Beza were not approved by early fathers or even Augustine. (5) The position of Calvin and Beza is "injurious to grace" and "adverse to good morals."⁵² He took his position with Origen and the Greek fathers over against Calvin and Beza.

Wesley said that neither Paul nor any other Jew was ever "without the law" and so he speaks neither of himself nor any other Jew.⁵³ Romans 7 describes all Jews and Gentiles who groaned to be delivered from sin. 4 He asks a penetrating question: "Do not Christians also (in the wide sense of the word) groan to be delivered from the body of death?"⁵⁵ John Fletcher, like Wesley, believed Romans 7 referred to the awakened unregenerate under the law.⁵⁶ Adam Clarke said if Romans 7 referred to a regenerate man, "the argument of the apostle would go to demonstrate the insufficiency of the gospel as well as the law."⁵⁷ A few holiness writers, such as W. B. Godbey, and H. C. Morrison have sometimes interpreted Romans 7 as describing a regenerate person. Grider believes this has been more prominent in folk theology than holiness literature²⁶ Richard Taylor thinks the debate is "a bit pointless" but he applies James 1:8 to Romans 7 to interpret it as the "double-minded" man. He wants Romans 7 to describe both the unregenerate and the unsanctified.⁶⁹

That this is still a hard question is seen in the way Greathouse handles it. He believes it is certain Paul is drawing from his experience and generalizing it, and he does want to say this is "Mr. Everyman's autobiography." But the "I" of Romans 7 cannot be a justified man; Paul's testimony at the time of writing the Epistle was not 7:7-25, but 8:1-4. The "wretched man" is the awakened sinner. But after all disclaimers, he then wants to interpret Romans 7 as the Christian needing to be sanctified. All of Romans 7:7-25 is in the past tense, although present tense verbs are used in verses 14-25! Finally, he gives a sermon outline for Romans 7:1-8:4 entitled, "The Christian and the Law!"⁶⁰

Given the use of the first person singular personal pronoun, *prima facie* evidence would indicate that the subject of the "I" is Paul. But, there is evidence Judaism did not always use the first person singular in a strictly biographical form. Kümmel cites three Talmudic passages where "I" is used as a stylistic form, a *Stilform*.⁶¹ New evidence from Qumran (columns 10 and 11 of IQS) indicate a use very similar to Romans that is not autobiographical.⁶² Within the Pauline literature one can find instances of a gnomic use of the first person singular (cf. Rom. 3:7; 1 Cor. 13:1-3; 6:15) where the indefinite "one" (tis) could have as easily been used as "I."⁶³

As Wesley pointed out, it is difficult to imagine a time in the life of any Jew when he was “apart from the law” (v. 9). However, objections are raised to an “identification-gnomic” interpretation: (1) Adam is not mentioned; (2) it requires that the law be pre-Mosaic. Neither of the objections is serious. Genesis 3 stands in the background of Jewish literature so prominently that the characters need not be named. Paul is not always precise with his illustrative material as we have already seen. Most likely we have here a mixture of the uses of the gnomic and autobiographical forms.

In the previous sections, Paul had argued that the Christian is free from the power of sin. He is free from it because in dying with Christ, he died to sin (6:1-11), so that in Christian existence he is free to live for God (6:12-13). He is also free from the law, because through dying with Christ, he also died to the law, so that he is free to live for God in the newness of the Spirit (7:1-6).

In 7:7 we face the same rhetorical question as in 6:1 and 6:15—*Ti oun eroumen?*—“What therefore shall we say?” Now it is no longer “Shall we remain in sin?” but “Is the law sin?” Paul gives the same emphatic denial as in 6:1, *15-me genoito*. Yet sin and law have been brought together so Paul states his thesis, answering the objection (*alla*): *ten hamartian ouk egnon ei me dia nomou* (v. 7). “Apart from the law sin lies dead” (v. 9). In a real sense, this brings his previous arguments together on sin and law.

Paul’s first argument is: *ten epithymian ouk edein ei me*. Having stated this, he proceeds with an exegetical explanation. There is an equation: *ei me dia nomou = ei me ho nomos elegen* (v. 7). What the law said was *ouk epithymeseis* (v. 7) and thus the law which is personified in the same way as sin, is given a voice with a Scriptural quotation (Exod. 21:17; Deut. 5:21, LXX). In verse 8 he seems to equate *entole* with *nomos* and *epithymia* with *hamartia* (v. 8).

Exegetical proof for his position is gained by reference to a mythological tradition concerning man’s primordial history in verses 8-11 (cf. 5:12f.). Before the law was given, sin was “dead”—it was there but it was ineffective (v.8; cf. 5:12f.). At that time man (ego) existed without the law and when law came, sin became alive (i.e. effective; v. 9) Then man (ego) died (v. 10; cf. 5:12). The law which itself was intended “*eis zoen*” in fact turned out to be “*eis thanaton*.” The law was misused by and became the tool which served sin to complete her demonic work (death). Man was cheated when he took the law to be what it was (*eis zoen*), while in fact it brought death (v. 11 is a reformulation of v. 8). The result is that Paul can say that the law itself is good (v. 12). Verse 13 then becomes an apologetic statement: Law is good and it did not bring death—the culprit is sin.⁶⁴

Paul introduces his second argument with *alla* (cf. 7:7): *he hamartia, hina phane hamartia (emoi egento thanatos)* (v. 13). The conclusions of his discussion in 6:7-12 are restated: *dia tou agathon moi katergadzomeno thanaton*. Sin did this through the instrumentality of the law which is good in order that sin might be revealed as sin. The sinfulness of sin must be demonstrated (v. 13).

The third argument in this section (w. 14-23) sounds like a confessional. It begins with *ego de sarkinos eimi, pepramenos hupo ten hamartian* (7:14), and ends with a law *aichmalotzdzonta me en to nomo tes hamartias to onti en tois melesin mou* (7:23). Throughout the argument first person

singular pronouns and present tense verbs dominate the scene. Bultmann agrees with the preconversion position, insisting it was known and presented “only from the standpoint of faith,”⁶⁵ but he believes verse 25b is then a gloss and belongs with verse 23.⁶⁶ But, C. L. Mitton believes the ego autos of verse 25b is precisely the key to interpreting the passage.⁶⁷ This became the summary of the whole chapter and the true contrast between chapters 7 and 8 is to be found in that of the autos ego of 7:25b and *en Christo Iesou* of 8:1.

Man is unable to attain to the will and law of God in and of himself. Paul expresses it with the “I-style:” I am carnal (v. 14); I am . . . sold under sin (v. 14); I do not understand my own actions (v. 15); I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate (v.15); I know that nothing good dwells within me (v. 18); I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do (vv.18-19); I sin against my wish (vv.17, 20). Paul concludes with the anguished cry which is the universal cry, “Wretched man that I am” (v. 24). A doxology follows: I thank God through Jesus Christ the Lord (v.25)!

According to Bultmann, “because what is involved in Romans 7:7-25 are trans-subjective processes it is possible to understand Romans 7 in its unity with 5:12-21.”⁶⁸ If this is correct, Richard Taylor is correct in saying it is “a bit pointless” to debate whether Romans 7 is concerned with Paul’s preconversion or post-conversion experience. Romans 7:7-25 is not specifically either Paul’s or mankind’s pre-conversion or post-conversion experience. Nor is it the cry of only “the man under the law” or “the Christian who slips back into a legalistic attitude to God.”⁶⁹ Paul is uttering mankind’s great cry of its own inability. It is Paul’s and humanity’s realization that in our history we have become so bound up with our Adamic sinfulness that there can be deliverance and victory only in Jesus Christ our Lord.

V. Man in the Freedom of the Spirit (8:1-39)

Romans 8 is clearly structured. Verses 1-11 say the Christian life is life in the Spirit. This life in the Spirit is expounded as the state of sonship in verses 12-17. Eschatological freedom is portrayed in 18-30. Verses 31-39 depict the Christian life as one of triumph. This life far transcends life under the law. Chapter 8 answers the questions raised in chapter 7. It is not the law, but the Spirit that provides the basis for the Christian life. The line of thought broken off at 7:6 is now resumed. The Christian has been crucified and buried with Christ and now lives and serves in the “newness of the Spirit.” Throughout chapter 8, the dominant note is that of assurance.

Like 7:25b, 8:1 is a dogmatic sentence, which is certainly not a question but according to the *ara nun* that follows, which is parallel to the *ara oun* in 7:25b, is to be understood as a foundation. As such, however, it does not fit in either with the depiction of existential tornness in 7:25b, the lament in 7:24, or the thanksgiving in 7:25a; which needs an explanation rather than a basis and is given in 8:2. Again, 8:1, unlike 7:25a and 8:2, does not maintain deliverance from the body of death, but from eschatological judgment.⁷⁰ Therefore, we must consider the possibility of a gloss.⁷¹ Now is the tie that binds 8:1 to 7:6. “But now we have been released from the law” (7:6, NASB). There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (8:1, NASB). *Condemnation (katakrima)* passed upon all men in

Adam (5:18) but in Christ there is no *katakrima* (8:1) because God condemned (*katekrinen*) sin in the flesh (8:3).

According to the context in chapter 7, it is not accidental that Paul states his thesis in terms of liberation from the law of sin and death (8:2). Just as one slavery replaces another in Romans 6, so in Romans 8 the “law of the Spirit” replaces the “law of sin and death.” It was because of the weakness of the flesh (*sarx*) that the law was made impotent, but God did what the law could not by sending His Son to condemn sin in the flesh (of Jesus). Jesus came in the likeness (*homoiomati*) of sinful flesh (v. 3). The “likeness of flesh” would be Docetism; the “flesh of sin” would be Ebionitism; the “likeness of the flesh of sin” is gospel.

For Paul, orientation to the *sarx* or the *pneuma* is the total attitude which determines everything. Life is determined as a totality by *sarx* or *pneuma*.⁷² Man “in the flesh” is man by himself, apart from God with no capacity over the power of sin. God accomplished what the law could not do by sending His son into the hostile territory of sin and death. Christ came to deliver Adam’s race from “the compulsion of sin” (v.4).⁷³ Life in Christ is life in the Spirit. Prior to chapter 8, the Holy Spirit was only mentioned twice (Rom. 5:5 and 7:6, both related to chapter 8), but the Holy Spirit is mentioned twenty times in 8:1-27.

The *gar* in verse 5 indicates the relation to verse 4, not just of verse 5, but of verses 5-11 as a whole, which provides an explanation of verse 4 for *tois me kata sarka peripatousin alla kata pneuma*. The expressions *hoi kata sarka ontes*, *ta tes sarkos phronousin*, and *hoi kata sarka peripatounes* are synonymous; the *en sarki* (instrumental, not locative dative) indicates that Paul has no fixed, technical terminology.⁷⁴ To “mind” the things of the flesh is to allow the direction of life to be determined by the flesh while those who allow the Spirit to determine life’s direction are “minding” the things of the Spirit. Verses 5-8 seem to be poetic in structure⁷⁵ and give a vivid contrast of life lived under sin and that lived in the Spirit which is reminiscent of 5:12-21. There are two possible “mind-sets”—the flesh (the old humanity) or the Spirit (the new humanity, v. 5). The mind of flesh has death as its final outcome (v. 6), is in absolute enmity with God (v. 7) and can in no way please Him (v. 8). In contrast, those who are in the Spirit set their mind on life (v. 6) and are at peace with God (v. 6; cf. 5:1).

What has been said in general in verses 5-8 is applied specifically to the Romans in verses 9-11. Paul begins with a qualified affirmation of his confidence that his readers are indeed in the Spirit (note that he either has a “functional trinitarianism” or is very imprecise because he moves almost imperceptibly in v.9 from “the Spirit” to “the Spirit of God,” to “the Spirit of Christ”). The qualification in verse 9b is necessary because he knows that sometimes men claim to be “in the Spirit” but fail to “walk” in the Spirit. The “walk” is the evidence of the “being” (v. 4). Those who walk in the Spirit still live in perishable bodies (v. 10). As in 1 Corinthians 15:42-43, so in verses 10b-11 Paul assures the Romans of a future body which will be transformed at the resurrection. Redemption, then, is eschatological; redemption is complete only in the future.

The qualified affirmation of confidence is still spoken to saints in Rome, not saints in heaven and they are told they are not *en sarki* (v. 9). The *soma* in this passage (v.10) is man himself while *sarx* is a power that lays claim to

him and determines him. That is why Paul can speak of a life *kata sarka* but never of a life *kata soma* 76 Verse 9b can be read in juxtaposition with 7:20 to give the contrasted meaning. In the expression, “Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ,” Wesley understands that one is not a Christian if he does not have the Spirit.⁷⁷ Adam Clarke believed that verse 9 proved that Paul is talking about justification.⁷⁸

Verses 13-14 provide a summary of everything from 6:1 on. The justified person is dead to the flesh and alive in the Spirit. These verses also provide a transition to verses 15ff. where sonship is declared. “Son of God” is a predicate, not the subject, and so, *hosoi* (v. 14) refers to the person described in verses 1-14. That is the point.⁷⁹ Paul has used the metaphor of slavery with an apology (6:18) to describe the Christian life but now he says the metaphor should be sonship, not slavery (v. 15), and the Spirit of sonship brings the impassioned cry, *Abba ho pater*.³⁰ There are two witnesses to the adoption: the confession of the believer (v.15) and the confirmation of the Holy Spirit (v.16) and this reciprocal witness is simultaneous. Adoption is a term (*huiothesia*) unknown to the Jews and is not found in the LXX. It is striking though that only “those who are guided by the Spirit” can be called “Children of God.”⁸¹ God loves us when we are sinners; He adopts us when we are guided by the Spirit.

Naive optimism is not allowed. The heirs and joint-heirs receive their inheritance only if they suffer with Christ (v. 17b). In Paul’s theology, the eschatological “coming glory” does not permit one to avoid the cross. His message of hope is placed in the context of participation with Christ in His Passion—a theology of hope must also be the theology of the cross and a pilgrim theology. But hope is alive so that the future glory is not to be compared with our present suffering with Christ (v. 18).

It is “the present” (v.18) in which the Christian suffers, but it is a present already transformed by the future because of what Christ did at the cross. Eschatological hope is grounded in an historical event. The “present” is a time of groaning—all nature groans together (*synodinei* v. 22); Christians groan (*stenadzomen*, v. 23) for the adoption as sons, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us with groanings (*stenagmois*, v. 26). The “perfect” is yet to come (1 Cor. 13:10)—we live in hope between the “already” and the “not yet.” “Since Adam’s fall the world lacks nothing more than eschatological freedom.”⁸²

The “we know” (*oidamen*) of verse 28 is to be contrasted with “we know not” (*ouk oidamen*) of verse 26 and is made possible by the “He knows” (*oiden*) of verse 27. Not only should we recognize that God (*ho Theos*) is the subject of verse 28, but that His “working together” (*synergei*) is set in an eschatological setting—all nature, including man, looks forward with keen anticipation to a future glory in which all the effects of Adam’s fall will be reversed and redemption will be complete. “Those who love him” are the ones “called according to his purpose”—the ones called and predestined by God.⁸³ So certain is Paul of this glorious future that he even uses the aorist tense for “glorify” (v. 30b), as if it had already occurred.⁸⁴

It is understandable but inappropriate to refer to the “poetic beauty” of 8:31-39⁸⁵ Neither is it to be described as a hymn.⁸⁶ Rather, it is diatribe with an approximation to the rhythmic prose of antiquity.⁸⁷ The initial rhetorical question does not merely prepare the way for what immediately

follows; it sets the whole message of Romans 5-8 under debate. This had already emerged in 5:5 and now love is defined, not as an emotion, but as “God for us” (8:31).

The diatribe takes the form of rhetorical questions and answers in verses 31-34 where the theme of “no condemnation” is developed. Verse 31 begins much like 6:1, 14 and 7:7. “If God is for us, who is against us” (8:31) almost certainly has 5:6-10 in mind. The second question, “who shall bring a charge against God’s elect?” is answered with “It is God who justifies” (8:33). Certainly, this has in mind 5:1, 20 and 8:1. The third question “Who is to condemn” (8:34) is very much the same question. Christ does not condemn-He died for us. God does not condemn-He loved and gave His Son.

To be reconciled to God means to be at enmity with the powers of sin and flesh. That accounts for the questions in 8:35, based upon “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” (Note that it is the love of God in Christ in v. 39.) Paul answers his questions in verse 35 with Scripture-Psalm 44:22. If we share in Christ’s suffering, we are assured of a share in His glory (v. 17). Thus, no matter how severe the tribulations, we are “super-conquerors” (hypernikomen) through Him who loved us (v. 37; cf. 5:5-10). Super-conquerors need fear nothing; all the invincible forces of the universe combined (v. 38) cannot separate us from the triumphant love of God grasped and existentialized through Christ Jesus our Lord (v. 39).

Conclusion

This paper does not intend to suggest that Romans 5—8 is not concerned with sanctification. But, it is the conviction of this writer that sanctification in these chapters is not discussed as a second work of grace. The theological precision of a first and second step or of justification and sanctification do not concern the Apostle Paul. The heart of the Wesleyan message is holiness of heart and life and that is the concern of Romans 5-8.

Nothing written in this paper should be construed to be a denial of two works of grace, only that it is not explicitly stated in Romans 5-8. Here Paul is concerned with justification by faith and the implications of faith lived out existentially. This is sanctification, but sanctification understood more in terms of the continual sanctification of life as it is lived “in Christ” by the Spirit as opposed to the former life “in the flesh” under the dominion of Adam.

Paul does not seem to be interested in defining justification and sanctification in terms of neat, systematic theological formulas. Nor does he seem interested in psychologizing these doctrines. What then shall I say? That there is no entire sanctification? *Me genoito!* My own experience (a valid Wesleyan criterion) confirms both a second work of grace and a progressive sanctification that continues until this moment and I trust until I see Him face to face. God is not finished with me yet!

Notes

1. Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1972), p. 48.

2. Charles David Isbell, "Historical Wesleyan Interpretations of the Pauline Phrase, The 'Old Man'" (M. A. Thesis, Bethany Nazarene College, 1967), pp. 48ff.

3. F. J. Leenhardt, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1957).

4. M. J. Lagrange, *Saint Paul Epitre aux Romains* (Paris: Etudes Bibliques, 1850-1918). It is argued by him and others that Romans 5 has some significant linguistic connections with chapters 1-4.

5. C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, in *The International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, Limited, 1975), p. 254.

6. Cranfield, *Romans*, ICC, p. 254.

7. Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, tr. Kendrick Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 276.

8. Rudolf Bultmann, *The Old and New Man in the Letters of Paul*, tr. Keith R. Crim (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1964), p. 49.

9. John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (Napier-ville, Ill.: Alec R. Allenson, Inc., 1958 reprint), pp. 535-36. Similarly, Cranfield, *Romans*, ICC, p. 257.

10. This writer is aware that the subjunctive reading has much better attestation in the MSS than the indicative reading.

11. Bultmann, *The Old and the New Man*, p. 51; likewise C. H. Dodd, "The Epistle to the Romans," *The Moffat New Testament Commentary* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1932), p. 73; and Cranfield, *Romans*, ICC, p. 258.

12. Both *eschehamen* and *hestekamen* are in the perfect tense, denoting a resultant state based on past action.

13. C. W. Ruth calls this "standing grace" and comments: "As indicated by the word 'also,' it is a grace obtained subsequent to 'being justified by faith,' *Entire Sanctification Explained* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1955, 8th printing), p. 52. Surprisingly, this same position is taken by J. Kenneth Grider, *Entire Sanctification* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1980), p. 120. Neither John Wesley (*Explanatory Notes*) nor Adam Clarke (*Commentary on the Holy Bible*, one volume edition, ed. Ralph Earle, Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1967) found a second work of grace in Romans 5:2.

14. John Knox, "The Epistle to the Romans" (Introduction and Exegesis), *Interpreter's Bible*, ed. George A. Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1954), 9:454, believes verses 3-4 form an interruption in Paul's thought.

15. As a general statement, one would need to say that the *thlipsis hupomonen katargadzetal* lacks validity because as Calvin points out, tribulation "provokes a great part of mankind to murmur against God, and even to curse him," *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, tr. R. Makenzie (Edinburgh: 1961).

16. The Holy Spirit is mentioned only twice (Romans 5:5, 7:6) before we get to Romans 8, where the Holy Spirit appears 20 times (8:1-27).

17. Bultmann, *The Old Man and the New Man*, p. 54.

18. Based on verses 6-8 we would expect Paul to say "through his death" in verse 9, as indeed he does say in verse 10, but Paul uses a traditional formula "by his blood." In Romans 3:25 he uses a similar formula. Except for these two passages and the traditional formulation of the eucharist, Paul does not speak of the blood, but of the death, or of the cross of Christ. Karl Barth has placed more emphasis on the resurrection in this passage than the allusion in v. 10 warrants, *Christ and Adam: Man and Humanity in Romans 5*, trans. by T. A. Smail (New York: Harper, 1957).

19. H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1959), 2:96. Also see William Greathouse, "Romans," *Beacon Bible Commentary* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1968), 8:114, where he makes much of the hamartia as a new term in Romans, beginning with 5:12; "the sin" is not guilt but sin as revolt and the expression occurs 28 times between 5:12 and 8:10.

20. Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, tr. Edwin C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 115.

21. Henry St. John Thackeray, *The Relation of St. Paul to Contemporary Jewish Thought* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1900), p. 33.

22. Interestingly, in vv. 15-17, Paul is concerned not with Adam's sin (hamartia) but with his trespass (paraptoma) and in v. 19 it is his disobedience (parakoēs).

23. John Knox, "Romans," *IB*, p. 463.

24. See Wesley, *Explanatory Notes*, p. 538.

25. Barth, *Christ and Adam*. Cf. Wesley, *Explanatory Notes*, p. 539.

26. Bultmann, *The Old Man and the New Man*, p. 65. Compare this also in verses 18 and 19.

27. Romans 5:12-21 does not intend to teach original sin. Certainly it says nothing of a mode of transmission. One can only wonder where A. M. Hills gets the idea that the genetic mode is the best way of avoiding the Calvinistic doctrine of imputed sin, *Fundamental Christian Theology* (Pasadena Calif.: C. J. Kine, 1931), 1:427ff. Wm. M. Arnett, "The Wesleyan-Arminian Teaching on Sin," *Insights Into Holiness*, ed. Kenneth Geiger (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1963), p. 66, is simply wrong when he says this is the Wesleyan-Arminian position.

28. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, all. Anakephaliosis = Recapitulatio.

29. E. g. Greathouse, "Romans," *BBC*, p. 124. LaGrange has even seen this as having to do with sanctification, but not in a Wesleyan sense, *Saint Paul, Epître Aux Romains* (Paris: Librairie Victor Lecoffre, 1916), p. 99. Reformed scholars will also make this division in a non-Wesleyan sense.

30. F. Blass, A. Debrunner and R. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of

Chicago Press, 1961), p. 442; H. E. Dana and J. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1927), p. 252.

31. Wilber T. Dayton, "Holiness Truth in the Roman Epistle," *Further Insights into Holiness*, ed. Kenneth Geiger (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1963), p. 100.

32. Greathouse, "Romans," BBC, p. 142, strains the questions: (1) Shall we continue in sin (te hamartia), (2) Shall we continue to sin? To say the least, the order of the questions seems to be hopelessly reversed for Greathouse.

33. Dodd "Romans" Moffatt p 87

34. For the function of the Greek verb, review Dana and Mantey, *Grammar*, pp. 177-79; Nigel Turner, "Syntax," Vol. III of *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, 1963, pp. 59ff. It should be noted that the tense stems were originally intended to indicate the kind of action, not the kind of time. A theology of verb tenses is indeed a precarious theology! See Dana and Mantey, *Grammar*, pp. 139ff. for a review of the aorist tense.

35. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, tr. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 42. David L. Cubie has noted that Fletcher and Wesley never made a distinction between SIN and sins. "Perfection in Wesley and Fletcher: Inaugural or Teleological," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 11 (Spring 1976):22-37.

36. Gerhard Kittel, ed., *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 1:286.

37. Bauer, *Lexicon*, pp. 42f.

38. V. P. Furnish, *Theory and Ethics in Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968), p. 77, notes that here Paul is making use of traditional material to lend persuasiveness to his argument.

39. 2 Timothy 2:18 indicates clearly the need for eschatological reserve. This may have also been a problem Paul faced at Corinth.

40. Anthropos most often refers to "the genus or nature, without distinction of sex." Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1886), p. 46.

41. On this, cf. Isbell, "Historical Wesleyan Interpretation." Apparently, the majority of present day Wesleyans view the "old man" as sin principle to be eradicated in the work of sanctification. A notable exception is J. Kenneth Grider.

42. Anders Nygren, *Commentary on Romans* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1949), pp. 232f.

43. C. K. Barrett, "The Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans," *Harper's New Testament Commentary* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1957), p. 125. Cf. also Robert C. Tannenhill, *Dying and Rising With Christ* (Berlin: Toplemann, 1967). J. Kenneth Grider sees Romans 6:6 as one of the strongest texts for the second crisis.

44. Paul Althus, *Der Brief an die Romer, Das Neue Testament Deutsch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1966), p. 62.
45. Frank Carver, "Compatible or Incompatible," *Preacher's Magazine*, November 1969, p. 39.
46. J Harold Greenlee, "The Greek New Testament and the Message of Holiness," *Further Insights*, p. 81.
47. Dodd, "Romans," Moffatt, p. 93.
48. Dodd, "Romans," Moffatt, p. 106.
49. Rudolf Bultmann, "Romans 7 and the Anthropology of Paul," *Existence and Faith*, tr. Schubert M. Ogden (New York: Living Age Books, 1960), p. 147. Richard N. Longenecker, *Paul, Apostle of Liberty* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1964), p. 86; for a definitive work, see W. G. Kummel, *Romer 7 und die Bekehrung des Paulus* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1929).
50. Longenecker, Paul, pp. 86-87.
51. G. C. Berkouwer, *Faith and Sanctification* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1952), p. 55.
52. James Arminius, *The Writings of James Arminius*, tr. James Nichols and W. R. Bagnall (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1956), pp. 195-453. See also Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), pp. 186ff.
53. John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, n.d.), 9:296.
54. Wesley, *Works*, 9:297.
55. Wesley, *Works*, 9:298. Wesley expresses irritation that Dr. Taylor spends over 20 pages trying to prove that Romans 7 does not describe a regenerate man.
56. John Fletcher, *Checks to Antinomianism* (New York and Cincinnati: Hunt and Eaton, 1891 edition), 2:529ff.
57. Clarke, *Commentary*, p. 1055. Cf. Henry E. Brockett, *The Christian and Romans 7* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press), 1972.
58. Grider, *Entire Sanctification*, p.142. But, cf. William Burt Pope, *A Compendium of Christian Theology* (New York: Hunt and Eaton, n.d.), 2:24, Thomas Cook, *New Testament Holiness* (London: The Epworth Press, 1954, 4th ed., first published 1902); and Joseph Gray, *The Double Cure* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1953), pp. 74-75.
59. Richard S. Taylor, *Life in the Spirit* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1966) p. 50. Grider thinks Paul uses the "historical present" in Romans 7 (*Entire Sanctification*, p. 143). Hills, *Fundamental Christian Theology* 2:259 argued similarly. It is quite strange when scholars demand the full force of the aorist in Romans 6, but refuse to allow the present tense in Romans 7!
60. Greathouse, "Romans," BBC, pp. 150-67.
61. Kummel, *Romer 7*, pp. 128-32.

62. Longenecker, Paul, pp. 88-89.
63. Kummel, Romer 7, pp. 121-23.
64. The lack of clarity in his use of symbolic language is not new for Paul as we have already seen.
65. Rudolf Bultmann, "Christ the End of the Law," Essays, tr. J. C. Greig (London: S.C.M. Press, 1955), p. 40.
66. Bultmann, *Theology*, 1:122, n.
67. G. L. Mitton, "Romans vii Reconsidered-III," *Expository Times*, 65:5 (February 1954), p. 133.
68. Bultmann, "Romans 7," p. 157.
69. As A. M. Hunter asserts in *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1955), p. 74.
70. Ernst Kasemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), p. 214.
71. Rudolf Bultmann, "Glossen im Romerbrief," *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, Vol. 72, (1947), pp. 199ff.
72. Eduard Schweizer, *TDNT*, 7:135.
73. Bultmann, *Theology*, 1:332.
74. Cranfield, "Romans," *ICC*, p. 337.
75. Dale Moody, "Romans," *Broadman Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman Press), 10:206.
76. Bultmann, *Theology*, 1:201.
77. Wesley, *Explanatory Notes*. Note "the Spirit" and the "Spirit of God" are used synonymously.
78. Clarke, *Commentary*, p. 1059.
79. Dodd, "Romans," *Moffatt*, p. 128.
80. Dodd, "Romans," *Moffatt* p. 130, notes the NT has no concept of "natural sonship." One becomes a son through adoption in Christ. God has children but no grandchildren.
81. Dodd, "Romans," *Moffatt*, p. 130. Cf. also Kittel, *TDNT*, 1:5f and J. Jeremias, *The Central Message of Jesus* (New York: Scribners, 1965), pp. 25ff. Wesley believes the person's spirit bears witness in "an inward impression on the soul" (*Sermons*, 1:115.) but Kaseman (*Romans*), p. 228 points to its juridical nature and calls for something more objective: the Spirit in worship speaks to the spirit that dwells within us.
82. Kasemann, *Romans* p. 234.
83. The question of election is treated in Romans 9 and it will not be dealt with here
84. John B. Polhill, "New Life in Christ, Romans 6-8," *Review and Expositor*, Vol. 73, p. 436.
85. Dodd "Romans", *Moffatt*, p. 133.
86. Moody, *Romans*, pp. 223-25.
87. Kasemann, *Romans*, p. 246.

CHARLES WILLIAMS' CONCEPT OF IMAGING APPLIED TO "THE SONG OF SONGS"

by

Dennis F. Kinlaw

One of the remarkable and delightful developments in the twentieth century has been the theological role of some non-theologians. I speak of C. S. Lewis and his friends.

It should not be lost on those who think of themselves as systematicians and apologists that it has not been the professionals who have caught the theological imagination of the masses in the latter part of this century and who have best communicated classical Christian orthodoxy to our day. Rather, it has been the novelists, the poets, the playwrights, and the literature professors. It should be humbling for many of us that those for whom theology is an avocation can often make it more exciting than those of us for whom it is a main business.

How does one explain their attraction for our day? Their literary genius and their style cannot be ignored. The Oxford ambient adds its own appeal. The conviction lingers though that there is more, that there is a shade of theological difference that gives them an advantage. Their approach to life and the human experience is such that they seem to be able to establish a point of contact, to find a bridge from the world of the pagan to their own that catches the imagination of the unsuspecting believer and enables him to see realities within his own experience that challenge his doubt and suggest that orthodox Christian doctrine may be more compatible with his own amorphous desires than he had suspected. Suddenly Christianity becomes neither banal nor anachronistic. It has charm if not relevance.

Perhaps this should not surprise us. They may have an advantage in their medium. The poem, the novel, and the drama have limitations but they also contain a power that the lecture, the treatise, and the sermon duplicate only rarely and with difficulty. Suggestion on occasion, as Eve learned, can arouse the curiosity where direct proposition may create its own opposition or only opiate. Inference and implication may kindle interest when affirmation would quench. It is evident that the imagination is not always best reached by linear logic.

The reality is that the Lewises, the Tolkiens, the Sayerses, and the

Williamses have been able to speak the evangelical word with a sharpness and an appeal that some of us, with what we may consider better “evangelical” credentials, have not achieved. I remember a moving moment with a mathematician who was recalling the impact of Lewis on him in his journey from agnosticism to faith. His comment: “It was just too good to be true. Then I decided it was too good not to be true.”

Does their medium in itself account for their effectiveness? I hardly think so. As we have said, their genius and their place do not hurt. But, the persuasion remains that it is more, that it is, at least in part, and a big art, theological. They seem to have an approach to life and human experience that creates a different climate. They seem to be able to find a point with which the pagan can identify, a bridge previously unnoticed by the unbeliever that suddenly not only is there but invites crossing. In their hands orthodox Christian doctrine does not seem so incompatible with sanity and the nature of things. It begins to exhibit allures undreamed before. Note Sayers’ captivating title, “The Dogma Is the Drama.” It sounds interesting (which theology is not supposed to be) if not even plausible.

That is one of the reasons why Charles Williams has intrigued this reader. At the heart of that appeal is his use of understanding of images.

A couple of years ago while recovering from surgery, I discovered Williams. I was enamored with his use of images. I found myself with that provocative feeling that I was reading more than I was seeing. Initially I looked upon it as a literary device that Williams had perfected in novel and poem that owed its effectiveness to his literary genius and discipline, but that had its origin in the arbitrariness of his own imagination. As I continued to read Williams, I began to realize that he would have been unhappy with my compliments. His insistence would have been that his imagery was not invented but discovered, that its basis lay not in his imagination but in the nature of reality. In other words, his imagery was rooted in ontology, not in the mind of the writer. That ontological base, if Williams is correct in his perception, meant that his imagery was not idiosyncratic with him. Rather, it had a universal character that gave it universal appeal. And, the ontological base made possible that “bridge” or “point of contact” to which earlier reference was made.

Here Williams was at one with Coleridge in his definition of symbols (though, as we will see, he preferred the term “image” to that of “symbol”). Coleridge’s definition is given by Williams in the introduction to his study of Dante.

Coleridge said that a symbol must have three characteristics. (i) it must exist in itself, (ii) it must derive from something greater than itself, (iii) it must represent in itself that greatness from which it derives.¹

Coleridge may have meant this to be literary analysis. The person with theological sensitiveness will read in it more. The symbol, whatever it may be, has its own existence but that existence speaks of a “beyond,” “something greater.” The symbol does not subsist in itself. Its existence is derived. The source is greater than the symbol. And, that “greater” has left some evidence of the symbol’s origin in the symbol itself. Discrete as the

symbol may be, its discreteness demands something further. Coleridge says it. The symbol represents in itself something of the character of the Source.

This provides the key to William's use of image. His work on Dante begins with Coleridge's quote. One could almost say that the rest of William's work is a development of this thesis.

Shideler has put the students of Williams in her debt with her analysis of symbols in her work, *The Theology of Romantic Love: A Study in the Writings of Charles Williams*. In her introduction she differentiates between arbitrary and natural symbols.²

The arbitrary symbol receives its meaning from an arbitrary human decision. Its meaning is assigned. The symbol carries in itself nothing that corresponds to or suggests the meaning of the symbol. Mathematical symbols are examples of these (the plus, the minus, the symbols for division and multiplication).

Natural symbols are symbols whose bases are not in the decisions of men. They instance in themselves the things symbolized. By simply being what they are they speak of more. The plus sign, like the minus sign or that for division, is arbitrary. The person unacquainted with mathematics would find nothing in the symbols to suggest their meaning. The plus sign (+) in another context though would serve as a natural symbol. It could symbolize an intersection, a crossroads, a place of decision. That meaning is reflected in the nature of the symbol. Williams' primary interest is in natural symbols.

These natural symbols are divisible into two categories: allegories and images. Allegories are symbols that are suggestively similar to their bases. Thus Bunyan in his classic allegory symbolizes despair by a giant and doubt by a castle. Here the symbol is constructed to make the basis or referent more clearly or more engagingly grasped. The movement intellectually is originally from the referent to the symbol, to explain the referent the symbol is developed. And the symbol has no existence apart from its allegorical function.

The image is quite different. It is not constructed but discovered as a part of the viewer's world. It exists independently of its imaging function. It is actually there before its larger significance is known. Its imaging value lies in its power to point by itself beyond itself to its basis. It is not there to be modified by the imagist as the allegory can be. It is there to be enjoyed for what it is in itself and to be read in what it speaks of more.

The allegory has a capacity for precision that the image never equals. It can be crafted by the allegorist to fine definition. There is often ambiguity about images that tantalizes and may seem to obscure. The amount that can be seen is determined both by the nature of the image and the nature of the viewer. Allegory partakes more of the nature of the deduction while imaging is more inductive with all the dangers attendant.

In 1943 Williams delivered a lecture at Oxford on five great images which occur in poetry. John Heath-Stubbs was there and has recorded for us the five.³ They are:

- (1) Religious Experience
- (2) The Image of Woman
- (3) The Image of Nature

(4) The Image of the City

(5) The Experience of Great Art

Two of these captured most of Williams' attention, and find substantial development in his work, the image of the woman and the image of the city. Here he found himself at one with Dante. Whether Williams first found these in Dante or simply found Dante echoing his own discoveries may be debated. The fact is that Williams found in Dante the classical expression of what he himself believes about images of woman (Beatrice) and the city (Florence). Take the experience of Dante and Beatrice.

Dante was nine and Beatrice was eight when Dante first beheld her. The poet was smitten. They saw each other on occasion, but he was eighteen before she spoke to him. By this time he was deeply in love with her. At twenty-four Beatrice was dead. The impact of her person upon Dante's life was such that his literary work was the tribute to her inspiration. The occasion for the quickening of love, she became its image. His *La Vita Nuova* and *The Divine Comedy* tell the story.

His work *La Vita Nuova* (The New Life) tells us what we know about her and her impact upon the poet. She is presented, as George Holmes says, in a manner hardly known in literature previously, as

. . . a person of overwhelming attractiveness and power. Her personality embodied a quite new conception of feminine goodness, a new image, different from both the idol of erotic verse and the saint of hagiography, but drawing inspiration from both.⁴

She evokes in Dante an adoration that produces poetry of near religious character. The climax of that relationship, begun so early, is found in the *Paradiso* where Beatrice leads the poet in an ascent through the ethereal spheres to the Sum of all Grace, to God. She is his conductor from good to God. Hear the poet as he describes it.

Yet was I no more
Conscious of climbing than is a man conscious,
Before the first thought comes, of its coming.
Beatrice it is who conducts us so
From good to better....⁵

The impact is beatitude.

No mortal heart was ever so disposed to piety and
Rendering itself up to God with such willingness
As was I when I heard those words, and so
Completely did I put my love in him,
That Beatrice was forgotten and eclipsed.
But this did not displease her, but she smiled, and
The splendor of her laughing eyes divided
My united mind . . .⁶

Beatrice, the original provocation of love in the poet, has now led Dante beyond herself to Love Itself, that Love of which all other loves are but images. The creature, instead of being the substitute for, or the enemy of, the Creator has become a means to the Greater from which it is derived. Williams' work is an attempt to explicate this theme. His designation of

this is the Way of the Affirmation of Images.⁷ If this sounds familiar to the theologian, he will understand why Williams may aptly be called “the poet of the *analogia entis*.” Williams believed that Brunner was right.

Whatever the Creator makes bears the imprint of His Creator-Spirit in itself; hence it is to some extent “similar” to Him and is therefore a “parable” or “analogy.”⁸

This was an inescapable corollary for Williams of the doctrine of creation. Our world comes from the hand of the loving Father. It is good. It retains, in spite of the Fall, its power to image its Maker. It is permissible for, yes, incumbent upon the Christian to affirm the original goodness of these images.

This does not mean that Williams was unaware of the dangers of this Way. He recognized the power of an image by its very goodness to distract. He knew the danger of the image’s becoming an end in itself. So, he felt that the Way of an Affirmation of Images should always be kept in tension with the Way of the Rejection of Images. The image originally was never the Imaged. Nor did it in itself ever exhaust the Imaged. The affirmation in the image was therefore never complete. A further problem has been introduced by the Fall. A lack of intellectual clarity has been produced that adds to the ambiguities. In spite of all though, the images remain and they remain for our good.

The power in the image and the limitation in the image brought Williams to an oft-repeated maxim about every image, a maxim familiar to all who have read Williams:

This also is thou;
neither is this Thou.⁹

Williams’ concern was not to displace the Way of Negation. The Way of Affirmation and the Way of Negation are both valid. In fact, both are necessary. The same person will walk both paths. Isaac was at one time in Abraham’s life an alternative to God and at another a very image of the Eternal Son.

Williams’ concern was that the goodness of the creation and its power to image its Creator has not received in our post-Reformation world, nor even in the longer history of the Church, the development that it merits. Our concern to give proper attention to Christ’s death and resurrection, to our sin which made the passion necessary for our justification and redemption, may have caused us unwillingly to miss or play down the goodness of the world and the flesh, the larger question of the Incarnation that made Christ’s death redemptive and His resurrection the vindication of God’s creation. It must ever be remembered that Christian soteriology finds an essential part of its basis in creation. It was the Creator who became “the first-born of all creation” that He might redeem us.

This emphasis upon Incarnation and the goodness of the creation is at the heart of that theological stance to which reference was made in the beginning of this article. It is Williams’ conviction that in every man’s natural life there is a witness to the Way. That seems to give special power to his writing. Life is not as discrete, nor as discontinuous as our

individuation might lead us to believe. The world of human experience is rather a *web* that has a unity so basic and so all-inclusive, so interrelated that the seemingly ungermane on closer scrutiny is seen to be a part of one's own larger existence. So, the particular is ever capable of leading to the universal. The image is capable of becoming the occasion for beholding the Imaged.

Beatrice was not the only image of Dante's life. There were people, places, poems, philosophies, but Dante saw in Beatrice the clearest example of them all. He brought that figure, Williams says, so far as he could express it, as near to the Final Image, God, as he could. Williams concludes of Dante's work:

It is the greatest expression in European literature of the way of approach of the soul to its ordained end through the affirmation of the validity of all those images, beginning with the image of a girl."10

The way of affirmation was in a special way Charles Williams' way. He knew the goodness of the creation and was determined to sing about it. He sang not just because of its goodness in itself but also because it imaged more. It is that concept of "imaging more" that may be a key to help us with some of the biblical material. I speak especially now of *The Song of Songs*.

Few portions of Scripture have enamored its readers more than this canticle. The beauty of the poetry and the tenderness of the sentiment have endeared the work to many but have never removed the tantalizing questions. The absence of a clear reference to God, the lack of the universal Old Testament themes of election, covenant, worship, sin and salvation force the question as to why it is here. Tucked away in the midst of the sacred canon it demands explanation.

The traditional answer is to see in it an allegory. The fact that the Old Testament sees the relationship of Yahweh to Israel as that of lover and beloved is patent. So a long history has developed of allegorical interpretation that includes some of the most eminent names in better than two millennia of biblical commentary. To dismiss this out of hand smacks a bit of modern arrogance.

The fact remains that there is not a suggestion in the text of the wide variety of spiritual insights that the commentators of all types have drawn from this little volume through the centuries. One hardly gets the feeling that the original participants in this drama of human love had in the forefront of their consciousness all of the exalted themes which the commentators find so evident. It makes one wonder how much of the comment has had its origin in the mind of the commentator rather than in the text itself. The result has been what is spoken of as the literal approach. The poems are seen for what they purport to be, beautiful and lyric pieces expressing the attractions, the delights, and the emotions accompanying human love between the sexes. So it is suggested that they are secular and are here simply as part of the national literature of Israel."

The justification for the modern "secular" approach is clear. Most readers who have experienced human love have found in it a good of such

worth that the allegorical explanations of the text seem unnecessary efforts to justify a human good which should stand on its own as a gift from God.

Here Williams helps. For him faithful married love has the nature of Coleridge's symbol. It has its own existence. It is good in itself. It does not need to be spiritualized to have human worth. It should be enjoyed for what it is in itself. Yet it cannot but speak of more.

Human love like all other created good derives from something greater than itself. It carries within itself overtones of that Greater from which it originates. As Coleridge says, it represents in itself that greatness from which it comes. It has a basis, a referent. That basis is in the creative will of God which enables God to use it as an illustration of His love for His people. But there is more. The basis lies ultimately in the very Being of that God who lives with an eternal love and can be called Love itself (Himself). There is then a divine ontological referent for this earthly reality which brings such joy to human life.

Human love is thus not first a human experience that helps us understand God. It is a personal experience that helps us relate joyously to one another. It is a joy we know because we are human. But it is not an earthly category that just happens to illustrate a divine reality. It is an human experience that images something eternal. It is part of what Scripture means by the *imago Dei*.

When this is realized, we see that it is a divine category with a human counterpart (image) which helps us understand ourselves. He who is love made us like Himself. He calls us to a relationship to Himself of an exclusive (monogamous) and an unending love. He has made us to relate to Him in that fashion and to find our ultimate fulfilment in that perfection of love. He has built into us a human need and a human experience that in counterpart symbolizes in a human relationship this ultimate personal experience with God. Thus a sanctity derives to human love from the sacredness of the reality which it images.

This is, to this writer, a bit different than the usual allegorical interpretation or even the typically religious literal one. Whether the allegorist intends it or not, the allegorizing tends to concentrate so upon the spiritual realities symbolized that the goodness and the richness of the gift is eclipsed. God gave His gifts for our joy because He loves us. To enjoy them less even for spiritual reasons is no tribute to Him. To rejoice in their goodness does not displease Him. To let them replace or obscure Him is the ultimate deprivation for us and the supreme offense to Him. Here the two Ways should meet. As Williams can say without irreverence, "When you play, play, and when you pray, pray.

For,

This is Thou,
neither is this Thou."

The gifts of God must not be slighted for a pseudospirituality. Nor dare we let them receive the ultimate thinning which inevitably comes when they are separated from the larger realities that they image.

The *Song of Songs* thus is a valid part of the canon of sacred Scripture not because Solomon and the Shulamite (or whoever the participants may have been) are allegorical representations of Yahweh and Israel or Christ

and the Church. It is there because of the sacredness of human love itself, a sacredness that has its source in the nature of the One whom all loves image. We de-allegorize the book not to secularize the relationship of Solomon and the Shulamite (or whoever the described participants may have been) but rather to sanctify all human loves by seeing them in that larger context which every love represents in itself.

Notes

1. Charles Williams, *The Figure of Beatrice: A Study in Dante* (New York: Octagon Books, a division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978), p. 7.

2. Mary McDermott Shideler, *The Theology of Romantic Love: A Study in the Writings of Charles Williams* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962), pp. 11-17.

3. John Heath-Stubbs, *Charles Williams* (New York: The British Book Center, Inc., by Longmans, Green & Co., 1973), pp. 18-19.

4. George Holmes, *Dante* (New York: Hill and Wang, a division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980), p. 6.

5. Alighieri Dante, *The Divine Comedy: Paradise*, trans. by Louis Bian colli (New York: Washington Square Press, 1968), p. 353.

6. Dante, *The Divine Comedy: Paradise*, p. 353.

7. An illustrative passage is found in Williams' *Descent of the Dove* (New York: Living Age Books, published by Meridian Books, 1956), pp. 56-64.

8. Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1952), 2:22.

9. Williams, *The Descent of the Dove*, p. 57.

10. Williams, *The Figure of Beatrice*, p. 8.

11. Robert Gordis, *The Song of Songs and Lamentations* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1974), p. 5.

A PROBLEM OF UNFULFILLED PROPHECY IN EZEKIEL: THE DESTRUCTION OF TYRE (EZEKIEL 26:1-14 and 29:18-20)

by

David Thompson

The Old Testament prophets were forth-tellers of God's word. They were also foretellers. In the course of declaring Yahweh's word to their generations, they made many predictions, long-range and short, general and very specific. Bible students of widely divergent points of view are showing renewed interest in this predictive feature of old Testament prophecy and the related question of fulfillment.

The emergence of previously predicted events continues to be cited in both popular and scholarly works in support of the divine inspiration and trustworthiness of the Bible. 1 More recently provocative studies of nonfulfillment in prophetic predictions have appeared, notably Dewey Beegle's *Prophecy and Prediction* (Ann Arbor: Pryon Pettengill (1980), and Robert Carroll's study, *When Prophecy Failed* (New York: Seabury, 1979).

Dr. Beegle treats a number of prophetic passages which deserve fresh study by theologically conservative interpreters. Unfortunately, in the opinion of this reader, Dr. Beegle's message will be largely lost on evangelical students because of the polemic tone of the presentation, in spite of his best intentions to the contrary. 2 Carroll's application of the theory of cognitive dissonance to problems of non-fulfillment is creative and tremendously stimulating. Still his inability to appreciate orthodox understandings of God and of the process of prophetic revelation raises questions to which we will later address ourselves.

There are of course several different types of prophetic predictions in the Old Testament and with them differing sorts of realizations expected. An adequate survey of these categories would be a paper in itself and will not concern us here. 3 We will consider the type of prediction which appears to have expected literal fulfillment, thereby excluding those pronouncements where the conditional nature of prophetic utterance as usually understood is obviously a factor or where some sort of symbolic interpretation may have been expected. We will further narrow our focus to a single

set of passages in Ezekiel, his prediction of the destruction of Tyre at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar (26:1-14) and his subsequent promise of booty from Egypt as payment to Nebuchadnezzar for his arduous labor against the island stronghold (29:17-20).

At least two features of these passages commend them to us for consideration. First, we have in them either “perhaps the most impressive case of fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy of this type” (prediction regarding a nation of antiquity) 4 or an example of a “prediction which did not come to pass and will never come to pass.” 5 Such a passage should certainly repay study, from the perspective of the history of interpretation if from no other. And it may provide a specimen for the study of clear non-fulfillment. Second, these companion passages allow one to study the prophet’s own response to the course of events related to his pronouncements and perhaps his response to non-fulfillment.

I. The Role of Nebuchadnezzar in Ezekiel 26:1-14

Ezekiel 26:1-14 is part of a single “word of Yahweh” (26:1-21, see v. 1), divided into four separate oracles, the first two of which are found in verses 3-6 and 7-14, (the latter two, vv. 15-18, vv. 19-21). The oracles are introduced by the standard formula, “thus says *Adonai Yahweh*” vv. 3 and 7), and conclude with the repeated substantiation, “For I [Yahweh, v. 14] have spoken, the word of *Adonai Yahweh*” (vv. 5 and 14).

The first oracle, verses 3-6, is preceded by a statement of the cause of the word here delivered (v.2): Tyre’s words against Jerusalem, words which in view of the surrounding passages (26:15-28:19) and other prophetic denunciations of this wealthy merchant city apparently reflect Tyre’s arrogance, selfishness and callous disregard for the people of God. Verses 3-6 draw explicit results: (1) Yahweh’s adversary stance against Tyre (v. 3a); (2) His decision to bring many nations against her (v. 3b); (3) what they and Yahweh will do to Tyre (v. 4): destroy her walls, tear down her towers, wipe her dust from her, making her a bare rock; and (4) what that will mean for Tyre (vv. 5-6): she will become a place for spreading nets, become plunder for the nations, and her dependent cities (“daughters who are in the field / plain”) will be slain. 6

In the second section, verses 7-14, Ezekiel explains and supports the opening, general prediction with the specific prediction of a victorious siege of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar II whom Yahweh is bringing against the city which had withstood repeated assault in the preceding centuries. 7 Yahweh is bringing Nebuchadnezzar along with his cavalry, chariotry, horsemen, and a great host (v. 7). The prediction proceeds with a string of third person singular references as to what Nebuchadnezzar or his forces will do: slay the dependent cities with the sword (v.8), lay siege works against the city (v.8), assault the walls with battering rams (v. 9), tear down her towers with his weaponry (v. 9), cover her with dust raised by his cavalry (v. 10), shake her walls with the noise of his chariotry entering her gates (v. 10), trample her streets with the hooves of his horses (v. 11), and slay her people (v. 11).

In verse 12 prediction continues with third person plural references: they will plunder her, trample her walls and tear down her fine houses, throw her stones, timber and dust into the sea (v. 12).

The prophecy continues with statements of what Yahweh himself will

do: bring her music to a halt (v. 13) and make her a bare rock, a place for spreading nets (v. 14a). The oracle concludes with the pronouncement that Tyre will “never again be built” and the formula, “For I Yahweh have spoken, says *Adonai Yahweh*” (v. 14b).

What actually happened to Tyre? About the time of the sack of Jerusalem, perhaps just before or just after, during the reign of Itto Ba'al II, Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Tyre. Quoting classical sources, Josephus informs us that the marathon siege lasted thirteen years. (Cuneiform tablets from Tyre, dated from Nebuchadnezzar's thirty-fifth year and following, assume that the siege was over no later than 570 B. C. 9 and that a Babylonian official had been installed in Tyre, apparently governing in conjunction with the king of Tyre, who was chosen and reigned with the approval of the Babylonian court. 10 Ittoba'al was dethroned and Babylonian suzerainty was acknowledged by Tyre.

If, however, the island stronghold was taken with anything approximating the fierceness and finality Ezekiel predicted, the classical sources are strangely silent concerning the unprecedented feat. The continuation of Tyre's royal line resident in the city as well as Nebuchadnezzar's known response to stubbornly rebellious cities elsewhere (e.g., Jerusalem) argue for a negotiated surrender under terms and for the survival of the island city as a “semi-independent state.”¹¹

The question as to whether or not Ezekiel actually envisioned Nebuchadnezzar as the instrument of all the devastation announced in 26:3-14 has naturally been raised by interpreters. The earliest formal exegetical treatment of the passage that I have been able to locate is that of St. Jerome of around A.D. 400-410. His Commentaries on Ezekiel are the only extensive interpretive work on this book to survive from the early fathers, so far as I know. He appears to view the entire “word” as referring to Nebuchadnezzar, expounding at length on the Babylonian king's assaults on the city in exposition of verse 3, “*Ascendere faciam ad te gentes multas sicut ascendit mare fluctuans, et erit Tyrus in direptionem gentibus,*” concluding with a reference to verse 13 that “either Nebuchadnezzar or the Lord himself” had quieted the city. ¹² Commenting on 26:15-18 he suggests that since the time of Nebuchadnezzar the city had been a peninsula, not an island, which also indicates that he saw the entire passage as related to Nebuchadnezzar. ¹³ (He adds parenthetically that “some affirm since Alexander,” indicating that not all were of his opinion that Nebuchadnezzar had been the one to connect Tyre to the mainland by a mole.) Although Luther's works do not include extended comment on Ezekiel, his lectures on Habakkuk show that he shared Jerome's opinion that Nebuchadnezzar had constructed the mole, tying the island to the mainland. Such a judgment would indicate that he apparently took the whole of 26:3-14 as referring to Nebuchadnezzar. Among the other reformers, the fact that Calvin expired in the midst of his lecture on Ezekiel, having completed work on only the first twenty chapters, is small encouragement to aspiring students of this major prophet.

Matthew Poole, the seventeenth-century exegete upon whom Wesley depended heavily for his notes on the Old Testament, read the entire passage as referring to Nebuchadnezzar's siege. Whatever settlements

followed on the site he considered sufficiently different or inferior as to raise no question about the prediction that Tyre would be “built no more.” 16

That Wesley shared Poole’s viewpoint in this case is shown by his comment on 26:19, where he explains “the deep” which will overwhelm Tyre as referring to Nebuchadnezzar’s army, an especially important equation since the same imagery appears in the general oracle (v. 3), supported in verses 7ff, by the details of Nebuchadnezzar’s siege. 17

Writing in the last century, C. F. Keil, of the Keil and Delitzsch team, seems also to treat the whole passage as referring to Nebuchadnezzar. 17 Among more recent interpreters, Walter Eichrodt, in the *Old Testament Library* series, (E. L. Allen in *The Interpreter’s Bible*, 19 and D. M. G. Stalker in the *Torch Bible Commentaries*, 20 along with Beegle and Carroll 21 interpret the passage to be a prediction of the total destruction of Tyre at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, though not all of these men regard the passage as entirely from the hand of Ezekiel.

Not all interpreters have concurred in the judgment that Ezekiel saw only Nebuchadnezzar as God’s agent of destruction for Tyre. Adam Clarke, for example, reasoning from what he knew of the subsequent history of Tyre, felt the prediction in 26:4 that Tyre would become a bare rock, its dust swept into the sea, could not “refer to the capture of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar. It flourished long after his time.” Then treating verses 12-14, he expressed “doubt whether the whole of this prophecy does not refer to the taking of Tyre by Alexander, three hundred years after its capture by Nebuchadnezzar. Indeed it may include more recent conquests of this important city.” 22 The prophecy referred to Nebuchadnezzar’s destruction of the mainland city and Alexander’s conquest of the island, with the “many nations” of 26:3 encompassing invaders through the sixteenth century of the Christian era, 23 he thought.

Although I cannot claim to have made an exhaustive survey of the literature, and would therefore not be surprised to find others, Clarke was the earliest I uncovered who introduced Alexander the Great as fulfilling the prophecy more adequately than Nebuchadnezzar. This opinion has in our time become commonplace among evangelical commentators and students of prophecy, particularly among persons who wish to use fulfilled prophecy for apologetic purposes, e.g., Robert D. Culver in the Moody publication, *Can I Trust the Bible?* 24

To the historical data noted by Adam Clarke, Charles Feinberg adds two significant bases for carrying the references on to Alexander the Great and even to the Saracens of the Middle Ages. First he understands the transition from third person singulars in verses 7-11, which clearly refer to Nebuchadnezzar, to third plurals in verse 12 as a clue that “Ezekiel was carrying the picture beyond Nebuchadnezzar.” 25 In addition, he relates the necessity of fulfillment to the fact of divine utterance: “Because the Lord Himself spoke the Word, His counsel came to pass.” 26 This approach to the passage is found as well in J. Barton Payne’s *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy*. The encyclopedia seeks to list every biblical prophecy with its specific fulfillment and appears based on the conviction that inspired prophecy is of necessity fulfilled. 27 Payne sees 26:1-4a and 6-11 as fulfilled in Nebuchadnezzar’s thirteen-year siege of Tyre, with 4b-5 and 12-21, which describe the complete destruction of insular Tyre, as “a further stage to the

collapse of Tyre” fulfilled by Alexander the Great and succeeding conquerors. 28 With Feinberg, Payne views the shift to third plurals in verse 12 as significant and sees in them an example of the “interpretive principle of ‘prophetic telescoping.’” 29

Printed opinions from recent Wesleyan commentators are not abundant. Professor Grider’s treatment of this particular passage in the *Beacon Bible Commentary* is not sufficiently detailed to discern his viewpoint on the question. 30 In the *Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, Bert Hall took verses 7-11 and 12-14 as describing two stages in the destruction of Tyre, the latter “probably that of Alexander the Great in 332 B. C.” and saw the pronominal shift as a clue to this progression, observing that Nebuchadnezzar “did not succeed in taking the city.” 31

In this writer’s opinion, the subsequent history of Tyre and affirmations one might wish to make concerning the necessity or dependability of biblical prophecy are secondary considerations. They are subordinate to information from the passage itself and its context regarding the question as to whether or not Nebuchadnezzar alone or Alexander the Great and others are in view in the destruction of Tyre. Several features of the passage and its textual transmission lead, in my judgment, to the conclusion that Ezekiel did indeed predict that Nebuchadnezzar would utterly annihilate the arrogant island fortress of Tyre, i.e., that the whole of verses 3-14 has him in mind.

For one thing the prediction of utter destruction is not easily separated from Nebuchadnezzar. Towers and standing columns (*massebot*) portrayed in the highly schematized art of Assyrian reliefs of insular Tyre make it quite probable that such “towers” and “columns” were distinctive features of the island city. 32 Their appearance in verses 4, 9, and 11 make it difficult to separate the description of Nebuchadnezzar’s siege from the opening general prediction of Tyre’s complete destruction. This overlap between the opening announcement of Tyre’s destruction and the description of Nebuchadnezzar’s siege in reference to an apparently distinctive feature of island Tyre make it further probable that Nebuchadnezzar’s siege here is seen by Ezekiel as at very least including a thoroughly destructive conquest of the island, not just mainland Tyre.

The separation of Nebuchadnezzar from Tyre’s utter destruction requires success at two points. One must clearly distinguish between the conquest of Old Tyre on the mainland and the sack of island Tyre. One must also show that Nebuchadnezzar was seen as related only or mainly to the conquest of the mainland. That is precisely where the effort leads J. Barton Payne. For him, verse 4 must be divided, one half referring to Nebuchadnezzar’s thirteen-year siege (4a) and the other half referring with verse 5 to a later destruction. In the text itself in my view, there is no clue to such a division. The division rests rather on a historical observation, that Nebuchadnezzar does not appear to have accomplished the feats cited in 4b-5: sweeping Tyre’s dust into the sea, making her a bare rock, a place for spreading of nets. Similarly with verses 12ff. and their separation from 7-11.

Such a treatment requires a fragmentation of the text and an overly technical reading of it which Ezekiel’s first hearers / readers would likely not have understood or perhaps even thought of. Indeed it appears to be a

reading of the material not widely encountered, if at all, prior to the Renaissance and rationalistic attacks upon the Scripture. Beegle's criticism of such interpretations at this point is justified. 33

Turning to syntax, what is the significance of the switch to third person plurals in verse 12? Is a new subject now in view, with Ezekiel's vision moving beyond Nebuchadnezzar to later conquerors such as Alexander and the Saracens? It is not possible absolutely to refute the contention. But it is certainly possible to raise serious doubt as to the validity of the claim.

First, one may recall, as we have already seen, that skilled interpreters since at least the time of Jerome have seen the plurals as a coherent part of the description of Nebuchadnezzar's siege of the city. The elaborate catalogue of participants in the siege—horses, horsemen, chariotry, cohort, and a large troop (vv. 7b, 10, 11) make the change to third person plurals quite understandable, if indeed that is the best reading of the text.

Although the reading of the plural does not in itself necessarily pose sufficient difficulties as to be a clue to subjects beyond the host of Nebuchadnezzar, one may inquire regarding the genuineness of the reading. The LXX at 26:12 reads singulars and thus carries the string of third person singular references begun with the mention of Nebuchadnezzar in verse 7 on through the end of the oracle. The entirety of verses 7-14 therefore is seen in the LXX as an exposition of the introductory oracle announcing Tyre's complete destruction, an exposition involving only Nebuchadnezzar and his forces.

This means one of two things: either (1) the translators had a Hebrew *Vorlage* which read singular and they are simply transmitting a variant Hebrew tradition, or (2) they had a *Vorlage* with plurals as we do in the MT and for some reason altered it.

The second alternative, that they have changed an original plural to singular seems unlikely. Judging from the sources cited by Josephus, by the time of the LXX it was common scholarly knowledge in the Hellenistic world that Tyre had survived the attack by Nebuchadnezzar. The singular by their time would have been the decidedly more difficult reading and an unlikely interpretive change for them to make. On the other hand the other major ancient versions (Targum, Vulgate, Peshitta) follow the MT and show the widespread acceptance of that reading. Neither the Qumran texts nor the Hexapla provide additional textual information on the question. The rather lamentable state of the Hebrew text of Ezekiel in general may make one wonder whether it is not simply a matter of textual corruption at this point that accounts for the plurals. It could also be that the MT itself carries an early alteration of the text for theological reasons, opening the passage at least to the possibility of other actors beyond Nebuchadnezzar; though, as we have noted, the plurals did not seem to pose a problem to the ancients.

The tentative nature of OT textual criticism makes it difficult in my judgment to decide confidently which of these various possibilities actually is best. The net result still is that the LXX either gives the original reading in which the question is textually settled (Nebuchadnezzar is read throughout) or provides the earliest extra-biblical witness to the interpretive tradition which surfaces again in Jerome, six to seven centuries later.

These considerations taken together: (1) the difficulty of separating the description of Nebuchadnezzar's siege from the utter destruction of island Tyre in view of the overlap of terminology apparently distinctive to that fortress, (2) the rather artificial and fragmentary reading of the text necessitated by the introduction of referents beyond Nebuchadnezzar, and (3) the LXX's witness either to the text or the interpretive tradition which excludes later actors—these considerations lead, it would seem, to the conclusion that Ezekiel envisioned the complete destruction of Tyre at the hands of the Babylonian “King of kings,” not at the hands of other invaders such as Alexander the Great.

II. Responses to the Unfulfilled Prophecy Regarding Nebuchadnezzar and Tyre

In 570 B.C., Ezekiel received a second word involving Nebuchadnezzar and the siege of Tyre:

Son of Man, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon drove his army in a hard campaign against Tyre; every head was rubbed bare and every shoulder made raw. Yet he and his army got no reward from the campaign he led against Tyre. Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I am going to give Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he will carry off its wealth. (Ezekiel 29:18-19a, NIV)

Commentators as early as Jerome have claimed that the disappointing booty was due to a naval evacuation of all valuables just prior to the surrender of the city on terms. 34 If Sidney Smith is correct, Ezekiel 27:27 (and the context) may indicate that Ezekiel himself was aware of such an evacuation. 35 I have been unable to find other objective bases beyond that possible data in chapter 27 for the opinion.

If Ezekiel's earlier prediction had reference to many conquerors of Tyre, then this word from the Lord is simply a comment upon the fact that Nebuchadnezzar's arduous labors were ill repaid. If, however, as this paper has sought to show, the prophet earlier saw the Babylonian himself as conquering Tyre, looting her costly wares and valuable real estate, and sweeping her remains into the sea, this word is a response to a course of events unexpected by the prophet. In that case the passage holds potential for study of a prophet's own response to non-fulfillment of his prediction and for comparison of that response with those of his interpreters.

Ezekiel offers no admission of error, nor does he seek to support the truthfulness of his previous prediction, to guarantee that his followers trust his word. The response seems rather to be a straight-forward acknowledgement that the course of events had not conformed to his inspired expectations; that for reasons not pursued, the predictions regarding Nebuchadnezzar had not and most likely would not be realized. With this we may at least begin.

The prophet in *this* passage at least does not seem to share the concern of some of his interpreters that he be exonerated and demonstrated to have been correct. Interpreters such as Culver, Feinberg and Payne appear to outrun the prophet himself in their concern to demonstrate the absolute accuracy of prophetic utterances. The falsification formula from Deuteron-

omy 18:21-22 might appear to support their concern: “If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come to pass, that is a word the Lord has not spoken.” But this feature of the biblical material appears to be laid on the entirety of prophetic experience by the above interpreters with a rigidity and precision beyond that actually anticipated by the prophet himself.

This is true in spite of the fact that the Deuteronomic test was obviously known by Jeremiah, a contemporary of Ezekiel (Jer. 28.9, and that Jeremiah and perhaps even Ezekiel struggled at times with facing the possibility of unfulfilled predictions (Jer. 17:15; Ezek. 12:21-25). But these well-known facts do not adequately account for all prophetic response to the question of non-fulfillment. Those who do interpret appear to me to prove, in spite of themselves, problematic concerns for Scripture actually will. lead to an applicability to contain certain exegetical possibilities which do not conform to that doctrinal expectation. As a result options which would otherwise seem inappropriate are introduced into the interpretive process.

In my opinion much of contemporary conservative interpretation of prophecy which transposes significant portions of Old Testament prophecies from their explicit historical contexts to a literal millennial or end-time fulfillment suffers from this same weakness. The interpretations proceed from the observation that certain prophecies have not been fulfilled. They further proceed on the premise that they are therefore necessarily yet to be fulfilled with precision more than from clear indications in either testament that they must be fulfilled, at least in any way resembling what one might expect from a common sense reading of passages involved.

Regarding our passage specifically, Alexander the Great is introduced in the interpretation more, one suspects, from a reading of later history and a concern for the accuracy of Ezekiel than from information actually in the passage itself. In this case G. A. Cooke’s judgment on 29:18-20 in the *ICC* is preferable: “Ezekiel’s confident expectation of the fall of Tyre (26:3-18); 27:26-36; 28:14ff.) had not been fulfilled; he admits as much in v. 18, but he allowed his word to stand, because at this later date he looked for a further development. 36

Bert Hall, in the *Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, follows H. L. Ellison in rejecting the notion that Ezekiel was mistaken and in attributing the unexpected developments to the “conditional nature of Hebrew prophecy.” 37 Although the conditional nature of prophetic pronouncements is a factor in many passages, especially pronouncements of doom whose very intent was to elicit repentance and thus to avert judgment, it does not really fit here. There is little indication that Ezekiel anticipated or even desired the repentance of Tyre. Nor is there indication that such matters figured in the course of events.

If the conditional nature of prophecy is a factor, it is with reference to divine sovereignty, not human response to the pronouncement which is usually meant. That is, the fulfillment of any prediction uttered in the name of the Lord is surely conditioned upon the sovereign will of God. One might say then, as Eichrodt does, that

The predictions of the prophets . . . are always associated with . . . a direct awareness of the whole control of providence, so

they subordinate each single historical event to its context in the activity of God which makes the whole development of history serve his kingdom.... So prediction demands humble obedience to the mystery of the divine work of realization and like the rest of what prophets preach, it confronts the hearer with the question of a faith which refuses to let itself be led astray by unexpected delays, changes of front, or reconstructions. 38

Eichrodt's view is a valuable corrective to approaches which reason from the sovereignty and truthfulness of God in the opposite direction to an almost magical approach to prophetic prediction. On the other hand there is a point of diminishing returns, as Robert Carroll points out. Carroll rejects Eichrodt's appeal to "the transcendental dimension of prophecy" as equal to saying "whatever turned out to be the case was the will of God." 39 The prophets could not be continually wrong without eventually undermining confidence in the whole prophetic enterprise. And yet, the fact that the Old Testament believing community passed on inspired prophetic hopes which had obviously not been realized precisely as predicted, indicates a faith precisely along the lines Eichrodt describes.

Eichrodt's approach is at this point superior to Beegle's. Professor Beegle uses examples of unfulfilled prophecy to prove that the prophets were not inerrant. In chapter 5 of his work, *Prophecy and Prediction*, "Were the Prophets Inerrant?", he cites Ezekiel's change of mind as a fact which "should warn against trying to make him inerrant." 40 While Beegle has helpfully gathered together texts to which evangelicals need to return with new categories, his emphasis in thus describing them is, in my judgment, misplaced. Proving that the prophets were errant comes no closer to Ezekiel's own response to the situation than do attempts to prove him inerrant. Ezekiel simply does not bring categories of truth and error to the problem. He does not critique his previous oracle as false, nor does he call in question the truthfulness of other statements he has made. Beegle sees this, but unlike the prophet himself proceeds to insist that the question must be discussed in these terms. If the prophet does not bring categories of truth/error to the question, we ought at least to ask why we must and why we do.

Robert Carroll is much closer to suggesting a potentially fruitful path of inquiry when he says "The important task of interpretation is not demonstrating that the predictions were wrong [one might say "right or wrong"] but showing how they were treated by the later communities as ongoing possibilities for their future." 41 Carroll's own application of the theory of cognitive dissonance to problems of unfulfilled prophecy is an interesting experiment. But it is not as enlightening as his study of the interpretation of the prophetic traditions to be found within Scripture itself. 42

Carroll sees historic formulations of God's knowledge of the future as unnecessary in light of process theology. According to him:

The hermeneutical gymnastics required to give any coherence to the notion of God knowing and revealing the future in the form of predictions to the prophets does no religious community

any credit. Furthermore the account of prophecy produced in such circles is banal beyond belief and on a footing with astrological charts and other such diversions of irrationalism. 43

One may well agree with Carroll's dissatisfaction with the "astrological chart" approach to prophecy-fulfillment and the "hermeneutical gymnastics" involved. But I am by no means prepared to conclude that the alternative is a scuttling of the prophetic vision of God for process theology. One wonders if it is not possible to pursue the matter of prediction and fulfillment with the creativity and candor Carroll has attempted but from entirely different theological and critical foundations. One wonders if it is not possible to move beyond the question of errancy — inerrancy which preoccupies Beegle on the one hand and Payne on the other to a more adequate appreciation of the meaning and truthfulness of prophecy — fulfillment.

In spite of Carroll's unacceptable assumptions, I suspect that his method, analysis of the interpretation of the prophetic traditions to be found within Scripture itself, holds promise. It would appear to have potential for expanding our understanding of the Old Testament community's own faith in prophecy and for taking our appreciation of prophecy beyond the true/false categories which do not appear to cover all the prophetic experience.

To be fruitful for evangelical interpreters, such a path of inquiry will have to rise above the mere humanism in much traditionalism. The prophetic traditions are a statement of the community's pragmatic response to events in the light of previous prophecy, more than the community's growing faith or merely the community's own formulation. The succeeding treatments of previous prophetic utterances are themselves presented as born of God, as inspired words from the Lord himself. This is true in our set of passages from Ezekiel and elsewhere in the prophets as well. Recognition of the interpretation of previous prophecy within the flow of the prophetic literature itself will expand our appreciation for the meaning of prophetic revelation. But the awareness that the whole process is indeed revelation must also inform the interpreter, leading him beyond talk about Israel's faith as though that faith as now recorded in Scripture were somehow different from the Word of God itself.

Further, an acceptable treatment will need a breadth with which modern rationalists, evangelical and otherwise, are uncomfortable. The Old Testament presents the student with data too diverse to bring together easily. The Deuteronomic test of the true and false prophet (18:21) stands balanced by materials showing an open response to obvious nonfulfillment, a dynamic which cautions against pressing the Deuteronomic paradigm with precision and rigidity one might otherwise expect possible.

The Old Testament believing community's response here is instructive. They passed on the word they received, problems and all, without judging unfulfilled predictions false. Their response was primarily kerygmatic and hopeful. It was the non-believing sectors in Israel that were primarily rationalistic and historically analytical, and that insisted on pressing the prophetic pronouncements into a rigid prediction — fulfillment scheme, using the delays and surprises to support their skepticism (Zeph. 1:12; cf. similar responses to covenant promises, Mal. 3:13-14).

The New Testament offers parallel phenomena. On the one hand Jesus affirms that Scripture cannot be broken (John 10:35) and proceeds with the apostles to interpret His life in light of the details of the text trusted without question. On the other hand, major passages which simply beg for comment in light of the New Covenant events, such as Ezekiel 40-48, either go completely untouched, as though their fulfillment or the lack of it is of little consequence, or are completely redone in a way that expands the idea of fulfillment far beyond the limits of the Deuteronomic test. And the whole thing is passed on, with New Testament persons confident in the truth of it all.

This paper has sought to investigate afresh a famous problem passage and to use it as a basis for calling for a renewed effort to fashion **UNREADABLE**. (If such a hermeneutic can be fashioned, it will not be done quickly or easily and certainly not in this paper, which has been long on diagnosis and short on cure.

Commenting on the present need to forge “an adequate theology of revelation” commensurate with the trinitarian and Christological definitions the Church hammered out over centuries, Clark Pinnock recently prayed:

May God grant us a team of godly, evangelical thinkers who will give themselves to this task and who will view their work not as the definitive statement, but as building blocks in a great cathedral to whose building they will have contributed, even though most of them will be forgotten. 44

In the spirit of Pinnock’s prayer, these meager efforts are offered as a small building block.

Notes

1 For example, Robert D. Culver, “Were the Old Testament Prophecies Really Prophetic?” *Can I Trust the Bible?* Howard F. Vos, editor (Chicago: Moody Press, 1963), pp. 91-119, and Bernard Ramm, “The Evidence of Prophecy and Miracle,” *Revelation and the Bible: Contemporary Evangelical Thought* Carl F. H. Henry, editor (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958), pp. 251-64.

2 See, e.g., *The Asbury Seminarian*, 25 (April 1980): 32-33.

3 For an interesting survey, see J. J. M. Roberts, “A Christian Perspective on Prophetic Prediction,” *Interpretation*, 33 (July 1979): 240-53.

4 Culver, “Were the Old Testament Prophecies,” p. 110.

5 Roberts, “A Christian Perspective,” p. 242.

6 Usually taken to refer to Old Tyre, the mainland dependencies which, together with the island stronghold, were regarded as a single state. Recently H. J. Van Dijk has proposed, unconvincingly in my opinion, that

these are women taken in surprise outside the city walls, imagery for sudden attack, in Ezekiel's Prophecy on Tyre (Ezekiel 26.1-28.19): *A Ne(v) Approach* (No. 20 of *Biblica et Orientalia*, Rome PBI, 1968) p. 13.

Although the last two of these results, those concerning Tyre's becoming plunder and the demise of the "daughters in the field," follow the formula, "For I have spoken, says Adonai Yahweh," sense demands their connection with the preceding section. This division from sense is supported by the traditional Masoretic paragraph division as well as the observation of the clear start of a new phase of the pronouncement in verse 7, a new oracle.

7. Assyrian assaults on insular Tyre climaxed in those of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal. In spite of Esarhaddon's monuments at Sam'al Assyrian terms were rejected and the siege successfully withstood. A treaty was finally concluded by Ashurbanipal with "more generous terms" than those offered by Esarhaddon, but the city remained. See Sidney Smith, *The Assyrian Empire*, Vol. III of *The Cambridge Ancient History*, eds. J. B. Bury, S. A. Cook, and F. E. Adcock (Cambridge: University Press, 1929), pp. 85-86 and 115.

8 Josephus, *Antiquities*, X.xi.228; *Against Apion*, I.21, 156ff. Cf. Herodotus, II, 161, on Egyptian involvement in the siege.

9 E. Unger, "Nebukadnezar II and sein Sandabakku (Oberkommissar) in Tyrus," *ZAW* n.f., 3 (1926):316.

10 Unger, "Nebukadnezar II," p. 314; and Josephus, *Against Apion*, I.21, 156ff., which indicate a continuing line of Tyrian kings, some recalled from Babylon itself.

11 John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 2nd revised edition (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), p. 352.

12 Jerome, in *S. Hieronymi Presbyteri Opera, Pars I, Opera Exegetica 4, Commentariorum in Hiezechielem, Libri XIV*, Vol. LXXV of *Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina* (Turnholti: Typographi Brepols Editores Pontificii, 1964), pp. 349-50.

13 Jerome, in *S. Hieronymi P* 353.

14 Martin Luther, *Lectures on the Minor Prophets, II: Jonah, Habakkuk*, Vol. 19 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Hilton C. Oswald (St. Louis: Concordia, 1974), p. 114.

15 Matthew Poole, *Psalms-Malachi*, Vol. II of *A Commentary on the Holy Bible* (London: The Banner of Truth, 1962; first edition, 1685), pp. 742-43.

16 John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament* (Bristol: William Pine, 1765; reprint by Schmul Publishers, 1975), 3:2356. Mr. Wesley also shares Poole's opinion on 26:14.

17 C. F. Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Ezekiel*, tr. James Martin (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1950), 1:372-77.

18 Walter Eichrodt, *Ezekiel. A Commentary in The Old Testament Library*, eds. G. Ernest Wright, et al. (London: SCM Press, 1970), pp. 370-72, 407-11.

19 E. L. Allen, "The Book of Ezekiel" (Exposition), *The Interpreter's Bible*, ed. G. A. Buttrick (New York: Abingdon, 1956), 4:228.

20 D. M. G. Stalker, *Ezekiel: Introduction and Commentary in The Torch Bible Commentaries*, eds. John Marsh and Alan Richardson (London: SCM Press, 1968), p. 209.

21 Dewey Beegle, *Prophecy and Prediction*, p. 49, and Robert Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed*, p. 174.

22 Adam Clarke, *Isaiah to Malachi*, in *The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments . . . With a Commentary and Critical Notes* (New York: Abingdon, n.d.; Introduction to Isaiah dated 1823), 4: 494.

23 Clarke, *Commentary*, 4: 493.

24 Culver, "Were the Old Testament Prophecies," pp. 110-12. Culver almost seems to give the written words a validity quite apart from the intent of the writers, whoever they may be: ". . . even if the contention of certain critics were true that Ezekiel's words were spoken, or enlarged by interpolation after Nebuchadnezzar's siege came to a particularly successful conclusion in the following years, some of the most striking details waited more than two centuries for fulfillment," p. 114.

25 Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel: The Glory of God* (Chicago: Moody, 1969), p. 149.

26 Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel*, p. 149.

27 J Barton Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 59: "Whether achieved by intent . . . or by the most extraordinary of coincidences . . . every inspired prophecy does come to pass."

28 Payne, *Encyclopedia*, p. 362.

29 Payne, *Encyclopedia*, p. 362, n.59.

30 J. Kenneth Grider, "The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel," *The Minor Prophets*, in *The Beacon Bible Commentary* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1966), 4:585.

31 Bert Hall, "The Book of Ezekiel," in *The Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, ed. Charles W. Carter (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1969), 3:437.

32 R. D. Barnett, "Ezekiel and Tyre," *Eretz-Israel*, 9 (1969): 6-13. See especially pages 6-7 and plates 1 and 2.

33 *Corpus Christianorum*, Series Latina, LXXV, p. 415, in Jerome's commentary on this paragraph where an evacuation to "the islands" is posited. Aprhahat the Persian, Metropolit of Nineveh in the early fourth century, held the same opinion. "Select Demonstrations," *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, second series, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1956 reprint), 13, pt. 2, 355.

35 Sidney Smith, "The Ship Tyre," *PEQ*, 85 (1953): 104-09, without other ancient documentation for such an evacuation.

36 A. Cooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel in The International Critical Commentary*, eds. S. R. Driver, Alfred Plummer, and C. A. Briggs (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1936), p. 329.

37 Hall, "The Book of Ezekiel, WBC, p. 437, referring to H. L. Ellison, *Ezekiel: The Man and His Message*, p. 103.

38 Eichrodt, *Commentary*, pp. 410-11; similarly D. M. G. Stalker, *Ezekiel*, pp. 224-25.

39 Robert Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed* (New York: Seabury, 1979), p. 76

40 Beegle, *Prophecy and Prediction*, p. 50.

41 Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed*, p. 58; see page 57 as well.

42 Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed*, in Part III, "The Hermeneutic of the Traditions.

43 Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed*, pp. (34-)35.

44 Clark Pinnock, "Three Views of the Bible in Contemporary Theology," *Biblical Authority*, Jack Rogers, editor (Waco: Word, 1977), p. 106.

NOTES ON THE EXEGESIS OF JOHN WESLEY'S "EXPLANATORY NOTES UPON THE NEW TESTAMENT"

by Timothy L. Smith

Dr. Kenneth Grider's recent criticism of John Wesley's treatment of the meaning of being baptized or filled with the Holy Spirit,¹ in Wesley's *Notes* on Acts, prompts the following comments. They are grounded in my belief that when seeking to understand what eighteenth or nineteenth-century texts say, historical theologians practice generally the same exegetical principles that guide students of the Old and New Testaments.

The initial task in Wesleyan as in Biblical studies is to establish the integrity of texts. In the case of the *Notes*, doing this does not require a student to accept the conclusion which John Wesley came to early in life, and stated in the preface, that the Bible comprises "one entire body," a "most solid and precious system of divine truth." Clearly, Wesley also thought the central theme of both the Old and the New Testaments to be God's promise to renew fallen humanity in the divine image. Nor do you need to share his apparent conviction that in the New Testament the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, standing together, proclaim in a saving narrative exactly what the Epistles of Paul and the other apostles affirm, namely, that "the kingdom of God," by whose sovereign grace we become partakers of the divine nature, "is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." What is at issue here is simply the integral character of what Wesley wrote in his *Notes Upon The New Testament*.

Of this there should be no question. John Wesley composed the *Notes* himself, with occasional help from his brother Charles. He borrowed much from John A. Bengel, but also relied upon several other commentators whom he mentions in his preface. Although he began the task in January 1754, Wesley did most of the writing in a space of less than four months in the winter of 1755-56. To be sure, his revisions of the text of the Scriptures themselves, many adopted from Bengel, rested on exegetical work he had done across the three previous decades. But he certainly thought about all those revisions during the period when he was writing the *Notes*. Revisions and notes, therefore, comprise a single literary work that reflects Wesley's biblical convictions in a crucial but brief period of his sixty-seven year ministry.

Modern New Testament scholars simply tear Wesley's text apart when they impose upon it the mosaic of divisions they customarily observe when commenting on the Scriptures. For example, separating his notes on the Acts from those he wrote on John's Gospel ignore not only his conviction of their theological unity but the fact that he probably finished his commentary on John only a few days before he began working on Acts. His notes on John 14:15, 20 and 23 affirmed his belief that when, as on the day of Pentecost, Father, Son and Holy Spirit come to "abide forever" in those who believe in, love, and obey Christ, the event constitutes "such a large manifestation of the divine presence and love that the former, in justification, is as nothing in comparison of it." The notes on Jesus' prayer in John 17 for the sanctification of all true believers, including His disciples then present and all who would later believe on Him "through their word," made precisely the same point. And Wesley's succeeding notes on John 20:22, 28 and 21:15 indicate clearly his view that whatever spiritual 1099 the eleven apostles may have suffered from their denial and flight in the face of the betrayal and crucifixion of Christ was fully recovered by the faith-inspiring presence of the risen Lord.

Wesley's belief in the unity of the New Testament Scriptures, and his assumption that his preachers would read the Notes with that unity in mind, are sufficient reasons to explain why he did not find it necessary to comment at all upon the meaning of being filled with the Spirit in Acts 2:4. Nor did he comment on Acts 4:31, the text of his well-known last sermon at Oxford -- last precisely because he had shown that verse to declare that all believers in all ages, and not simply the first apostles, were to seek and expect to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and by that event to be perfected in love.

Having established the authorship and unity of the text, historians then turn, as biblical scholars do, to the historical setting of the work they are dealing with. Wesley began writing the Notes four years after he had revised and published his third volume of sermons. Included there were the last four of the majestic series of thirteen on Christian perfection, as taught in the Sermon on the Mount; the one on "Satan's Devices," which dealt so explicitly with the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer seeking the experience of perfect love; and the one entitled "A Caution Against Bigotry." In the last, he described the experience of Christian perfection, when the heart of a believer becomes "an habitation of God through his Spirit." In that moment, Wesley wrote, "the energy of Satan ends, and the Son of God destroys the works of the Devil . . . His desires are refined, his affections purified; and, being filled with the Holy Ghost he grows in grace till he is not only holy in heart, but in all manner of conversation." Within weeks of the publication of the Notes he wrote his important letter "On Christian Perfection" to the Reverend Mr. Dodd and a long *Address to the Clergy of the Church of England*. Both of these gently but firmly called ministers to the experience of Christian holiness.

In the winter of 1757-58, two years after completing the *Notes*, Wesley began to preach far more insistently about entire sanctification in his annual visits to the Methodist societies in England and Ireland. The result was the awakening that prompted Wesley to write in his journal for 28 October, 1762 that his Pentecost "was now fully come." Texts that appear

with great frequency in the sermon register during the revival years include those of the major sermons on entire sanctification published at its end, between 1760 and 1768: “Wandering Thoughts” (1760); “On Sin in Believers” (1763); “Scripture Way of Salvation” (1765); and “The Repentance of Believers” (1768). During the revival he also carefully edited the Notes for a new edition; and in September, 1758, he wrote *Thoughts on Christian Perfection*. In the latter work, a condensation of which formed a large part of his *Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (1766), Wesley equated being “full of His Spirit” (Q. 32), “filled with pure love” (Q. 3, 7, 25), “filled with the love of God” (Q. 6,18), and “filled with all the fullness of God” (Q. 17) with having attained “scriptural perfection.”² The purpose of the *Plain Account* of course, was to demonstrate the consistency with which Wesley had proclaimed, beginning in the year 1740, that a second moment of sanctifying grace was crucial to the process by which God brought His children to full inward and outward perfection.

This historical and theological setting of the Notes makes it unlikely indeed that Wesley’s surprising silences about not only the meaning of being filled with the Spirit but about the second work of sanctifying grace generally are a proper basis to judge his doctrine on those subjects. Indeed, a quick glance at the notes he wrote on the great texts from which he characteristically preached both the general doctrine of perfect love and the specific call to faith for the experience of it (for example, Matt. 5:4, 6; John 15:12; 16:22; Rom. 6:6; 2 Cor. 3:17-18; Gal. 5:17; 6:15; Eph. 2:13; 4:24; 5:5; Col. 2:10; and 1 John 1:7; 2:13; 3:8; and 4:17) hardly indicates that he had ever preached on those texts, much less proclaimed the promise of entire sanctification from them. The more sensible conclusion is that he did not intend in the Notes to duplicate what he had already proclaimed from one end of the British Isles to the other, in meetings great and small and in public print as well.

This brings us, logically, to the next step in the task of exegesis, namely, establishing the primary and the important secondary purposes of the text we are dealing with. Here, Wesley’s preface to the *Notes* seems to reflect his life-long habit of candor. His purpose, he said, was not to display his learning or pander to that of others, but to “assist serious persons, who have not the advantage of learning [that is, a knowledge of the original languages of Scripture], in understanding the New Testament.” “I have endeavored to make the notes as short as possible,” Wesley continued, “that the comment may not obscure or swallow up the text; and as plain as possible, in pursuance of my main design, to assist the unlearned reader.” He believed he had not “written one line with a purpose of inflaming the hearts of Christians against each other.” He wished “that all the party names and unscriptural phrases and forms which have divided the Christian world were forgot, and that we might all agree to sit down together, as humble, loving disciples, at the feet of our common Master, to hear His word, to imbibe His Spirit, and to transcribe His life in our own.” Christian theology, he declared, was set forth in the words of Scripture itself. His preachers needed only to be able to read those words with precision.

The consistency of this statement of purpose with Wesley’s life-long reliance upon the “plain meanings” of Scripture to teach Christian truth is apparent to anyone closely familiar with his major works. He had many

times declared that the doctrine of Christian perfection was nothing more than the common faith, accessible to any who read the Bible with the aim of being fully renewed in the image of God. Accordingly, he quoted Luther's definition of theology toward the end of the preface: "Divinity is nothing but the grammar of the language of the Holy Ghost."

Indeed, Wesley's formal expositions of the theology of salvation, grounded in his own life-long study and exegesis of Scripture, lay before the world already in the three volumes of sermons he had published and in several others published separately, such as the one on "Free Grace." All but one of these sermons dated from after his discovery in the spring of 1738 that salvation by faith, in an instant of grace, was the New Testament's promise. When he began work on the Notes, therefore, I think he correctly assumed that his preachers and class leaders were acquainted both with those published sermons and with his repeated preaching of them in their hearing, as he traveled over the British Isles.

I find no evidence of any hidden agenda in Wesley's preparation of the *Notes*. And I believe that his hundreds of revisions of the authorized translation, which Herbert McGonigle is heroically laboring to sort out at the University of Manchester, had precisely the same objective stated in his preface: to make the sense of the original as clear as possible to readers having only an ordinary English education. He was, of course, always certain that the Scriptures must be the authority for all Christian belief. And he had long since been convinced that they declare the promise of heart purity, of perfect love, to all believers, by grace alone, through faith. Far from feeling constrained to labor the point in the Notes, he seemed content to let the plain meanings of what he later called "The Scripture Way of Salvation" speak for themselves. The truth he wanted his readers to grasp lay not in his comments but in the Word of the Lord, illumined by the ever-faithful Holy Spirit.

Text, context, and governing purposes having been thus, in my judgment, established, the student must next ponder the actual language used in the Notes in the light of Wesley's repeated employment of the same words and phrases in the great body of his prose and poetic writings. This is necessary to escape the tendency to impose twentieth-century meanings upon compositions written in the eighteenth century, as well as to identify such special theological meanings as John Wesley had developed for particular words and phrases. This large task is somewhat simpler than it seems at the outset, because Wesley's theological language, whether in sermons, hymns, or tracts, was overwhelmingly biblical. And the definitions that he had assigned to certain terms had been, by the time the Notes were published, set out in numerous paragraphs of scriptural exegesis in his sermons and essays. His repeated use of them, when studied with ordinary care, leaves little room for doubt as to their special meanings.

All of this can be demonstrated by reference to a phrase that appears continuously in Wesley's writings between 1738 and the preparation of these notes, namely, "fearing God and working righteousness." In the Aldersgate sermon, "Salvation by Faith" (1738), and in a succession of other sermons on the new birth, such as the early one on Romans 8:15, "The Spirit of Bondage and Adoption" (1739), Wesley explained that to be awakened by the Holy Spirit to a sense of conviction for sin is to know the

fear of the Lord. But no person could, in the proper scriptural sense, actually do good or righteous works before that fear was displaced by his or her experience of the new life in Christ that comes in regeneration, or “justification by faith.” The phrase “fearing God and working righteousness,” therefore, like another favorite, “faith working by love,” refers consistently in John Wesley’s writings of these years to what is only possible to those who have been “born of the Spirit” and experience saving grace. Even a “babe in Christ,” he rejoiced, has sufficient grace to overcome temptation to sin. Such a person both fears God and works righteousness.

And what is the scriptural source of that phrase? It appears only in the opening words of Peter’s sermon at the house of Cornelius: “In every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted by him (Acts 10:35).” Wesley’s strong note on it reads: “Is accepted of him -- through Christ, though he knows Him not. The assertion is express, and admits of no exception. He is in the favor of God, whether enjoying His written word and ordinances or not.” No hint of this comment appears in Bengel’s work the ideas and the words seem to be entirely Wesley’s.

Thus did Wesley declare, quite simply, that Cornelius was saved by faith, even though his faith did not consist in actually knowing or explicitly trusting in Jesus Christ as Lord. Wesley knew that such a declaration ran counter to the preoccupation of his evangelical contemporaries with formulations of Christian words that had to be known, believed, and recited before one could be saved. He and, later, John Fletcher, following him, argued the contrary. From this and other scriptures they posited a “dispensation of the Gentiles.” And a dispensation, in their view, was not a period of time but a relationship under which God dispensed the grace of salvation in a particular way—to Gentiles, in one; to Jews, in another and much higher manner; and, after Christ had come, to those who believed in Him in an even “more excellent way.”

When Wesley came to the words in Acts 15:9, where Peter, reporting on the events at the house of Cornelius, spoke of God “purifying their hearts by faith,” his brief note said only this: “Purifying—This word is repeated from chapter x.15. Their hearts—The heart is the proper seat of purity. By Faith—Without concerning themselves with the Mosaic law.” The words are a succinct reworking of Bengel’s. But Wesley omitted Bengel’s further comment that “he who hath the Holy Spirit and faith . . . hath liberty and purity, and is no longer subject to the law. “ It contradicted his oft-expressed view that all believers “have” the Holy Spirit, even those who do not yet enjoy liberty or purity from inbred sin, and that when they do enjoy this second blessing they remain not only subject to the law but gloriously able to fulfill it. One would scarcely suspect from this the significance of Acts 15:9 to John Wesley’s theology. In the long sequence of passages in sermons, prefaces, and essays where, as in a litany, he piled Scripture upon Scripture to declare the promise to believers of purity of heart and perfect love, the phrase that appears almost as persistently as “full renewal in the divine image” is “purifying their hearts by faith.”

Wesley’s observations on Acts 10:15 and 15:9, therefore, are not theological comments at all, but exactly what the title of his work called them, “explanatory notes.” His preaching and published writings had long since

made clear what he thought these two verses affirmed about salvation theology: justification by faith, in the one case, and the experience of heart purity, as in the experience of the apostles at Pentecost, in the other.

A similar comparison of Wesley's use in other places of the words in his note on Acts 1:5, "and so upon all true believers to the end of time," will yield parallel results. The note is in fact a nearly direct quotation from his early sermon on "Christian Perfection," at the point where he discussed Jesus' promise of the "sanctifying graces" to be poured out at Pentecost, as recorded in John 7:38-39. His notes on the latter verses, not foreshadowed by a syllable in Bengel, made the same point as the sermon:

Whosoever doth come to Him by faith, his inmost soul shall be filled with living water, with abundance of peace, joy, and love, which shall likewise flow from him to others. As the scripture hath said-.... Here is a general reference to all those scriptures which speak of the effusion of the Spirit by the Messiah, under the similitude of pouring out water. The Holy Ghost was not yet given-That is, those fruits of the Spirit were not yet given, even to true believers, in that full measure.

For those who had read these words, or who had read his sermons and tracts and sung his and his brother Charles's hymns, the cryptic comment on Acts 1:5 distilled the essence of Wesleyan teaching about entire sanctification: it was God's promise. He who had brought "true believers" to life in the Spirit was bound by the New Covenant to answer the cry of their hearts to be filled with the Spirit. He would sanctify them through and through. He would bless with all inward righteousness those who in the "godly temper" of meekness hungered and thirsted after it.

The reliability of this "promise of the Father" was crucial to John Wesley in a deeply personal way. For since his Oxford days he had been certain that the hearts of Christians must be made pure before they could "see God. "

Peter declared at the end of his Pentecost sermon that the full benefit of that promise, and not simply their initiation by grace into it, was extended to "as many as the Lord our God (hall call." But those who wished that benefit must begin with repentance, faith and baptism. When Wesley came to Acts 2:38-39, he added to Bengel's thin reference to its trinitarian significance his own unusually full comment:

Repent -- and hereby return to God. Be baptized, believing in the name of Jesus . . . The gift of the Holy Ghost does not mean, in this place, the power of speaking with tongues; for the promise of this was not given to all that were afar off in distant ages and nations; but rather the constant fruits of faith, even righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

The last words, Methodist readers knew, were from one of his favorite texts on regeneration. The word "constant" points to a hundred passages of prose and poetry in which the Wesleys expounded the difference between receiving and being fully renewed by the "abiding" Holy Spirit.

On the crucial word in Acts 2:4, however, "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit," Wesley made no comment in the Notes at all. Obviously,

this was not because he had no opinions upon it. Rather, I think, he was certain that in the context of what he had preached for fifteen years and what he had already said in his notes upon John 14:17-23 and other passages, his readers would understand without further help the truth the text declared. That truth, he believed was as certain as God's promises are true: the Holy Spirit, in His fully sanctifying grace, would, by faith, and without omitting any, come "upon all true believers to the end of time."

Notes

1J. Kenneth Grider, "Evaluation of Timothy Smith's Interpretation of Wesley," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 15:2 (Fall 1980), pp. 64-69.

2The only readable edition of *Thoughts on Christian Perfection* is in Albert C. Outler, ed., *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford, 1964), 283-97.