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# ***Wesleyan Theological Journal***

*Publication of the*  
**Wesleyan Theological Society**

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**Volume 34, Number 2**  
**Fall, 1999**

The Journal  
of the  
**WESLEYAN THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY**  
A Fellowship of Wesleyan-Holiness Scholars

Editor and Chair of the Editorial Committee:  
Barry L. Callen, 1993 to present

All communications concerning editorial matters should be addressed to the Editor, Barry L. Callen, c/o Anderson University, 1100 East 5th Street, Anderson, Indiana 46012. Communication about book reviews is to be directed to the Book Review Editor, David Bundy, c/o Christian Theological Seminary, 1000 West 42nd Street, P.O. Box 8867, Indianapolis, Indiana 46208. Membership dues and other financial matters should be addressed to the Secretary-Treasurer, William Kostlevy, c/o Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky 40390. Rate and application form are found at the end of this issue.

Publication Address: Wesleyan Theological Society, P. O. Box 144, Wilmore, Kentucky 40390.

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WESLEYAN THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY  
(Organized 1965)

The Society's mission is to encourage exchange of ideas among Wesleyan-Holiness theologians; to develop a source of papers for CHP (Christian Holiness Partnership) seminars; to stimulate scholarship among younger theologians and pastors; and to publish a scholarly journal.

# WESLEYAN THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL



Published by the Wesleyan Theological Society  
P. O. Box 144  
Wilmore, Kentucky 40390

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Wesleyan Theological Society

ISSN-0092-4245

Indexed with abstracts in *Religion Index One: Periodicals*, American Theological Library Association, Chicago, and by Christian Periodical Index of the Association of Christian Librarians. Available on-line through BRS (Bibliographic Retrieval Series), Latham, New York, and DIALOG, Palo Alto, California.

Available in Microform from University Microfilms International, 300 North Zeeb Road, Dept. I.R., Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106. Other than the most recent issues, the journal is available electronically at this online address: <http://wesley.nnc.edu>

Views expressed by writers are not necessarily those of the Wesleyan Theological Society, the Editor, or the Editorial Committee.

Printed by  
Old Paths Tract Society  
Shoals, Indiana 47581

## CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS NUMBER

### ARTICLE WRITERS:

**E. Byron Anderson**

Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, Indiana

**Paul M. Bassett**

Nazarene Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Missouri

**Dean G. Blevins**

Trevecca Nazarene University, Nashville, Tennessee

**Michael G. Cartwright**

University of Indianapolis, Indianapolis, Indiana

**Charles H. Goodwin**

Cannock, England

**Joe Gorman**

Pastor, Golden, Colorado

**Charles Edwin Jones**

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

**Scott Kisker**

Director, Charles Wesley Heritage Centre, England

**Randy L. Maddox**

Seattle Pacific University, Seattle, Washington

**Philip R. Meadows**

Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Evanston, Illinois

**Clark H. Pinnock**

McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

**Laurence W. Wood**

Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky

### BOOK REVIEWERS:

**Heather Ann Akely Bean, David Bundy,**

**Henry W. Spaulding II, John E. Stanley**



## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Numerous topics are addressed in this issue, covering the fields of Christian theology, church history, biblical studies, Christian education, spiritual formation, and church discipline, growth, and ministry in changing social environments. Each article examines and confronts a key challenge before the churches of the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition as a new millennium approaches and begins.

Sometimes the tasks facing individual believers and churches seem overwhelming. Joe Gorman wonders how John Wesley might be related constructively to the substantial problem of depression in this "age of melancholy." Dean G. Blevins addresses the question of how Wesleyans should seek to educate in a postmodern world, while E. Byron Anderson explores eucharistic practice and its ability to shape our will and vision so that we become and act in more Christ-like ways. Here the theology of the Trinity and the church's worship life join in the quest for Christian spiritual formation. Assuming with the Wesleyan tradition that Christian formation requires discipline, Michael G. Cartwright examines closely church discipline in the American Methodist experience.

Philip Meadows seeks to demonstrate that, following in the stream of John Wesley's correctives of John Calvin, we can incorporate today certain key insights of process theology and thereby be more biblical and pastoral without having to subscribe to process metaphysics. Clark H. Pinnock joins the current discussion of biblical hermeneutics with an exploration of the past and present meanings of biblical texts, suggesting as a hermeneutical principle that Bible readers are on an interpretive road, not yet at the end of the journey. While Charles Edwin Jones pursues one historic case study of the gospel's potential to make believers transformers of culture, Charles H. Goodwin explores another piece of church history that relates to the unresolved dilemma of Wesleyan concepts of ministry and church growth.

The issue of "Pentecostal" sanctification is pursued further in these pages. In the Spring 1999 issue, Laurence W. Wood presented a major study of this subject in the context of early Methodism. Now Randy L. Maddox responds to Wood, and Wood then continues the conversation with a response to Maddox. These two scholars are each seeking the best way to read the available documents, and they are being unusually open about their diverse readings as a good way to inform a reader who is faced

with making an independent decision on the matter. Scott Kisker contributes further to this subject with fresh insight into John Wesley's Puritan and Pietist heritages.

At the Annual Meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society convened on the campus of Southern Nazarene University, March 5-6, 1999, awarded by the Society to Dr. J. Kenneth Grider was the special recognition "Lifetime Service to the Wesleyan/Holiness Tradition." The tribute to Grider presented on that occasion by Paul M. Bassett appears in this issue.

May the extensive research and reflection offered in these pages, coming from prominent Wesleyan scholars in Canada, England, and the United States, contribute helpfully to the church's quest for integrity and mission effectiveness as the new millennium dawns.

# CHURCH DISCIPLINE IN THE AMERICAN METHODIST EXPERIENCE

by

**Michael G. Cartwright<sup>1</sup>**

One of the more fascinating documents in the history of American Methodism is the Episcopal Address of the Council of Bishops given at the 1900 General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. In their discussion of the “Spiritual Life” of the Church, the bishops made the following observations about the status of church discipline:

That many changes have occurred in the outward forms of Methodism is obvious. Which do they indicate, growth or decay? The class meeting, for instance, is considerably dis-used: have fellowship and spiritual helpfulness among believers abated, or do they find, in part, other expressions and other instruments? The rigid and minute Church discipline of former years is relaxed: is this a sign of pastoral unfaithfulness, or is it a sign of growing respect for individual liberty and of a better conception of the function of the Church? The plainness of the early Methodist congregations has disappeared: is this simply vanity and worldliness, or is it, in part, the natural and justifiable development of the aesthetic faculty under more prosperous external conditions? The strenuous contention for this or that particular doctrine or usage of Methodism, once common, is now rarely heard: is this indifferentism, or is it, in part, a better discernment of that which is vital to the Christian

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<sup>1</sup>An earlier version of this essay was presented at the Believers’ Church Conference on “The Rule of Christ” that convened at Goshen College, Goshen, Indiana, May 20-23, 1992.

faith, and, in part, the result of an acceptance by others of the once disputed opinion?<sup>2</sup>

The language or languages<sup>3</sup> of this document deserve further analysis. The distinctions that are made (e.g., “outward forms” and inner reality) in relation to the changes over time reflect the attempt by Protestants at the turn of the century to identify some “essence” that stands above history.<sup>4</sup> At the same time the bishops have no desire to ignore the concerns raised within the church about the possibility of apostasy. The hesitancy of the bishops to assign *any one answer* to the questions they pose in their General Conference address reflects both the uncertainty of the denomination with respect to its own past and the sensitivity of the church’s leadership to the challenges of the twentieth century, within as well as outside the denomination.

In these respects, the diachronic and synchronic complexities of this document also parallel the twofold challenge of this paper: (1) How does one offer a summary of the Methodist experience of church discipline given the theology of John Wesley, the history of the Wesleyan revival in Great Britain, the history of early American Methodism, the schisms of Methodism in the nineteenth century, the mergers of the twentieth century, and the more recent history in my own denomination, the United Methodist Church<sup>5</sup> (UMC)? (2) How does one offer an account of the United Methodist experience with church discipline given the *pluralism* that marks the contemporary reality of Pan-Methodism—the African

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<sup>2</sup>*Journal of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church held in Chicago, Illinois, May 2-29, 1900*, ed. David S. Monroe (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1900), 59-60. I am indebted to Dr. Stephen Long for calling this document to my attention. Frederick Norwood quotes this same passage in his study *Church Membership in the Methodist Tradition* (Nashville, TN: Methodist Publishing House, 1958), 9.

<sup>3</sup>To some extent, it could be argued that this statement encapsulates what Russell Richey has identified as the four “languages” or rhetorics of early American Methodism: terms derived from the “religious vernacular” of the Second Great Awakening are mixed easily with the archaic “Wesleyan” terminology of early British Methodism, and the rhetoric of “republicanism” appears in the voice of “episcopal” authority. See Richey’s study *Early American Methodism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991), xvi-xix.

<sup>4</sup>Stephen Long, *Living the Discipline: United Methodist Theological Reflections on War, Civilization, and Holiness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 8-9.

<sup>5</sup>The United Methodist Church is the product of three separate denominational mergers in the twentieth century: 1939 union between the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the Methodist Protestant Church to form the “Methodist Church”; the 1946 union of the Evangelical Church and the United Brethren Church to form the Evangelical United Brethren Church; the 1968 union between the Evangelical United Brethren Church and the Methodist Church to form the UMC.

Methodist Episcopal Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, the United Methodist Church—not to mention the Wesleyan Methodists, Free Methodists, and others in the broader Wesleyan family? These two (synchronic and diachronic) different kinds of considerations make it difficult to offer a coherent narrative of the American Methodist experience of church discipline, and yet the issues that converge in relation to these questions are crucial for United Methodists to consider.

Forty years ago, Frederick Norwood offered an assessment of the changes in church discipline in the American Methodist experience that is remarkable for the sense of *separation* that exists not only between the American Methodist past and the present of American Methodism, but also between the substance of Methodist witness and the practice of Methodist discipline. He wrote:

No longer do we hear the stern authoritative voice of our English founder setting down the strict confines of the strait way a Methodist Christian should follow. No longer are we held together by the old class meetings and bands and select societies. No longer do we adhere willingly to the strict and unbending discipline of the Rules. Methodist discipline there is, and much of it is written into the many pages of the *Discipline of the Methodist Church*. But it is not the same as it used to be.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, my task in this essay is to describe *how* Methodist disciplinary practice has changed and to point to some of the reasons *why* the changes have occurred. However, the difficulty of this task is compounded by the fact that there are *competing historical narratives* within American Methodism about how to account for these changes.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Norwood, *Church Membership in the Methodist Tradition*, 10. Written a decade before the merger of the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren, Norwood's study has never been updated to include the parallel experience of the Evangelical Association and the United Brethren which merged in 1946 to form the Evangelical United Brethren.

<sup>7</sup>Scholars such as Albert Outler would downplay the restitutionist features of Wesley's ecclesiology and stress the synthesis of tradition and revelation in early Methodism. Others such as Franklin Littell would emphasize the "Free Church" pattern of Wesley's Methodist societies, particularly the role played by church discipline in the class meetings, while downplaying the links with the ecclesiological sensibilities of the Church of England and the broader identification with the Anglo-Catholic tradition. At a more popular level, American Methodists like E. Stanley Jones have offered what might be dubbed an "American evangelical" reading of Wesleyan theology that ignores both the "Free Church" and "Anglican" dimensions of Wesley's ecclesiology while strongly affirming the communal significance of evangelical experience typified by Wesley's heart-warming experience at Aldersgate in 1738.

As Franklin Littell discovered nearly forty years ago, American Methodists typically do not respond well to critics within the church who call attention to the loss of church discipline within American Methodism. Littell called attention to the “promiscuity of membership practice” in the Methodist Church.<sup>8</sup> He correlated the diminished membership standards in the Methodist Church with the demise of the class meeting within American Methodism and related factors. Two prominent Methodist leaders wrote extensive “Readers’ Responses” in a subsequent issue of *The Christian Century* attempting to refute Littell’s charges. One of these respondents, Harold Bosley, objected to Littell’s historical narrative—particularly the correlation with the demise of the class meeting—which the author considered to be “accidental, not essential, to the witness” of early Methodism.<sup>9</sup>

In my view, the disagreement between Littell and Bosley about the “loss” of church discipline is emblematic of the confusion in contemporary United Methodism about how to read the history of American Methodism in relation to what is taken to be significant about John Wesley’s theology and the respective experiences of early British and early American Methodism. On the one side, in Littell’s article we have an example of “jeremiadic history.” As Russell Richey has noted in another context, “The hidden motive in jeremiadic history is to build a case for reform through recovery. It is a strategy of primitivism, a prophetic call to return to the covenant.”<sup>10</sup> In this case, Littell’s denunciation of current standards and practices in the church is embedded within what might be called a “Free Church” narrative<sup>11</sup> that begins with the notion of an original Methodist

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<sup>8</sup>Franklin H. Littell, “Toward the Recovery of Discipline in Methodism,” *The Christian Century* (June 26, 1963): 828.

<sup>9</sup>See Harold Bosley’s letter in the Readers’ Response column entitled “Returning Franklin Littell’s Fire” (July 17, 1963): 911-913. Bosley’s own historical narration and assessment is noteworthy for its implicit confidence that changes in church discipline did not affect the course of American Methodism negatively.

<sup>10</sup>Russell Richey, “The Role of History in the Discipline,” *Quarterly Review* (Winter 1989): 15. The focus of Richey’s article is the way in which history functions in the recent *Book of Discipline*, particularly paragraph 66, beginning with “Our Distinctive Heritage as United Methodists,” which Richey also identifies as a jeremiadic narrative.

<sup>11</sup>Littell is the author of the influential study *The Free Church* (Boston: Starr King Press, 1957) in which he identifies the decisive significance of discipline for the sectarian movements which gave rise to the Free Churches. Although the notion of the “free church” stands in contrast with the “territorial” or state church concept, Littell’s discussion demonstrates that there are richer senses of the concept that can be identified in a range of Protestants, including Pilgram Marpeck and John Wesley.

purity, identifies the reasons for the success of early Methodism, and proceeds to trace the decline of the class meeting in early Methodism as the primary causal explanation for the malaise of the denomination. As Richey notes, this kind of historical perspective is regarded with suspicion in some scholarly quarters, not only for the “hidden motive” of the argument,<sup>12</sup> but because it often fails to offer the kind of evidence—historical and textual—that would support the jeremiadic call for the recovery of disciplinary practices such as probationary membership.<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, Bosley’s defense of the membership practices of the American Methodism of the 1960s can be seen to rely on another kind of unacknowledged narrative. His declaration that the Methodist class meeting was “accidental, not essential, to the witness” of American Methodism presumes more than it reveals. In fact, to recall the Episcopal Address of 1900, it would seem that Bosley answers the bishops’ questions by offering an account of the “witness” of Methodism that is abstracted from practices of church discipline. “The witness gave them form and content and used them, though steadily modifying them, so long as they were useful to the witness.”<sup>14</sup> This “witness” to which Bosley refers apparently floats through the history of American Methodism, validated by its numerical success. Bosley’s argument is a good example of what Stephen Long has identified as the “pragmatist” strand of American Methodism: “Methodism’s ‘genius’ becomes its ability to accommodate and adjust to new cultural situations because of its ‘practical’ or ‘pragmatic’ character.”<sup>15</sup> In other words, the assumption of *progress* determines the way the story of discipline in American Methodism is to be told.<sup>16</sup> While it is probably overstated to claim, as Stephen Long has

<sup>12</sup>Richey, 15.

<sup>13</sup>In fact, this is one of Harold Bosley’s complaints about Littell’s style of argument. Bosley cites passages from the 1960 *Book of Discipline* where the Methodist Church has not “eliminated membership standards” and objects to the lack of historical evidence in Littell’s argument.

<sup>14</sup>Bosley, “Returning Franklin Littell’s Fire,” 911-912.

<sup>15</sup>Long, *Living the Discipline*, 20. Long’s discussion of why John Wesley’s conception of “practical divinity” should not be regarded as a “pragmatist” in this sense is insightful.

<sup>16</sup>For a critique of nineteenth century and early twentieth century trust in “progress” as the driving force of American history, see Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (New York: Norton, 1990), 40-81. More recently, Stephen Long has argued that the vision of progress has distorted the social witness of American Methodists in the twentieth century. See especially Long’s chapter “A Wesleyan Social Gospel” in *Living the Discipline*, 63-95.

recently done, that American Methodist “pragmatists” underwrite an inversion of Methodist discipline in the name of a “doctrine of civilization,”<sup>17</sup> there is no question that in the nineteenth century American Methodists began to see their mission as closely allied to the mission of America under the guidance of Providence.<sup>18</sup> Given such an alliance, church discipline diminishes in importance compared to the need to develop disciplined citizenship. Bosley’s response to Littell, although not as triumphalist as nineteenth century forbears, presents but one twentieth century example of the pragmatist tendency in American Methodism.

As the foregoing discussion is intended to demonstrate, both of these historical narratives are unsatisfactory: the first because it overdramatizes the discontinuities between the “golden age” of Methodism and the present; the second because of its unexamined assumption that the contemporary witness remains in continuity with the “essence” of Wesley’s revival in England and its confidence in the “mission” of American culture with which it is implicitly allied. In both cases, far too little historical analysis is presented. It is worth repeating that when it comes to discussing the history of church discipline in American Methodism, these two kinds of perspectives have tended to be the most vocal.<sup>19</sup> Fortunately, these are not the only ways that the history of American Methodism can be narrated.

How then should the story of the American Methodist experience with church discipline be told? I will argue that there is discontinuity, but that the separation occurs at several different levels, at different times, some of which are much earlier than Littell argues. On the other hand, there is some continuity. To paraphrase Frederick Norwood, Methodist discipline does still exist in some sense. Questions yet to be answered are: in what shape does it exist? and how does United Methodist discipline stand

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<sup>17</sup>Long, 52-62.

<sup>18</sup>There is no better nineteenth century example of this linkage of the mission of America with that of Methodism than Bishop Matthew Simpson. In *The Life of Matthew Simpson* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1956) Robert D. Clark describes Simpson as a “eulogist of country and church” (297). Simpson was convinced that he was living in a time of unparalleled opportunity. Therefore, his message was epideictic, not didactic: “He called men not so much to repentance as to praise” (268). “In a new era, he found only new cause for praise” (297).

<sup>19</sup>Given the sparse literature on the topic of the history of church discipline in American Methodism, this judgment is validated by the views noted in the preceding discussion.

in relation to the practice of church discipline in the past and present? To answer these questions, it will be necessary to accomplish three tasks: (1) describe the origins of Methodist discipline in John Wesley's ecclesiological synthesis; (2) describe some of the important shifts that have altered the character of church discipline in early British and American Methodism over the course of the past two centuries; and finally, (3) offer a brief assessment of the contemporary situation in the United Methodist tradition in which some features of early Wesleyan church discipline are being recovered. Throughout the discussion that follows, I will be calling attention to the manifold ways in which in which Methodist witness has become separated from church discipline in American Methodism, an irony that should haunt the American heirs of John and Charles Wesley.

### **John Wesley's Conception of Church Discipline**

The temptation to abstract Methodist witness from Methodist disciplinary practice is also a problem that John Wesley had to confront within his lifetime. For, contrary to the narrative of declension that centers on the demise of the class meeting in nineteenth century American Methodism, there is reason to believe that a significant shift in church discipline occurred within British Methodism during the same decade that the Methodist Episcopal Church was being founded (1784) in America. Five years before his death, Mr. Wesley expressed grave concern about the character of discipline in the Methodist societies (sermon on "Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity," 1786). He asked:

But why is self-denial in general so little practiced at present among the Methodists? Why is so exceeding little of it to be found even in the oldest and largest societies? The more I observe and consider things, the more clearly it appears what is the cause of this in London, in Bristol, in Birmingham, in Manchester, in Leeds, in Dublin, in Cork. The Methodists grow more and more self-indulgent, because they *grow rich*.<sup>20</sup>

Although John Wesley provides an answer to his own questions, he stands amazed that a reform movement could fail in the second generation as an indirect result of its own success in nurturing self-discipline in its adherents. He continued:

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<sup>20</sup>John Wesley, "Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity," Sermon No. 123 in *The Works of John Wesley*, IV (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987), 95.

But how astonishing a thing is this! How can we understand it? Does it not seem (and yet this cannot be!) that Christianity, true scriptural Christianity, has a tendency in the process of time to undermine and destroy itself? For wherever true Christianity spreads it must cause diligence and frugality, which in the natural course of things, must beget riches. And riches naturally beget pride, love of the world, and every temper that is destructive of Christianity.<sup>21</sup>

Although early in the Methodist revival, Wesley had called for the “radical rejection of surplus accumulation”<sup>22</sup> in offering his threefold rule on the use of money: “Gain all you can; [in order that you may] Save all you can; [in order that you may] Give all you can.”<sup>23</sup> Late in life he began to wonder whether it was possible to prevent “riches from destroying the religion of those that possess them.” Wesley repeats his threefold rule again in the 1786 sermon, but the second question he asked in that context goes unanswered: “But is there no way to prevent this? To continue Christianity among a people?”<sup>24</sup> Although the time and circumstances were different, this is the same question that haunted the Methodist bishops in 1900 and the 1963 dispute between Bosley and Littell.

There is some question as to whether Wesley himself grasped some of the shifts that were taking place within the Methodist movement during the last two decades of his life. For example, beginning in 1738, one of the five questions to be asked by the leader at every meeting of the “bands” was “Have you nothing you desire to keep secret? This question was quietly dropped without explanation after 1779.<sup>25</sup> The first generation of Methodists had apparently covenanted together not to keep secrets from one another about their activities, memberships in other groups, or financial status. Little is known about the circumstances in which the fifth question was dropped in 1779—was it thought to be redundant in light of the other questions? Were Methodists uncomfortable about their growing wealth and their hesitance to “give all they can”? These are questions that

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 95-96.

<sup>22</sup>Albert Outler uses these words to describe Wesley’s “originality” in the preface to Sermon No. 50 on “The Use of Money,” *Works*, II, 263.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 278-279.

<sup>24</sup>Wesley, “Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity,” 96.

<sup>25</sup>See “Rules of the Band Societies” (drawn up Dec. 25, 1738) in *Works*, IX, 77-78. See especially the explanatory note #12 on p. 78.

it is not possible to answer at present, but they are significant insofar as they reveal an apparent shift in disciplinary practice that caused old Mr. Wesley much anguish.

The importance of this initial shift in the practice of church discipline in Methodism is best seen when viewed in relation to two related problems: (1) John Wesley's relationship to the Church of England; and (2) John Wesley's ecclesiological synthesis. Here the objective cannot be to give an exhaustive account of John Wesley's use of church discipline,<sup>26</sup> much less offer a full description of the Wesleyan vision of "accountable discipleship"<sup>27</sup> which informed it. Instead, what I propose to do is to offer a sketch of Wesley's conception of church discipline as it exists in the overlap between two discourses or "languages" about the authority of the church.

**Wesley's Ecclesiological Synthesis.** At first glance, it might appear that Wesley had a "bicameral mind" when it came to ecclesiological questions insofar as he can be seen to talk about the church in two different ways depending on the audience (or issue) he was addressing at a given time. When addressing non-Methodist audiences, Wesley tended to be very ecumenical and stressed the "catholic spirit" of Methodism.<sup>28</sup> In these contexts, to the extent that issues of church discipline came up at all, he would typically cite the Edwardian Homilies and the canons of the Church of England or the writings of "Christian Antiquity," as he referred to the primitive church. On the other hand, when he addressed the Methodist "societies," Wesley's emphasis on church discipline could be quite pointed. Where Wesley can be found to be speaking to an overlapping set of audiences (Methodists and non-Methodists), we not only find some of Wesley's most intriguing discussions of church discipline, but

<sup>26</sup>For a good summary of John Wesley's use of church discipline, see Charles Edward White, "John Wesley's Use of Church Discipline," *Methodist History* 29:2 (January 1991): 112-118.

<sup>27</sup>See David Lowes Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting: Its Origin and Its Significance*, rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1987), and more recently Watson's expanded discussion of the "covenant discipleship" model with its revived "class leader" role in *Forming Christian Disciples: The Role of Covenant Discipleship and Class Leaders in the Congregation, Accountable Discipleship: Christian Formation Through Mutual Accountability, and Class Leaders: Recovering a Tradition* (all published by Discipleship Resources, a division of the United Methodist Publishing House, 1991).

<sup>28</sup>See, e.g., his "Letter to a Roman Catholic" (1749).

also some of his richest ecclesiological commentary. In such instances, we also discover what Albert Outler aptly terms the “instability” of Wesley’s ecclesiological synthesis.

It was Wesley’s genius to join the doctrine of salvation—what he regarded to be “Scriptural Christianity”—to disciplined discipleship, the theological significance of which is still too little understood in scholarly assessments of Wesley’s ethics.<sup>29</sup> Influenced as he was by “Christian Antiquity,” Wesley cited the practice of “the primitive church”: “The soul and the body make a man; the spirit and discipline make a Christian; implying that none could be real Christians without the help of Church Discipline.”<sup>30</sup> This relationship of church discipline and the Spirit, inseparably joined as a soul to the body, was critical not only for Wesley’s conception of Methodism as a reform movement within the Church of England, but also for his assessment of world Christianity.

But if this be so, is it any wonder that we find so few Christians; for where is Christian discipline? In what part of England (to go no farther) is Christian discipline added to Christian doctrine? Now, wherever doctrine is preached, where there is no discipline it cannot have its full effect upon the hearers.<sup>31</sup>

While Wesley realistically acknowledged the corruption of the Church of England in his day, he did not separate from it; rather, he sought to reform it by being neither a “dissenter” nor an “enthusiast,” but by creating a new ecclesio-political option—the Methodist “society.” Although the Methodist societies have been described in a variety of ways, ranging from “sect-like” to “church-like,” neither term describes the reality.

Albert Outler’s description of Wesley’s most mature ecclesiological statement (the sermon “Of the Church,” September 1785) as “an unstable blend of Anglican and Anabaptist ecclesiologies”<sup>32</sup> could be applied to most of Wesley’s ecclesiological reflections. The sermon “Of the Church” is worth discussing in light of Outler’s characterization. There, Wesley uses the text of Ephesians 4:1-6 as the framework for his ecclesiological

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<sup>29</sup>See, e.g., Manfred Marquardt, *John Wesley’s Social Ethics: Praxis and Principles* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1992).

<sup>30</sup>Wesley, “Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity,” *Works*, IV, 90.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup>See Albert Outler’s editorial preface to John Wesley’s sermon “Of the Church,” *Works*, III, 46.

reflections. In the first part of the sermon, he exploits the ambiguity of the word “church” in British culture: it means everything and nothing at the same time. Then he offers definitions of “the church of God” (Ephesians 4:1) in relation to the magisterial Protestant consensus as expressed in the Nineteenth Article of the “Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion” of the Church of England: “The visible church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure word of God is preached and the sacraments be duly administered.”<sup>33</sup> Notice that Wesley does not append an additional statement about “the ban” as we would find in the writings of Balthasar Hubmaier or in the Schleithem Confession or other documents in the “Anabaptist” tradition. In fact, there is no reference whatsoever in this sermon to the process of “binding and loosing” described in Matthew 18:15-20; nor does Wesley describe any kind of congregational “due process” based on 1 Corinthians 14:29. But neither does Wesley rely on the nineteenth article or use it as the basis for further discussion; rather, he assumes it.

What Wesley does do is to offer an exposition of what it would mean to “walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called” (Eph. 4:1). It is here that the ecclesiological synthesis comes into view. Wesley’s exposition of Eph. 4:1-6 drives home the point that any church worthy of the name of “the holy Catholic church” will be a church that is *holy*, and while there are many explanations for the holiness of the church, Wesley stressed that “the shortest and the plainest reason that can be given, and the only true one, is: the church is called ‘holy’ because it is holy; because every member thereof is holy, though in different degrees as he that called them is holy. How clear is this! If the church, as to the very essence of it, is a body of believers, no man that is not a Christian believer can be a member of it.”<sup>34</sup> The latter comment is significant not so much for the definition of the church that is given but for *the conception of membership* that one finds therein. I argue that the reason Wesley never finds it necessary to argue with the classical Protestant definitions of the church is because his focus is on what it means to be a *faithful member* of the church, i.e., what it means to pursue holiness as the mark of the church that *best describes* what it means to “walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called.”

<sup>33</sup>John Wesley, Sermon No. 74, “Of the Church,” *Works*, III, 51.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 55-56.

Within the Methodist societies, then, and not in the Church of England as such, Wesley exercised rigorous discipline. At the quarterly meetings of each Methodist society, a love feast would occur. Those persons whose lives indicated that they were seriously pursuing holy lives, Wesley gave a ticket for admission to the quarterly meeting. The intent, Wesley said, was to imply “as strong a recommendation of the person to who it was given as if I had wrote at length, ‘I believe the bearer hereof to be one that fears God and works righteousness.’” Further:

Those who bore these tickets . . . wherever they came, were acknowledged by their brethren and received with all cheerfulness. These were likewise of use in other respects. By these it was easily distinguished when the society was to meet apart, who were members of it and who were not. These also supplied us with a quiet and inoffensive method of removing any disorderly member. He has no new ticket at the quarterly visitation (for so often the tickets are changed); and thereby it is immediately known that he is no longer of this community.<sup>35</sup>

This passage is equally significant for what Wesley did not do. For example, in his description of the tickets, Wesley explicitly identifies them as being similar to the “commendatory letters” mentioned by the Apostle Paul.<sup>36</sup> Conceivably, Wesley might have called for the revival of these kinds of apostolic “tickets” for admission to the Eucharist of the “national Church,” but it did not fit his purpose in the Methodist Revival to do so. Here he accepted the *existing* sacramental discipline of the Church of England; indeed he presumed that all Methodists would attend worship on Sunday at their local parish and partake of the Eucharist according to the canons of the Church of England.<sup>37</sup> What Wesley did do was to follow what he regarded to be the apostolic precedent of “separating from the body of ‘hearers’ those (of the Church of England) who were convinced, and organizing them into a society of ‘catechumens.’”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>John Wesley, “A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists,” *Works*, IX, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1986), 265.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 265.

<sup>37</sup>I am indebted to Ted Campbell for calling my attention to Wesley’s use of “Christian antiquity” in this one instance as an implicit warrant to support an innovation in the early Methodist movement, in contrast to the absence of such restrictions on the admission to the Eucharist of the “national church” of England.

<sup>38</sup>Norwood, *Church Membership in the Methodist Tradition*, 30.

Membership in these catechetical “societies” remained probationary for all. Negotiating the “border between radical and moderate reformation,”<sup>39</sup> Wesley combined aspects that are recognizable to both Anglicans and Anabaptists: tradition is honored, and “Christian Antiquity” is drawn upon for patterns of restitution in continuity with the New Testament.

**Church Discipline.** As the foregoing example suggests, John Wesley’s conception of church discipline is complex and subtle precisely because of the ways it presumes—while going beyond—the discipline of the Church of England. Wesley never uses the phrase “the rule of Christ” in the way that sixteenth century Anabaptists did, yet it is clear that Wesley did see the performance of what Jesus commanded in Matthew 18:15-20 to be “the rule by which Christians walk. . . .”<sup>40</sup> His clearest reflections on Matthew 18:15-20 come in his sermon on “The Cure of Evil Speaking” where he denounces the worldly ways of gossip and backbiting that too often infiltrate the life of the church (a problem that would also plague the Methodists in Wesley’s lifetime).

Here again we see the tension between the two sides of Wesley’s doctrine of the church. In his explication of the “third step” (Matthew 18:17, “tell it to the church”), Wesley addresses the Methodists with these words:

All the question is how this word, “the church” is here to be understood. But the very nature of the thing will determine this beyond reasonable doubt. You cannot tell it to the national church, the whole body of men termed “the Church of England.” Neither would it answer any Christian end it you could: this is therefore not the meaning of the word. Neither can you tell it to that whole body of people in England with whom you have a more immediate *connexion*. Nor indeed would this answer any good end: the word therefore is not to be understood thus. It would not answer any valuable end to tell the faults of every particular member to “the church” (if you would so term it ), the congregation or *society* united together

<sup>39</sup>John Howard Yoder used these words to describe the focus of the 1989 conference on Balthasar Hubmaier in his article “The Believers Church Conferences in Historical Perspective,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 65 (January 1991), 5.

<sup>40</sup>John Wesley, Sermon 49, “On the Cure of Evil Speaking,” *Works*, III, 261.

in London. It remains that you tell it to the elder or elders of the church, to those who are your overseers of that flock of Christ to which you both belong, who watch over yours and his soul “as they must give account.” . . . It belongs to their office to determine concerning the behaviour of those under their care, and to “rebuke,” according to the demerit of their offence, “with all authority.” When therefore you have done this, you have done all which the Word of God or the law of love requireth of you.<sup>41</sup>

There is considerable ambiguity in Wesley’s language here, yet there is reason to believe that his Methodist audience grasped his point. On the one hand terms such as “connexion” and “society” certainly have specific meanings for the Methodists. On the other hand, the Methodist leadership is still a part of the Church of England, and is therefore in some sense still subject to its canons. Nothing Wesley says here suggests that he *only* has the Methodists in mind. Anglicans could take their own meanings from this sermon. Even his reference to the “elders” of the church is ambiguous since the Hebraic “elders” was used by Wesley to refer to mature persons of faith as well as a more informal designation for the office of ordained clergy in the Church of England (to this day, ordained United Methodist clergy “in full connection” with a conference are called “elders”). Wesley can be seen to be delicately balancing his fidelity to the Church of England with his commitment to bring about reform within the church catholic. In the same context, Wesley calls attention to the fact that this kind of discipleship is absent from the national churches.

But if this be the rule by which Christians walk, which is the land where Christians live? A few you may possibly find scattered up and down who make a conscience of observing it. But how very few! How thinly scattered upon the face of the earth! And where is there any body of men that universally walk thereby? Can we find them in Europe? Or to go farther, in Great Britain or Ireland? I fear not: I fear we may search these kingdoms throughout, and yet search in vain. Alas for the Christian world! Alas for Protestants, for Reformed Christians! “O who will rise up with me against the wicked? Who will take God’s part against the evil-speakers?” “Art thou the

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 259-260. Emphasis on “connexion” added. Emphasis on “society” presented in the original text.

man?" By the grace of God wilt thou be one who art not carried way by the torrent? From this hour wilt thou walk by this rule, "speaking evil of no man"?<sup>42</sup>

The point not to be missed here is that, while Wesley can indict state churches like the Church of England for their failures, he does not take the step of breaking fellowship with disobedient Christians in the national churches. Rather, he calls on those who are (at least nominally) members of the Church of England to forswear practices like "evil speaking"—which to Wesley's way of thinking was one of the problems that was killing the Church of England.

In the conclusion of his sermon, Wesley makes it clear what his intended solution to the problem of a corrupt Christendom is: "O that all you who bear the reproach of Christ, who are in derision called 'Methodists,' would set an example to the Christian world, so called. . . . If ye must be distinguished, whether ye will or no, let this be the distinguishing mark of a Methodist: 'He censures no man behind his back; by this fruit you may know him.'" In all these ways, Wesley conveys his hope that the performance of Matthew 18 would have an effect on the "wild unthinking world" such that people would say of Methodists what Julian the Apostate once said of the early church: "See how these Christians love one another!"<sup>43</sup> It is in this sense of a restoration of the practices of the "primitive church" such as those described in Matthew 18:15-20 that Albert Outler is probably correct to describe Methodism as an "evangelical order within the church catholic."<sup>44</sup>

**The General Rules of the United Societies.** Of course, the corollary to the resolve to "speak evil of no man behind his back" is that Methodists dared to admonish one another face to face in the "bands," "class meetings," and "societies" of the Wesleyan movement in England. One cannot grasp Wesley's conception of church discipline without understanding the importance of the "General Rules of the United Societies." Wesley nowhere cites Matthew 18:15-20 as an explicit warrant for the "accountable discipleship" described in the "General Rules"; however,

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 261.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 262.

<sup>44</sup>Albert Outler, "Do Methodists Have a Doctrine of the Church?" in *The Doctrine of the Church*, ed. Dow Kirkpatrick (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964), 11-28.

it is clear from the description of the purpose of a Methodist society that the kind of reproof and mutual admonition described in Matthew 18 is clearly what Wesley has in mind.

Such a Society is no other than a “company of men ‘having the form, and seeking the power of godliness’, united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation.”<sup>45</sup>

The correlate of the open invitation to all who “desire to flee from the wrath to come” is the expectation that those who join the Methodist societies will engage in “serious seeking” after the assurance of salvation. Wesley’s understanding of the *ordo salutis* precluded a dilettantish exploration of Christianity. Fraternal “oversight” and “admonition” were not only encouraged but absolutely necessary.

Wesley’s rules for the United Societies are at once both general and specific. Under the general headings of “By doing no harm,” “By doing good of every kind,” and “By attending upon all the ordinances of God,” Wesley identifies particular behaviors that Methodists were to embody.

He expected the early Methodists not only to *refrain* from particular behaviors and practices, but also to “continue to evidence their desire of salvation” in positive disciplines of holy living, including both “works of piety” and “works of mercy.” It is important to remind ourselves of Wesley’s notion of “covered promises” as found in various places in the Wesley corpus, and which is at least implicit in the first sermon in the Sermon on the Mount series. According to this notion, God has “covered” God’s commands with a promise that God’s grace will be sufficient to enable followers of Christ to fulfill those commands.

Thus, Wesley urges his preachers to preach both Law and Gospel, a pair that means something slightly different than it would have for Martin Luther. For Wesley, “preaching the law” meant “explaining and enforcing the commands of Christ briefly comprised in the Sermon on the Mount.”<sup>46</sup> In this sense, it is possible to say that the General Rules were a kind of “performative” guide to Christian discipleship that informed and guided the conversations in the class meetings and bands. The goal of the

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>“Of Preaching Christ” in *John Wesley*, ed. Albert Outler (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 232.

General Rules was to enable the “performance of Scripture,” if you will, understood within the context of Methodism as a continuing experience of God’s activity—the works of God (Acts 4-5) “moving on” through history. As such, the “General Rules” were not so much intended to replace Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount as to make it possible for Christians to read and understand the sermon in the context of accountable discipleship.

Finally, of course, Wesley commended to his followers a regular resort to the Means of Grace: “Thirdly, by attending upon all the ordinances of God” (or as Wesley also referred to these six disciplines, “the means of grace”). They were: the public worship of God; the ministry of the Word, either read or expounded; the Supper of the Lord; family and private prayer; searching the Scriptures; and fasting or abstinence. Wesley carefully joined the disciplinary practice of the Methodist revival to the sacramental tradition of the Church of England. At the same time, those who were not accountable for their discipleship would be admonished, disciplined, and if necessary expelled from the “society” of Methodists in a way that was not unlike the practice of Anabaptists at their best.

It is in these senses, then, that the early Methodists can be linked to what Donald Durnbaugh has called the “Believers’ Church” tradition,<sup>47</sup> while also claiming to stand within the ecumenical or “Anglo-Catholic” tradition. As a careful search of Wesley’s writings would bear out, John Wesley was profoundly concerned that Methodist “believers” be a disciplined company *for the sake of* calling the church catholic to live out its calling as Christ’s body in the world. Wesley’s way out of this problem was to invoke the platonizing distinction between the “visible Church” and the “invisible Church.”<sup>48</sup> Believers’ Church representatives rightly find this to be an unsatisfactory distinction, particularly when it is used by the heirs of the magisterial Protestants to *rule out* the use of “The Rule of Christ,” but Wesley does not do this. At the same time, it must be said that Wesley did rely on the “national church” for some aspects of church discipline. In fact, Wesley had a robust conception of church discipline that was anchored in his vision of Methodism as a reform movement within “the one holy catholic church.”

<sup>47</sup>Donald Durnbaugh, *The Believers’ Church: The History and Character of Radical Protestantism* (New York: Macmillan; reprinted by Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1985). In particular, see Durnbaugh’s discussion of John Wesley and Methodism, 130-145.

<sup>48</sup>See John Wesley’s discussion of Matt. 21:14 in *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament* as cited in Albert Outler’s note 56 in “Of the Church,” *Works*, III, 56.

## Shifts in Disciplinary Practice in American Methodism

Once we have ruled out any simple narrative of decline in either British or American Methodist experience with church discipline, it becomes necessary to identify the several shifts which occurred in nineteenth and early twentieth-century American Methodism that led to separations at other levels in disciplinary practice. The ecclesiological synthesis that I have described not only was “unstable,” as Albert Outler observed, but it did not survive Wesley. In particular, in the wake of Wesley’s death, new patterns of authority took shape in relation to church discipline in both British and American Methodism. In British Methodism the emergence of “Buntingism” ultimately redefined church discipline within an hierarchical consolidation of power by a few preachers in the early decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>49</sup> The story of what transpired in American Methodism is more complex.

**Episcopal Authority and “Methodist” Discipline.** American Methodists disregarded many of John Wesley’s directives about liturgy and sacramental disciplines, particularly in *Sunday Service*, Wesley’s abridged version of the *Book of Common Prayer* where he clearly presupposed the ecclesiological contribution of the Church of England.<sup>50</sup> In many respects, early American Methodism never really grasped the richness of Wesley’s ecclesiological synthesis within which the restitution of discipline coexisted with the sacramental traditions of the Anglican Church. In part, this is because of a lack of understanding of the contribution of the Anglo-Catholic tradition to Wesley’s reform movement. Albert Outler was probably correct to suggest the following contrast: “In Wesley, Scripture and tradition had been integrated, as the mutual interdependence of *revelation* and *interpretation*. No one among American Methodists

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<sup>49</sup>For a discussion of “Buntingism,” particularly as embodied by the authoritarian British Methodist leader Jacob Bunting, see Robert Currie, *Methodism Divided: A Study in the Sociology of Ecumenicalism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 31-43.

<sup>50</sup>*John Wesley’s Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America*, reprinted by *Quarterly Review* in a special bicentennial commemorative edition with an introduction by James F. White (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1984).

. . . knew enough about tradition to appropriate such an integration.”<sup>51</sup> This problem is clearly visible in Francis Asbury’s defense of episcopal authority in response to the challenge of James O’Kelly at the 1792 Conference and Nathan Bangs’ defense of the integrity of Methodist ecclesiology in response to the challenges by a priest in the Protestant Episcopal Church in 1831.

On the other hand, Asbury and others did hold firm in resisting the move by a group of lay preachers at the Fluvanna (Virginia) Conference of 1781 to “set up a presbytery of four ministers who should ordain one another, and then in turn they should ordain as many other preachers as desired to administer the sacraments”<sup>52</sup> of baptism and the Lord’s supper. As Frederick Norwood observed, the kind of ordination proposed “was not episcopal, nor was it presbyterian or congregational. Perhaps the closest parallel would be the self-baptisms of the Anabaptists in Zurich in the sixteenth century.”<sup>53</sup> Under Asbury’s leadership Methodists in America held to the Anglican conception of ordination and episcopal authority. In this respect, discipline of *ministers* in American Methodism has taken shape within a clearly defined *episcopal* authority that is distinct from—even as it overlaps with—the accountability of ordained ministers to the (regional) conferences in which ordained deacons are “probationary members” and ordained elders are “full members.” One is elected to conference membership by the “full members” of the conference *prior* to one’s ordination as deacon or elder, and one is then ordained by the bishop. At the same time, other ordained clergy (and more recently lay people) also participate in the laying on of hands at ordination.

To say that early American Methodists did not grasp Wesley’s “unstable synthesis,” however is not to say that the leaders of early Amer-

<sup>51</sup>“ ‘Biblical Primitivism’ in Early American Methodism,” in *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage: Essays of Albert C. Outler*, ed. Thomas C. Oden and Leicester R. Longden (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing Co., 1991), 151. See also the collection of essays *The American Quest for the Primitive Church*, ed. Richard T. Hughes (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 136. Outler probably distorts the issue somewhat by importing his notion of the Wesleyan “quadrilateral” into the discussion of American primitivism in relation to Wesley’s ecclesiological sensibilities, but otherwise his interpretation strikes me as correct.

<sup>52</sup>Frederick Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1974), 91-92.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, 92.

ican Methodism were uninterested in matters of discipline; rather, it is to acknowledge that their interest in church discipline took shape in a very different context. Ambivalence would seem to be the best word to characterize the attitude of the leaders of American Methodism throughout the first few decades. Initially, the focus of attention was how to maintain membership standards in relation to other Christians who were interested in participating in the Methodist fellowship without watering down the conception of “accountable discipleship” that had worked so well in the Wesleyan revival. When Francis Asbury arrived in 1771 to supervise the Methodist mission in America, he discovered that the Methodist discipline was not being kept.<sup>54</sup> Apparently, some of the early Methodist preachers were not as exacting as Bishop Asbury thought necessary in maintaining the discipline of the societies. Reports Frederick Maser:

The preachers, however, were responsible for the enforcement of discipline, and Asbury immediately began to urge it upon them with energy. He expelled from the societies persons who were not ready to submit to the General Rules. He divided the rest into classes and bands and instructed them in the teachings and aims of Methodism. He carefully examined the quarterly tickets that been issued to ensure their correctness.<sup>55</sup>

Asbury’s concern centered on the fact that many persons were being admitted to society meetings and even to the love feast and watchnight services who were not Methodists and who in some cases were of questionable character. While there is no question that Asbury ultimately consolidated appointive authority over the preachers—an important development in the episcopacy in American Methodism, the description of how Asbury used the General Rules in 1771 appears to be the *exception* in American Methodism. To explain this claim, it is necessary to call attention to several shifts in disciplinary practice, the significance of which has been to alter the use of the General Rules in American Methodism.

**Preparatory Membership.** I have argued against both jeremiadic narratives of the demise of the class meeting and the denials of pragma-

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<sup>54</sup>See *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, ed. Elmer T. Clark (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1958, vol. 1, 28, April 25 and 28, 1772). See also explanatory note 91 on page 28.

<sup>55</sup>Frederick Maser, *The Dramatic Story of Early American Methodism* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1965), 54.

tists underwritten by appeals to progress, while calling attention to fault lines in disciplinary practice that had appeared already within Wesley's lifetime. Recently, Franklin Littell has reiterated the charge he made in his 1963 *The Christian Century* article: "A century after Wesley's death, the Methodist movement stumbled and fell on the issue of church discipline."<sup>56</sup> The event to which Littell is referring is the 1908 General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, at which (according to Littell) "the last disciplinary requirement was removed." According to Littell's historical reconstruction, until this conference, "The Methodist Episcopal Church still retained the requirement that before being recommended for full standing, applicants for membership should spend six months in training in class."<sup>57</sup>

It is interesting to notice that Littell's claim centers on the problem of "preparatory membership" because, as Frederick Norwood has noted, one of the paradoxes of the relationship between early American Methodism and the Methodist revival in Britain was that *more restrictions* were placed on "getting in" in nineteenth-century American Methodism while less and less emphasis was given to the sense in which *all Methodists* remained "preparatory members." Although John Wesley exercised careful oversight of the members in the societies, "no *formal standards* for preparatory membership were set up" because a Methodist remained a "preparatory member" all his or her life.<sup>58</sup> In American Methodism, preparatory membership became more and more formalized (some critics would say "legalistic") and the *probationary character* of "full membership" was lost. For example, at the Conference (of preachers) of 1781, it was agreed that the preachers would examine persons admitted on trial for a period of three months, a period of time that corresponded with the *longest period ever specified* in British Methodism. The subsequent history of the changes in preparatory membership presumed this period of time. But as Norwood notes, in the South probationary membership as such was already "gone" by the time the General Conference of 1908

<sup>56</sup>Franklin Littell, "Assessing the Restoration Ideal," typescript page 13. This unpublished paper was presented as the keynote address at the Pepperdine University Conference on "Christian Primitivism and Modernization," June 6-9, 1991.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>58</sup>Norwood, *Church Membership in the Methodist Tradition*, 31, emphases added.

eliminated the stipulation of a minimum term of probationary membership.<sup>59</sup>

In other words, Littell's argument focuses on the last vestige of "probationary" membership, but it does not take into account the *discontinuities* that existed between probationary membership in Britain and the United States that already existed in the last decades of the eighteenth century. Similarly, Littell's often-repeated charge about the demise of the class meeting also fails to take into account the shift in the practice of admittance to the quarterly meeting love feasts of the Methodist societies in America, where from the beginning there appears to have been more openness to non-Methodists who were interested in the joining the society. Finally, not to take into account the different purpose served by the bands and class meetings when the love feast is no longer being "fenced"—not to mention in a circumstance where the sacramental discipline of the Church of England can no longer be presupposed—is to assume more continuity than there was in early American Methodism.

One of the more conspicuous examples of this discontinuity can be found in the 1798 edition of the *Doctrines and Disciplines of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America*. In fact, Bishops Coke and Asbury devoted an entire section of that volume to the question "Of the Privileges granted to serious Persons who are not of the Society." Although there was resistance to the notion of admitting non-Methodists to the "love feasts" of the Methodist societies, the Conference of Preachers agreed that such persons could be admitted "with the utmost caution," and in any case *no more than two or three times* unless the person in question became a member. In their commentary on this decision, the bishops note that, while it is the duty of the ministers to "fence our society and preserve it from intruders, . . . At the same time we should suffer those who are apparently sincere, if they request it, to see our order and discipline twice or thrice, that they themselves may judge, whether it will be

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<sup>59</sup>Norwood, 36-38. As Norwood goes on to explain, the long history of the Northern church's struggle with the probationary period stands in sharp contrast with the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Even after the 1908 decision of the General Conference of the MEC, there was a sense in which provision was made for probation without defining a specific duration. As Norwood notes, "In the Discipline of 1916, a footnote was added at this point explaining that, according to an interpretation by the bishops in 1912, a probationary period was mandatory. . . . The Methodist Protestants continued equally insistent on probation, but were not concerned about requiring a particular period" (38).

for their spiritual advantage to cast in their lot among us.”<sup>60</sup> The bishops then issued a warning that no further accommodation of the rules should be made with respect to non-Methodists on this point.

Documentary evidence suggests that among the “interested others” that the Conference had in mind when this section of the *Doctrines and Disciplines* was written were the German-speaking Evangelical Association and the United Brethren. These groups were attracted to the *fellowship* enjoyed by the Methodists, as found in the class meetings and love feast celebrations of the societies. In a few notable instances, leaders of the United Brethren actually participated actively in nearby Methodist “societies” while retaining their membership in their own fellowship. Martin Boehm, the former Mennonite, was among those to have something like “dual membership” in the Methodist Episcopal Church and the United Brethren.<sup>61</sup> Differences in language was one obstacle that prevented formal union between the Methodists and these German-speaking evangelicals. But more than any other factor, the *strictness* of discipline in the Methodist Episcopal Church kept the German-speaking United Brethren and the Evangelical Association preachers from uniting with them formally.<sup>62</sup> Interestingly enough, both groups would later adopt the Methodist *Discipline*—including the General Rules—when they formally organized as denominations in the early decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>63</sup>

Thus, on the matter of “preparatory” membership, American Methodists diverged from the practice of Wesley by permitting non-Methodists to participate in the love feasts. On the other hand, to the extent that the four questions continued to be asked about the adequacy of one’s discipleship at every meeting of the bands, church discipline continued to exist in some residual sense in the context of the societies. The questions were:

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<sup>60</sup>*The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America with Explanatory Notes by Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury* (Facsimile Edition), ed. Frederick A. Norwood (Evanston, IL: The Institute for the Study of Methodism and Related Movements, 1979), 154.

<sup>61</sup>J. Bruce Behny and Paul Eller, *The History of the Evangelical United Brethren Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1979), 44-45, 104.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, 54-55, 106-108.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, 78-82, 94-95, 100.

1. What known sins have you committed since our last meeting?
2. What particular temptations have you met with?
3. How were you delivered?
4. What have you thought, said or done, of which you doubt whether it be sin or not?<sup>64</sup>

As long as class leaders continued to raise these traditional questions, “accountable discipleship” continued after a fashion. But it is clear that changes in the surrounding matrix did alter the character of church discipline in early American Methodism as well as lead, however indirectly, to subsequent changes. In this respect, then, it is not possible to say that there was any one point when Methodists in America “stumbled and fell”; it appears that there was a stumbling from the beginning.

**Racism, Slavery and “The General Rules.”** In their annotations to the 1798 *Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America*, Bishops Asbury and Coke offered a ten-page commentary on the “General Rules,” which they described as “one of the completest systems of Christian ethics or morals, for its size, which ever was published by an uninspired [i. e., non-biblical] writer.”<sup>65</sup> The very fact that the bishops had to offer such a commentary is significant. Apparently, in the absence of any well-defined tradition of church discipline in early American Methodism, the bishops felt the need to clarify the origin and intent of the “General Rules” in relation to problems that were being raised with respect to the application of the General Rules—such as the “complicated crime” of the buying and selling of slaves. In 1789, this line had been inserted in the text of the General Rules: “The buying and selling of men, women, and children with an intention to enslave them.”<sup>66</sup> The bishops attached a footnote to the discussion of this particular rule, which praises those slaveowners who permit their slaves to “attend the preaching of the gospel.”<sup>67</sup> This reference suggests the measure in which accommodation to slavery was already taking place prior to the beginning of the nineteenth century in American Methodism.

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<sup>64</sup>“Rules of the Band Societies,” *Works*, IX, 78.

<sup>65</sup>Coke and Asbury, *Doctrines and Discipline*, 1798, 135.

<sup>66</sup>After 1808 this rule was shortened to read: “Slaveholding; buying or selling of slaves” (see *Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, 1988, Nashville, TN: United Methodist Publishing House, 1988, Para. 68, page 75).

<sup>67</sup>Coke and Asbury, *Doctrines and Discipline . . . 1798*, 138.

St. George's Church in Philadelphia was the meeting place of one of the Methodist societies in which Asbury had found it necessary to restore discipline shortly after his arrival in America in 1771. By 1792 this congregation had become a thriving church, one of the largest in America at the time, and biracial in its membership. In fact, apparently one of the reasons why it was thriving was because of the spirited preaching of several African-Americans, including Harry Hosier (who often rode with Bishop Asbury on his itinerations) and Richard Allen, a "free Negro" who was a leader in Philadelphia's African-American community and who was ordained a deacon at the 1784 "Christmas" Conference held in Baltimore, the organizing conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America. In 1792 the African-Americans in the congregation walked out after being forbidden to worship in a particular section of the church by the white leadership of the congregation. As Gary B. Nash has noted, this controversy actually stemmed from the increasing membership of the congregation at St. George's Church. "The congregation had outgrown the seating capacity. When the elders decided to expand their house of worship, black Methodists contributed money and labor to the effort. Then, on the first Sunday after the renovations were completed, the elders informed the black worshippers who filed into the service that they must sit in a segregated section of the newly built gallery."<sup>68</sup>

There is considerable corroborating evidence to support Richard Allen's version of the events over against the narrative of the congregation at Historic Old St. George's Church.<sup>69</sup> Consequently, "the St. George's

<sup>68</sup>Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community: 1720-1840* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 118.

<sup>69</sup>For a useful discussion of the complex events surrounding the "walkout" at St. George's Church, see Gary B. Nash's study *Forging Freedom*, 109-122. As Nash summarizes: "Many historians, assuming that the incident at St. George's took place in 1787, before the Free African Society was formed, have seen the discriminatory and insulting treatment by the elders of St. George's as the catalyst that drove Jones and Allen away from an assimilationist position within biracial churches and toward the creation of a separate black church. The black church, it is argued, had its origins in the racial segregation imposed by whites. But recently it has been shown that the confrontation at St. George's took place in late 1792, more than five years after the Free African Society was established, several years after separate black religious services were first held, and many months after Absalom Jones and others had launched the subscription campaign for a black church. . . . Allen recounts that after the incident the black leaders renewed their determination 'to worship God under our own fig tree' and 'were filled with fresh vigor to get a house erected to worship God in'" (118-119).

incident did confirm . . . what many blacks must have suspected—that there would be no truly biracial Christian community in the white churches of the city.”<sup>70</sup> This incident set a pattern that directly and indirectly has been replicated throughout the history of American Methodism. The separation of the races remains a grave problem affecting the witness of the United Methodist Church. Many congregations deny that there is a problem; some like the congregation at Historic Old St. George’s United Methodist Church even dare to congratulate themselves for helping the African-American Methodists get their start.<sup>71</sup> Franklin Littell has drawn the connection between ecclesiastically-tolerated racism and the propagation of “culture religion” in America and has called attention to examples of Methodist congregations where racism is one of the chief indicators of a lack of church discipline.<sup>72</sup> My point is to call attention to the profound shift in church discipline that occurred once the pattern of membership separation by race took shape in American Methodism. The consequences for church discipline in both Euro-American Methodism and African-American Methodism were profound.

This pattern of separation by race is all the more notable because there is some evidence that the democratizing influences of the first and second Great Awakenings, with their emphasis on religious experience, gave Methodists in America an advantage over Presbyterians and Episcopalians in converting slaves. Further, the extant slave narratives support the claim that prior to the nineteenth century enslaved African-Americans

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<sup>70</sup>Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 119.

<sup>71</sup>The pamphlet sold to visitors of Historic Old St. George’s United Methodist Church provides the following information about that congregation’s relationship to the founding of the first congregation in what would become the African Methodist Episcopal Church. “It was from St. George’s that the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) had its beginning. It is now one of the largest and most powerful churches in America. Richard Allen, a Negro slave, bought his freedom in 1786, although he had been licensed to preach by St. George’s in 1784, and was the first Negro in America licensed to preach by the Methodist Church. In 1787 Allen founded the first Negro congregation in America and organized the Bethel Church now known as ‘Mother Bethel.’ He became its first bishop in 1816. Many false and fantastic explanations have been passed down about Allen and his group as to why and how they left St. George’s, and many uncomplimentary things have been said of St. George’s when she deserved only praise and gratitude for giving Allen and his society opportunity and help” (see the “Third Century Booklet,” 16).

<sup>72</sup>Franklin H. Littell, *The Free Church* (Boston, MA: Starr King Press, 1957), 82-84.

did find significant opportunities to exercise leadership in the class meetings of the Methodist societies, including exhorting and preaching in Methodist societies of both races.<sup>73</sup> Unfortunately, there are not available the kinds of documented cases of Methodist slaves bringing charges against their masters based on Matthew 18:15-20 that are extant in other American Protestant traditions,<sup>74</sup> but we do know that as early as 1828 the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church rejected a resolution proposed by Stephen G. Roszel and Peter Cartwright that would have permitted Methodist congregations to discipline masters who mistreated their slaves. Here also, Euro-American Methodists elected not to follow through with the commitments implicit in the General Rules, thereby separating themselves not only from Wesleyan tradition but also from their brothers and sisters in Christ who were enslaved (to Methodists!).

Within the African Methodist Episcopal and African Methodist Episcopal Zion churches, the Wesleyan practice of “class meetings” based on the “General Rules” proved to be a kind of training ground for leadership—not only in the church but for the “Free African Societies” and the abolitionist movement as well. For example, Frederick Douglass (at one time a licensed preacher in the AMEZ tradition) testified that the opportunity to be a class leader and exhorter proved to be quite liberating for him as a young man. And it was a class leader, Denmark Vesey, who plotted the rebellion of slaves in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1822, a plot that apparently had the approval of AME church leaders in Charleston and Philadelphia.<sup>75</sup> In fact, it was in Charleston that African-American Christians discovered that church meetings provided the setting for political indoctrination and planning.

<sup>73</sup>See several examples of African-American slaves who were Methodists in Albert Raboteau’s *Slave Religion* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1980), 146. Although the examples Raboteau discusses are all taken from advertisements for runaway slaves between 1793-1800, none of these examples suggests that they are exceptional cases.

<sup>74</sup>See, for example, the case of charges that were brought against the owners of Nancy the Negro slavewoman by the Elkhorn Baptist Church in Kentucky in Albert Raboteau’s *Slave Religion*, 182-183. As Raboteau notes at the conclusion of this account, “More research into the minute books of antebellum congregations will be necessary before we can accurately estimate how frequently or infrequently slaves sought redress for maltreatment by appealing to church discipline” (p. 183).

<sup>75</sup>Gayraud Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of Afro-American People*, 2nd ed., revised and enlarged (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983), 57-62.

Although the “General Rules” have a prominent place in African-American Methodism,<sup>76</sup> it must be said that the continuing struggle against racism—not only in American culture, but in American Christianity as well—has tended to *separate* the discussion of church discipline in the African-American Methodist traditions from social ethics in a way that is distinctly different from Euro-American Methodists. What is not as well known is the fact that the African-Methodist Episcopal Church had to confront thorny problems of church discipline of their own as a result of slavery.

As late as 1856, the AME Church was still struggling with the problem of revising its own *Discipline* so that it would be unmistakably opposed to slaveholding. The original version of the AME Church Discipline read: “We will not receive any person into our society as a member who is a slaveholder. Any person now a member, having slaves, who shall refuse to emancipate them after due notice has been given by the preacher in charge, shall be expelled.”<sup>77</sup> The General Conference of the AME church held in Cincinnati in 1856 struggled with this issue. As Gayraud Wilmore explains:

There were still a few black slaveholders in the South and the border states. Some had purchased slaves with the intention of setting them free immediately, but others expected the slaves to “work off” their purchase price before claiming full liberty. The report on the Committee on Slavery proposed to force immediate emancipation or expulsion from the church. It also offered for adoption the policy that no person who was a slaveholder be received into membership in the church under any condition. A minority on the committee objected that in some cases there were extenuating circumstances. They argued that in order not to penalize those who had bought slaves for the purpose of giving them freedom, due notice of expulsion should be given “by the preacher in charge,” as already provided for in the Discipline. The minority warned that in establishing the denomination in a new area it was

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<sup>76</sup>See, for example, Bishop Henry McNeil Turner’s essay on “Methodist Polity” (approved in 1888 by the General Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church; reprinted 1986 by the African Methodist Episcopal Church Sunday School Union), as cited in David Lowes Watson, *Forming Christian Disciples* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1991).

<sup>77</sup>As cited in Gayraud Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, 86.

impossible always to know immediately who were slaveholders and who were not until after they had joined the church. Furthermore, there should be a period of “mercy” for such persons, untutored as they might be in the duties of Christians, that they might learn of God’s will, repent, and emancipate slaves they may have acquired for whatever reason.<sup>78</sup>

Wilmore concludes: “Thus in the 1850s, followers of Richard Allen encountered some of the same dilemmas the white Methodists had wrestled with in 1844, despite the fact that the question was presented in Cincinnati more as one of strategy than of principle.”<sup>79</sup> However, the difference between the AME struggle and the struggles of the MEC and MEC, South, must be noted; there is no record of the AME justifying its inconsistencies by claiming that God had *ordained* that African-Americans and Euro-Americans should not “mingle” because of the racial differences.

**The Restrictive Rules and the Transformation of the General Rules.** Between 1792 and 1808, ecclesiastical authority gradually became defined in early American Methodism. First, the 1792 General Conference solidified the authority of the bishops to appoint ministers, thereby resolving a crisis that had been prompted by James O’Kelly’s “republican” challenge to Bishop Asbury’s authority. The General Conference of 1808 further defined the boundaries between episcopal authority and that of the representative General Conference. Among the six Restrictive Rules that bind General Conference—the only body that can speak on behalf of the United Methodist Church—is the fifth rule which states that “The general conference shall not revoke or change the General Rules of Our United Societies.” With this action, the “General Rules” were given an institutional status within the *Discipline* of the Methodist Episcopal Church and its successor bodies.

As a result, American Methodists have seen themselves in continuity with John Wesley and early Methodism without recognizing the multiple discontinuities at the level of practice or use of the “General Rules.” I

<sup>78</sup>Wilmore, op. cit., 86. There are comparable examples that can be found in the United Brethren tradition. For example, Christian Newcomer was known to be opposed to slavery. Yet there is documentary evidence to suggest that he purchased a Negro girl for the purpose of setting her free. See Behny and Eller, *A History of the Evangelical United Brethren Church*, 65.

<sup>79</sup>Wilmore, op. cit., 87.

have already called attention to the shift in the conception of “preparatory” membership, and the segregation of members in worship which led to the separation of the African Methodist Episcopal Church from the MEC between 1792 and 1816. Other separations would occur in due time, but in almost every case both parties would continue to *claim continuity* with Wesley, even while they disagreed about the ethical significance of the General Rules. For example, when the Methodist Episcopal Church, South split in 1844 from the Methodist Episcopal Church over the issue of slavery, it claimed to be following nothing but the traditional Wesleyan discipline. But in fact, the MEC (South) actually deleted the rule about the buying and selling of slaves from its General Rules. The MEC (North) would also claim continuity with Wesley through its use of the General Rules, despite the fact that it had early on altered the context of the application of those rules when it allowed non-Methodists to be permitted to attend the love feasts. But because the leadership of the MEC could say that they had not violated the fifth Restrictive Rule, which protected the General Rules from alteration, they could effectively hide the fact that changes had already occurred in the use of the General Rules long before the General Conference of 1808.

This is not to say that no one recognized that there was a problem. In fact, throughout the nineteenth century voices could be heard in both the MEC and the MEC, South, decrying the “loss” of Methodist discipline. In most instances, such concern centered on the demise of the class meeting. Many but not all of those who voiced such criticisms were part of the “Holiness Movement.” The Holiness Movement called attention to this alleged divergence from early Methodism without recognizing that its own doctrine of “instantaneous sanctification” was by no means identical to Wesley’s doctrine of sanctification. Many of these same individuals were against slavery as well. In fact, the Free Methodist and Wesleyan Methodist splits with the Methodist Episcopal Church were partly over discontent with church strictures against those who were participating on the fringes of the Abolitionist movement. By mid-century there was open struggle between those preaching “holiness” and those who were seeking to position the church with the forces of progress and respectability. From the perspective of those in the Holiness Movement who regarded themselves as “traditional Wesleyans,” the class meeting itself was the issue in their battle for the soul of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Note:

Without doubt there are some who feel the bonds of Christian discipline too strait for them; and, believing that Methodists might be still more numerous if this condition were withdrawn, are already asking, 'Are class-meetings really necessary? Are they quite suited to the age in which we live?' But the vigilant pastors and faithful Methodists will keep their eye upon this humble yet essential means of grace. It were better that the Church should be smaller, if pure, than larger and worldly, as it undoubtedly would be, if class-meetings were dispensed with.<sup>80</sup>

Of course, not everyone perceived the problem in these terms. Bishop Matthew Simpson in particular defended the Methodist Episcopal Church from the attacks of the Holiness Movement while also coopting its views on other occasions for political purposes. Bishop Simpson did not see anything wrong with "respectability" as such; to erect majestic churches need not be in conflict with the "spirit" of the General Rules which counseled modesty in adornment and dress. To appeal to the General Rules in this way seemed "literalistic" to Simpson. Besides, the time was ripe for the Methodist Episcopal Church to change the way it presented itself to American culture. Responded Simpson:

Take architecture, for instance. The typical Methodist church was an unadorned meeting house, more like a warehouse than a temple or a cathedral. And yet might it not be said that a church was a "house of God's glory," that it was erected "for the honor of his great name," and was, therefore, "partly monumental"? On the frontier of civilization a log cabin might show forth the glory of God as fully as a large edifice in a great city; but when men build houses for themselves "lined with cedar," ought not the house of God to be equal to the "grandest edifices of men"? Such a house would be a "source of great social refinement," "the keystone of the arch of architecture, of science and art," an inspiration of noble undertakings— orphanages, homes for the aged and the infirm—the dwelling place of God, the ark of salvation.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>80</sup>From *Jobson's Portrait of His Mother* (n.d.; n.p.) as cited in *Heroines of Methodism* (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1857), 20-21.

<sup>81</sup>Clark, *The Life of Matthew Simpson*, 193.

From Simpson's perspective, the fact that many "respectable" people had joined the Methodist Episcopal Church presented the denomination with new opportunities to witness in the corridors of power. In fact, Simpson led the way in developing a high-profile ministry to senators, congressmen, and even the President of the United States before, during, and after the Civil War. The conflict between the progressive leaders like Simpson and the Holiness Movement over the application of the General Rules resulted in the exodus of many Holiness leaders to other denominations in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. But the most determinative result of this and similar disputes was to render the General Rules impotent as the *primary* ethical guide for American Methodists. Given the previous alterations in American Methodist practice with respect to preparatory membership, separation of the races, the emphasis on episcopal authority, and the demise of the class meeting, American Methodists discovered that they no longer had a *specific use* for the General Rules.

**The Social Creed and the Social Principles.** One hundred years after the General Conference of 1808 established the "General Rules" as an unalterable part of the Constitution of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America, the General Conference of the MEC (North) attempted to bolster its "social witness" by adopting a document known as "Our Social Creed." Initially appearing as part of the General Conference Reports and Resolutions, this document has gradually made its way toward the front of the *Book of Discipline*. Since 1972 it has been appended to the Social Principles statement of the United Methodist Church. In the process, the ethical significance ascribed to the "General Rules" by Bishops Asbury and Coke in the 1798 *Doctrines and Discipline* has been lost.

Subsequent Disciplines of the MEC (North) also contained a chapter of "Special Advices" on moral matters that immediately followed the chapter on membership where the class meetings were discussed. For example, Paragraph 65 of the MEC (North) *Discipline* of 1920 comprises an article on slavery which suggests the ongoing awareness of the split between MEC and the MEC, South, even while it attempts to trace the connection to Wesley via the "General Rules." In part, it reads:

We declare that we are as much as ever convinced of the great evil of Slavery. We believe that the buying, selling, or holding of human beings as chattels is contrary to the laws of God and nature, and inconsistent with the Golden Rule, and with the

Rule in our Discipline which requires all who desire to continue among us to “do no harm,” and to “avoid evil of every kind.” We therefore admonish all our ministers and people to keep themselves pure from this great evil, and to seek its extirpation by all lawful and Christian means.<sup>82</sup>

The very need to make this kind of statement suggests that the General Rules needed supplementation, or were no longer regarded as relevant to “social ethics.”

Later in the twentieth century, after the union of the Methodist Church with the Evangelical United Brethren tradition to form the United Methodist Church (1968), a new set of ethical statements, “The Social Principles,” were added to the *Book of Discipline* (immediately following the section on “Doctrinal Standards and Our Theological Task”). In preparation for the 1972 General Conference of the United Methodist Church, a working party responsible for the topic of “War and Peace” brought to the Commission as a whole two proposals.

- A. We reject all war.
- B. We believe that war is incompatible with the teachings and example of Christ. We therefore must reject war as an instrument of national policy, and insist that the first moral duty of all nations is to resolve by peaceful means all disputes that arise among or between them; that human values must outweigh military claims as governments determine their priorities; that the militarization of society must be challenged and stopped; and that the manufacture, sale and deployment of arms must be limited and controlled.<sup>83</sup>

As Paul Ramsey commented, the first of these proposals was brought “half in jest. But only half in jest.”<sup>84</sup> Ramsey, a well-known advocate of the just-war position, offered a series of objections followed by amendments that in his judgment would strengthen the ethical position of the church. All of them failed. Part of Ramsey’s summary is worth quoting:

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<sup>82</sup>*Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church 1920* (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1920), Para. 65, 60.

<sup>83</sup>Paul Ramsey, “Introduction” to *Speak Up for Just War or Pacifism: A Critique of the United Methodist Bishops’ Pastoral Letter “In Defense of Creation,”* with an epilogue by Stanley Hauerwas (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988), 8-9.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, 8.

I pointed out that if there is any war that is justified it is “an instrument of national policy” and that the war we should really worry about is a war that is not and cannot be an instrument of national policy (i.e., nuclear war)—which is only made more likely by sweeping pacifist statements such as both A. and B. I also pointed out that “military claims” should not be set over against “human values,” that if they are warranted military claims it is because weighty human values are at stake (just as property is not a right if it is not among the human rights). Then I proposed, in effect, three amendments. First, I proposed that the first line read: “We believe that war is *ultimately* incompatible with the teachings and example of Christ.” . . . Second, I proposed that the second sentence read: “We insist that the first moral duty of all nations is to resolve by peaceful means all disputes that arise among or between them”—striking out the words “therefore must reject war as an instrument of national policy.” . . . Third I proposed that the words “and stopped” be stricken out—because it could be understood to presume a question of fact that is arguably false, that is, that our nation was militarized. . . . The Final Report forwarded to the 1972 General Conference read:

*War and Peace.* We believe war is incompatible with the teachings and example of Christ. We therefore reject war as an instrument of national foreign policy and insist that the first moral duty of all nations is to resolve by peaceful means every dispute that arises between or among them; that human values must outweigh military claims as governments determine their priorities; that the militarization of society must be challenged and stopped; that the manufacture, sale, and deployment of armaments must be reduced and controlled.<sup>85</sup>

As Ramsey went on to point out, if United Methodists were going to take their own words about war and peace seriously, then they would have needed to present a different kind of statement concerning “Military Service” in the “Social Principles” than they did.

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<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*, 9-10. As of the General Conference of 1992, the statement remained the basic position of the United Methodist Church on war and peace.

For consistency the Commission should have gone back and revised the last line of its statement on Military Service to read: “We also support those persons who choose in *erring conscience* to serve in the armed forces, while urging them to go only so far as to accept alternate service.”<sup>86</sup>

But in the end neither the Social Principles Commission nor the General Conference were inclined to heed Ramsey’s warnings, apparently because General Conference (which alone can speak on behalf of the UMC) wanted to have it both ways: to be on record as opposing war as immoral while also being on record as respecting the prerogative of individuals to choose to fight or not as they should choose.

Ramsey’s criticisms of the “Social Principles” statements are telling, not simply because the United Methodist Church does not regard itself as a “Peace Church” (either in the sense of the historic Peace Churches or the United Church of Christ which recently declared itself a “Just Peace Church”), but more importantly because it indicates the degree to which United Methodists have not wanted their moral discourse to be disciplined. Apparently, United Methodists want to be able to equivocate—to “have it both ways”—about issues of moral consequence. Despite the best efforts of United Methodist theological ethicists like the late Paul Ramsey, Stanley Hauerwas, and more recently Stephen Long, the United Methodist Church has seemed to be content with ethical positions that are marked by equivocation and have little to do with church discipline.

With this shift, the separation between discipline and social ethics which has been implicit for much of the twentieth century, the lack of discipline was reinforced and codified. The same General Conference of the newly United Methodist Church which approved the “Social Principles” placed “The General Rules” in a new section entitled “Landmark Documents,”<sup>87</sup> indicating yet another rhetorical separation between Methodist witness and Methodist discipline under the guise of historical respect. The fact that this shift was codified in the *Discipline* of the United Methodist Church is an irony that no one appears to have noticed at the time.

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<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>87</sup>*The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 1972* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1972), Para. 69, 52-68.

## The Contemporary Situation of Church Discipline in United Methodism

From the time of the Uniting Conference in 1968 to the present, United Methodists have been aware of the tensions that exist between the various “legacies” that constitute the United Methodist tradition. For example:

Legacies affect their heirs in different ways. Some are content to ignore them and ever know their loss. Others cling too closely to their past and so forfeit its full value to themselves and to others. Still others are led to seek appropriate ways of receiving what has been bequeathed to them and of sharing it gladly with others. It is some such combination of loyalty and freedom that bespeaks true liberty of Christian men and women—our true confidence in Christ’s Lordship over our pasts and our futures. This was the way of Wesley and Albright and Otterbein—and still may be the way of their sons and daughters in the faith.<sup>88</sup>

Until recently, as this paragraph from the 1972 *Book of Discipline* suggests, United Methodists have been cautious about how to appropriate these “legacies” given their growing awareness of the diversity in the denomination. In some respects, this statement parallels the Episcopal Address of 1900 insofar as it reflects uncertainty about how to read the history of American Methodism with respect to doctrine and discipline. On the other hand, the statement also commends a set of norms for the appropriation of these legacies—loyalty and freedom—that appears to take into account American Methodist failures in the past with respect to church discipline.<sup>89</sup> As such it illustrates the unresolved status of church discipline in contemporary United Methodism.

For these reasons, any assessment of the status of church discipline in contemporary United Methodism must be provisional as well as con-

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<sup>88</sup>Para. 68 of the 1972 *Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, 52. This statement originally was included in the 1972 *Book of Discipline* and was reprinted in all *Disciplines* through 1984, before being deleted in the revisions for the 1988 *Discipline*.

<sup>89</sup>This view is confirmed by the paragraph (Paragraph 67, p. 53) that immediately preceded this conclusion in the 1984 *Discipline*, which discusses the history of church discipline in American Methodism and offers another pair of norms—accountability and support—to guide contemporary disciplinary actions in the United Methodist Church.

tested. Nevertheless, some comments can be made about recent developments and the current situation. I offer eight.

1. One is tempted to say that, if the process of church discipline outlined in Matthew 18:15-20—"the rule of Christ"—comes up in a United Methodist Church today, more likely than not it will be because someone happened to (re-)discover it while reading the Bible, not because they learned about "watching over one another in love" in their local United Methodist "class meeting." Whereas in eighteenth century England mutual admonition regularly took place within the set of practices related to the General Rules that constituted the Methodist societies, in contemporary United Methodism there are virtually no traditioned practices left in relation to which such admonition takes place. Therefore, whenever such admonition does occur, it takes shape informally, almost as if contemporary United Methodists did not know how to use the "General Rules of the United Societies."

2. In some measure, this conceptual dislocation of a practice closely linked to what Wesley called "scriptural holiness" correlates with what amounts to an inversion, rhetorically speaking, of the position of the *Book of Discipline* with respect to the Bible. As Richard B. Steele has noted: "An amusing, but also disturbing, ritual takes place each year during the plenary sessions of annual conference. Whenever anyone quotes *The Book of Discipline*, debate instantly stops. But whenever anyone quotes the Bible, debate instantly begins. Why is this?"<sup>90</sup> An answer to Steele's question would have to begin by offering an account of how little Methodists understand about the profound ways in which the practice of the General Rules enabled faithful performances of Scripture in the early Methodist class meetings, and conversely, the ways in which the meetings of the societies served as a context for what might be called reading Scripture "in communion"—to borrow a phrase from Stephen Fowl and L. Gregory Jones.<sup>91</sup>

3. In 1988 the General Conference of the United Methodist Church reinstated the office of "class leader" and restored the "class meeting" as

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<sup>90</sup>Richard B. Steele, *Circuit Rider* (a monthly magazine for United Methodist clergy), 11.6 (June 1987): 10.

<sup>91</sup>Stephen Fowl and L. Gregory Jones, *Reading in Communion: Scripture and Ethics in the Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991).

an option within the organizational structure of the local church.<sup>92</sup> This action of General Conference indicates support for the “covenant discipleship” model pioneered by David Lowes Watson and others. While this is one of the more promising programmatic emphases of contemporary United Methodism, ironically it underscores the separation that currently exists between church discipline and membership standards. While the office of class leader is linked to the Administrative Board or Administrative Council of the local church, there is virtually nothing that links the “accountable discipleship” practiced in these “class meetings” to the membership requirements of the UMC.

4. However, it would be an error to assume that because there is a separation of membership practice from church discipline, there is no remaining provision for dealing with unfaithful members in United Methodism. In fact, the *Discipline* of the United Methodist Church does provide for removal of a person after three years by action of the charge conference, albeit not for the reasons that early Methodists would have cited.<sup>93</sup> It is also significant to note that the task of restoring members also remains defined within the evangelistic task<sup>94</sup> of the congregation, although nothing about this task suggests that the restoration specifically requires admonition or reproof as described in Matthew 18:15-20 or the General Rules. Nevertheless, it would be an overstatement to say that reproof is *excluded* from the tasks listed under “Care of Members” in the 1988 Discipline: “The Church has a moral and spiritual obligation to nurture its nonparticipating and indifferent members and to lead them into a full and active church relationship.”<sup>95</sup>

5. In retrospect, the most significant change in the past ten years with respect to the question of church discipline may be the *deletion* of a

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<sup>92</sup>See paragraphs 229 and 268 of the *Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 1988*. The language of the disciplinary provision for “class meetings” is permissive, not mandatory. However, within this permission, the regulations for how the class leader will be accountable to the Council on Ministries or Administrative Council of the local church and under the supervision of the pastor are quite specific. “Class leaders shall be elected by the Charge Conference to lead and coordinate the classes under the direct supervision of the pastor” (Para. 268).

<sup>93</sup>The process for removal of a person from the roles of a local church are described in Paragraph 229 of the 1996 *Discipline*.

<sup>94</sup>See Paragraph 229.2b(5) of the 1996 *Discipline*.

<sup>95</sup>See Paragraph 229.1 in the *Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 1996*, page 130.

paragraph in which the history of church discipline is discussed. Significantly, it begins by recalling the “General Rules.”

The last paragraph of the General Rules—providing for the expulsion of delinquent members of the Methodist Societies—poses the agonizing problem of how discipline is to be administered in a communion of compassion in extreme cases. Originally, of course, there was no thought in Wesley’s mind of “excommunication” from the sacraments—he had no canonical warrant for *that*. And he always stressed the therapeutic task of the religious society, so that expulsion from the society was never for any single lapse in itself, but for persistent disloyalty after patient warnings and prolonged pastoral counsel. But the problem persists even now in the changed circumstances of The United Methodist Church, since our *Discipline* provides for both reprimands and expulsions, of both pastors and laity—always in cases of last resort. The history of church discipline cannot always provide valid answers for particular cases. It does, however, point to two interacting principles: *accountability* to the community of the church is an inherent obligation on those who claim that community’s *support*. Support without accountability promotes moral weakness; accountability without support is a form of cruelty. A church that rushes to punishment is deaf to God’s mercy; but a church lacking the conviction and courage to act decisively loses its claim to moral authority. On either side, the balance is struck only as the church understands itself primarily as a community of the reconciled and reconciling in Christ—in whom God continues to “reconcile the world to himself.”

All that remains of this paragraph in the 1996 *Discipline* are the two sentences at the end of the paragraph. It is not immediately clear what the significance of this deletion can be said to be, but it is interesting to notice that the change occurred in the same section in which the connection between doctrine and discipline is *reasserted*—again prefaced by a discussion of the General Rules. Only this time, the General Rules are specifically linked to the Social Principles as a way of stressing the *connection* between doctrine and ethics.<sup>96</sup> Given the fact that for much of the twentieth century the General Rules have been treated as something of

<sup>96</sup>See para. 60 in the 1996 *Discipline*, 47.

a dead letter, this latest “use” of the General Rules would appear to be more rhetorical and nostalgic.

6. Since 1988, the *Discipline* also has drawn a connection between the General Rules and the Social Principles as part of the revised section on “Doctrinal Standards and Our Theological Task” that replaced the “Foundational Documents” (formerly “Landmark Documents”) rubric of the 1984 *Discipline*. Like the General Rules, the Social Principles are supposed to embody the “connection between doctrine and ethics.”<sup>97</sup> Here again, the claim asserts continuity with the past, but it fails to do justice to the *separation* of doctrine and discipline in late nineteenth century American Methodism which actually prompted the development of “Our Social Creed” and other predecessor documents of “Our Social Principles” in twentieth century American Methodism. In light of these changes, the question can plausibly be asked: Is it significant that, in the process of this revision of the *Book of Discipline*, a commentary on the history of church discipline in the United Methodist tradition was *deleted*? Does this mean that United Methodists think they can reintegrate doctrine and discipline without dealing with the history of separations, many of which center on the use of the General Rules?

Interestingly enough, this latest example of a rhetorical shift in the conception of the relationship of doctrine and discipline came about as a result of trying to do justice to the historical experience of the former EUB tradition (particularly its Confession of Faith) as illustrated in the quotation that was placed at the beginning of this section. But, as Steve Long has recently argued, United Methodists may discover that taking seriously these doctrinal documents from the EUB tradition would require the UMC to make commitments that would place it closer to the historic Peace Churches than to the Church of England on matters of war and peace.<sup>98</sup> These recent changes suggest that much remains unresolved in the relationship of doctrine and discipline in the UMC.

7. In November, 1990, the Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church issued a pastoral letter in which they called on the church to re-envision what the United Methodist Church could be under God’s direction. In the course of their discussion, they made a claim that some readers have found incredible: “What unites the United Methodists is our common discipline of holiness and our shared movement for reforming

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<sup>97</sup>Ibid.

<sup>98</sup>Long, *Living the Discipline*, 1-16.

the church and the continents.”<sup>99</sup> As I have argued elsewhere, the United Methodist bishops appear to have confused their grammatical moods because there is little reason to believe that United Methodism has a “common discipline” at present unless all they mean to do is point to the *Book of Discipline* as such. Even worse, the bishops are not able to articulate the connection between “the disciplined quest” and the mission of United Methodism. In the end, they were not able to overcome the negative connotations of “discipline” in contemporary United Methodism.<sup>100</sup>

However, I would agree with the bishops that the UMC hope as a church depends on its recognition that the basis of its unity lies in a *common practice* of discipleship. It remains to be seen whether the bishops will be successful in prodding the Church to “know the hope to which [we] have been called” (Ephesians 1:18), but it is noteworthy that they have led the way in the recovery of the discipline of fasting within United Methodism, first as a corporate discipline within the Council of Bishops and more recently as a discipline to which the entire church is called. They have also called for the recovery of the other means of grace, including Wesley’s notion of “Christian conference” in the United Methodist connexion. It is too early to pronounce a verdict on this latest attempt to recover aspects of Wesleyan discipline in United Methodism, but nearly a century after the episcopal address of 1900, the superintendents of American Methodism are beginning to discover answers to the questions posed by their forebears.

8. However, the most recent events in United Methodism suggest that contemporary American Methodists *may not* want to come to grips with the multiple ways in which they are separated from one another and from their heritage. For example, the 1992 General Conference considered the results of two major study commissions. Neither of the study commissions on Baptism<sup>101</sup> and Ministry<sup>102</sup> that presented their reports to the 1992 General Conference of the United Methodist Church made refer-

<sup>99</sup>The Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church, *Vital Congregations-Faithful Disciples: Vision for the Church* (Nashville, TN: Graded Press, a division of the United Methodist Publishing House, 1990), 74.

<sup>100</sup>Michael G. Cartwright, “The Pathos and Promise of American Methodist Ecclesiology,” *The Asbury Theological Journal* 47.1 (Spring 1992): 9.

<sup>101</sup>“The United Methodist Understanding of Baptism” (September 20 revision), available from Chuck Kishpaugh, General Board of Discipleship, The United Methodist Church, P. O. Box 840, Nashville, TN 37202-0840.

<sup>102</sup>See “Report of the Commission for the Study of Ministry to the 1992 General Conference of the United Methodist Church.”

ence to church discipline despite the fact that both of these reports have a profound bearing on the relationship of doctrine to discipline. Oddly enough, in different respects, the Ministry report would amend the current discipline to *alter* the category “probationary membership” (in the case of clergy) and the Baptism report proposed to *eliminate* the category of “preparatory membership” (in the case of laity). The irony that apparently went unnoticed is that *neither* the proponents of these changes or those opposed to the proposed alterations of the *Discipline* were using the terms “probationary” or “preparatory” in the ways that the early Methodists used them in the eighteenth century. Yet, in the debates about these documents both prior to and at the General Conference of 1992, both proponents and opponents appealed to Wesley and early Methodism in constructing their arguments. The 1996 actions were ruled unconstitutional by the UM Judicial Council in 1998. This has resulted in a *de facto* return to the 1992 standard with the result that there is even more debate and confusion about the meaning and application of these membership categories. It is one thing to appeal to early Methodism knowing the distance that separates us; it is quite another to act as if the separation is not there.

### **The Case of Reverend Jimmy Creech**

Perhaps no event has called attention to the separations that exist between United Methodist disciplinary practice and the practices of the Wesleyan Revival than the case of Reverend Jimmy Creech, pastor of First UMC, Omaha, Nebraska. In July, 1997, Rev. Creech had notified Bishop Martinez by letter that he had been asked to perform a “covenanting ceremony” for two women who were members of his congregation. When he did not receive any response to his letter, Creech proceeded with plans to perform the ceremony at First UMC, Omaha. Several weeks before the ceremony, Bishop Martinez notified Creech that he should not proceed, but because plans had already been made for this event, Creech chose to proceed. On September 14, 1997, he celebrated the Covenant Ceremony for “Mary” and “Martha” in the sanctuary of First UMC in the presence of approximately thirty family members and friends as these two women “spoke vows of love and fidelity to each other.” As Creech subsequently stated, “the liturgy consisted of essentially the same rubrics as the “Service of Christian Marriage” found in *The United Methodist Book of Worship*.”<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>103</sup>“Response to the Judicial Charge” by Jimmy Creech, Senior Pastor, First United Methodist Church, Omaha, Nebraska (January 26, 1998), 1.

Subsequently, a judicial complaint was filed against Rev. Creech, alleging that he was “in disobedience to the Order and Discipline of the United Methodist Church” because he had “performed a covenanting ceremony that celebrated a homosexual union between two women. Those charging Creech appealed to Para. 65C of the “Social Principles” and Article IV, Para. 15.6 of the 1996 *Discipline*. At the 1996 General Conference, legislation had been passed that added “Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches.”<sup>104</sup> Those advocating this change had done so in an attempt to prevent the very action that Creech had taken.

In response to the charges, Creech appealed to the Preface to the “Social Principles” document, which—following two paragraphs of historical preamble—states:

The Social Principles are a prayerful and thoughtful effort on the part of General Conference to speak to the human issues in the contemporary world from a sound biblical and theological foundation as historically demonstrated in United Methodist traditions. They are intended to be instructive and persuasive in the best of the prophetic spirit. The Social Principles are a call to all members of The United Methodist Church to a prayerful, studied dialogue of faith and practice.<sup>105</sup>

Claiming that he arrived at his position only after “prayerful, studied dialogue of faith and practice” and had acted in a way that he believed was “consistent with my calling as a pastor in The United Methodist Church,” Creech avowed in response to the charges filed against him: “It is my hope that when the final verdict has been determined that the Social Principles will be affirmed as ‘advisory and persuasive’ and that there will be greater openness, acceptance, and justice for gay men and lesbians in the UMC.”<sup>106</sup> In the conclusion to his response to the Judicial Charge, Creech went on to charge that it was not him, but The United Methodist Church that is being placed on trial” for the sin of heterosexism.<sup>107</sup>

The church trial was held on March 11-13, 1998, before a jury of thirteen men and women selected from a pool of 35 clergy. In the end, the

<sup>104</sup>Para. 65C of the 1996 *Discipline*, 87.

<sup>105</sup>Preface to Part III, “Social Principles,” in the 1996 *Discipline*, 84

<sup>106</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup>*Ibid.*, 14.

jury addressed two issues. (1) “Did Creech perform a covenanting ceremony that celebrated a homosexual union between two women?” On that charge, the jury voted eleven yes, two no. (2) “If he did perform the ceremony as described, by so doing did he disobey the order and discipline of the UMC?” In response to this question, eight persons voted to convict him of violating the disciplinary standard, and five voted to acquit. Because church law specifies that it requires nine votes to convict, Creech was acquitted. Members of the jury, when queried by the press, acknowledged that the placement of the prohibition on homosexual unions in the Social Principles “gave it an ‘ambiguity’ that troubled several jurors.”<sup>108</sup>

Subsequently, Creech was granted a leave of absence from the Nebraska Annual Conference after Bishop Martinez notified him that he would not be re-appointed as Senior Pastor of First UMC, Omaha. Appeals on behalf of various church bodies were brought before the Judicial Council of the United Methodist Church amid calls for a special session of General Conference to decide the matter once and for all. In August, 1998, the Judicial Council ruled that statements such as Para. 65C in the “Social Principles” were indeed to be regarded as binding in the same sense as other sections of the *Discipline* and as such clergy *could* be tried for violating such standards as the prohibition against performing homosexual unions specified in Para. 65C of the 1996 *Discipline*.<sup>109</sup> Creech could not be re-tried, but it was clear that anyone doing what he had done would likely be charged with violating church law.

As a result of this recent controversy, United Methodists have begun to face the fact that their habits of equivocation in moral matters—which Paul Ramsey had tried to head off in 1972 in the context of the church’s stance on war—have led to a circumstance in which United Methodists appeal to the *Discipline* in a “pick and choose” fashion in the course of advocating divergent social ethics. It remains unclear how this case will shape the decisions of the General Conference in 2000, or for that matter the future shape of United Methodist disciplinary practice. What is not in doubt, however, is that American Methodists now find themselves in a situation in which they have had to start confronting their own bad habits of using moral discourse in the *Discipline*.

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<sup>108</sup>*Newscope: A Newsletter for United Methodist Leaders* 26:12 (March 20, 1998), 1-3.

<sup>109</sup>*Newscope: A Newsletter for United Methodist Leaders* 26:12 (August 11, 1998), 1-2.

### **Conclusion: The Pairs “So long Disjoined”**

One of the great hymns written by Charles Wesley is “Come, Father, Son and Holy Ghost.” The third stanza calls on God to “unite the pair so long disjoined, knowledge and vital piety.” In some respects, this hymn stands for the theological integration that Albert Outler contends took place in the context of the Wesleyan revival. In another sense, this poetic phrase suggests an image of what has been lost in contemporary American Methodism. Contemporary United Methodists face a situation of multiple pairs that are now “disjoined,” some of which have remained separated for most of the history of the denomination. Even now, the reassertion of a connection between doctrine and discipline is taking shape against the backdrop of these separations, and thereby United Methodists run the risk of denying their own history.

Coming to grips with the continuities and discontinuities of the history of church discipline in American Methodism is a task that lies before us just as much as it did the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the year 1900. The difference is that contemporary United Methodists are more ambivalent about acknowledging the history of separation, perhaps because they are less sure that they know what it is that connects them to their past. In this respect, the “pair, so long disjoined” has been multiplied because there has been a choice to reaffirm “vital piety” while hiding from ourselves the knowledge of what we have rejected over the course of the past two centuries. Coming to grips with the history of church discipline in American Methodism is one of the challenges we must face. Oddly enough, it may be that the way to face with candor all that now separates from Wesley and early Methodism is to recover the practice of mutual admonition as a means of grace.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>110</sup>I am grateful to Dr. Franklin H. Littell and Dr. Stephen Long for assistance with materials and to Dr. Ted Campbell for several conversations related to technical details in the interpretation of John Wesley’s ecclesiological sensibilities.

# PROVIDENCE, CHANCE, AND THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING

by

Philip R. Meadows

Classical theism has sought to define and defend the nature of God as both Creator and Governor of the world. As Creator, God is both transcendent over the world and immanent within it. The divine presence and power are constantly necessary for the world's continuing existence. As Governor, God providentially directs world events, as a whole and in every part, according to a benevolent divine purpose. Such is a traditional pattern of Christian belief.

The problem of suffering, however, presents two contrasting but inseparable modes of theological discourse that bring tension to this traditional pattern. First, the idea of providence seeks to affirm and explain the mode of God's *activity* in creation. As such, this idea is also inseparably connected to conceptions of divine power insofar as they account for the nature and extent of God's ability to govern the world. Second, the ever-present reality of suffering challenges us to explain the apparent *inactivity* of God or the scope and limit of God's action in our lives.

Theism typically has held that chance and providence are antithetical descriptions of the universe. The idea that God exercises a meaningful and purposive direction over the universe in general, and individual lives in particular, has simply ruled out the operation of chance. In normal conversation today, however, people commonly accept the vagaries of life, including a highly significant level of pain and suffering, as a consequence of human freedom, a product of natural causes or the unpredictability of the world in

general. Appealing to God's providence is not a normative part of the contemporary scientific worldview. Indeed, the discoveries of modern science have only served to strengthen the thesis that there is a chancefulness lying at the heart of all existence, a radical indeterminacy and randomness underlying any of the measurable regularities or laws of nature.

Christian faith today is mostly lived within this paradox of providence and chance. Living in a world of chance is belied only by the religious instinct we find encouraged throughout the Bible for turning to prayer in the anticipation that God acts and is working out the divine purpose.<sup>1</sup> It is within this paradox that I want to explore the resources in John Wesley's theology for constructing a contemporary theodicy. My method will be to enter first into dialogue with John Calvin's doctrine of providence as an expression of classical theism and then with the emphasis on chance we find in modern science.

### John Calvin: The God of Providence<sup>2</sup>

John Calvin claimed it to be the solace of believers to know that their "Heavenly Father so holds all things in his power, so rules by his authority and will, so governs by his wisdom, that nothing can befall except he determine it."<sup>3</sup> If we are to understand the nature of God's prov-

<sup>1</sup>Timothy Gorringer puts it well when he says that belief in providence which pits providence against chance is "both necessary and impossible, absurd, but deeply human." He continues: "It is not a belief required of us formally by the creeds but, much more profoundly, by our daily prayer. Belief in providence is the very structure of the religious life: belief that God acts, that he has a purpose not simply for the whole of creation but for me, that this purpose can be discerned and that, through prayer, I can put myself in the way of it. . . . Over against this all embracing trust in God, which is the fabric of Christian life, stands the tyranny of chance" (T. J. Gorringer, *God's Theatre: A Theology of Providence*, London: SCM Press, 1991, 1-2).

<sup>2</sup>See Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1956), 61f.; Francois Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of His Religious Thought* (London: Collins, 1980), 177f.; William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 162-176; Anna Case-Winters, *God's Power: Traditional Understandings and Contemporary Challenges* (Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990); David C. Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 40f.; T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin: An Introduction to His Thought* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1995), 53f.

<sup>3</sup>John T. McNeill, ed., and Ford Lewis Battles, trans., *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), hereafter, *Institutes*, I, XVII, 11.

idence, we must understand the nature of the God of providence: that God as Father is wise Governor and powerful Ruler of the world.<sup>4</sup>

**1. Wise Governor.** There have been those in every generation who, when confronted with the problem of evil, have sought to demonstrate that world events are either subject to pure chance with no higher purpose or driven by natural causes according to some necessary and inbuilt purpose.<sup>5</sup> First, Calvin minted his theology against the Epicureans, for whom the purpose of life was to seek the greatest level of happiness in a world of chance, and over which we have little control. Second, he also proceeded to refute the Stoics who thought of providence in terms of God governing the world through the inbuilt and irrepressible laws of nature which were set in motion at the time of creation. Calvin rejected both these schools of thought because the radical indeterminacy of the Epicureans and the determinism of the Stoics effectively compromised God's own personal government of the world in general, and the providential care of individual creatures in particular. Rather, Calvin says that "faith ought to penetrate more deeply, namely, having found him Creator of all, forthwith to conclude he is also everlasting Governor and Preserver—not only in that he drives the celestial frame as well as its several parts by a universal motion, but that he sustains, nourishes, and cares for everything he has made."<sup>6</sup>

Calvin wants us perceive, by faith, that it is God as Governor of creation who determines every particular event, however seemingly insignificant. So, "God by the bridle of his providence turns every event whatever way he wills."<sup>7</sup> This so called "panergism," or universal exercise of divine

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<sup>4</sup>The Bible presents us with many different images of God, but, for Calvin, none could be more all-embracing than that of God as our Heavenly Father. See Parker, *Calvin*, 43. William Bouwsma argues for the way that the feudal system of princely power shaped Calvin's understanding of the nature and rule of God's power over the world. Anna Case-Winters also demonstrates how Calvin, as a man of his time, formulated his theology against very strong patriarchal patterns of thought, shaped by his particular socio-political context. See Case-Winters, *God's Power*, 49f.

<sup>5</sup>See Charles Partree, *Calvin and Classical Philosophy* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977), 99f.; Case-Winters, *God's Power*, 57-58; Parker, *Calvin*, 45.

<sup>6</sup>Institutes I, XVI, 1. Bouwsma claims that "Calvin's emphasis was on God's governance; indeed, his creation of the world interested him chiefly because it pointed to his control over it" (*John Calvin*, 163).

<sup>7</sup>Institutes, I, XVI, 9. Concerning general providence, Calvin insists that "the universe is ruled by God, not only because he watches over the order of nature set by himself, but because he exercises especial care over each of his works" (Institutes I, XVI, 4).

power, means that it is misleading to speak of *general* and *particular* providence, as though God works in two different ways in creation. Rather, there is one providence, since all of God's activity is particular. Thus, on the one hand, we are to read the unpredictability and volatility of nature as instances of God's sovereign freedom to act in particular ways without any constraint whatsoever.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, the generalities of nature are merely God acting in a particular way with dependable and memorable regularity, such as the daily rising and setting of the sun, which cause us to "renew our remembrance of his fatherly favour towards us."<sup>9</sup> Such generalities, therefore, serve to remind us that God's particular government of the world is exercised with goodness and wisdom—faithfully directing all things for our ultimate well-being.<sup>10</sup>

The nature and extent of divine power is such that nothing happens at all except that God directly wills it and willfully directs it. Omnipotence is not just a measure of God's power to do *anything*, but having a power which actually does *everything*. In other words, Calvin also understood divine omnipotence in terms of "omnicausality." God is the cause of everything that happens, everywhere and at all times.<sup>11</sup> Divine power is "a watchful, effective, active sort, engaged in ceaseless activity. . . . For he is deemed omnipotent . . . because, governing heaven and earth by his providence, he so regulates all things that nothing takes place without his deliberation."<sup>12</sup> Thus, omnipotence denotes God's action in the world, ubiquitously directing and ceaselessly caring for creation.

**2. Powerful Ruler.** The logic of identifying God's power and will leads Calvin ultimately to reject the power of self-direction in any part of creation. Not only does God irresistibly direct inanimate objects,<sup>13</sup> but also human beings, such that "whether they are good or evil . . . their plans, wills, efforts, and abilities are under God's hand; that it is within his choice to bend them whither he pleases and to constrain them whenever he

<sup>8</sup>See Bouwsma, *John Calvin*, 163, 166.

<sup>9</sup>Institutes I, XVI, 2.

<sup>10</sup>Institutes I, XVII, 7. See also Institutes I, XVI, 1.

<sup>11</sup>Institutes, I, XVIII, 2.

<sup>12</sup>Institutes I, XVI, 3.

<sup>13</sup>Institutes, I, XVI, 2: "Concerning inanimate objects we ought to hold that, although each one has by nature been endowed with its own properties, yet it does not exercise its own power except in so far as it is directed by God's ever present hand."

pleases.”<sup>14</sup> In short, there is no other power but God’s power, no other will but God’s will. Any power displayed in the world, whether natural or personal, is but a realization and reflection of God’s own all-determining will. What is more, insofar as God’s will is always realized, so far does Calvin identify the power and sovereign freedom of God, albeit at the expense of what we would consider to be genuine creaturely freedom.<sup>15</sup>

Further, the divine will is singular: God does not have a plan for the world which can be frustrated or compromised by creaturely causes, as though the divine purpose was like a mere human desire that may or may not be realized. For nothing happens that is not directly willed by God. Calvin’s purpose is to refute any dichotomies or dualisms between God’s will and the unfolding history of the world. First, as we have seen, there is no difference between God’s general and particular providence. Second, he denied the then current medieval distinction between the absolute and ordained power of God, “between what God can do in view of his sheer and unlimited ability to act and what he has chosen to do in the light of his wise and sometimes inscrutable purposes.”<sup>16</sup> Third, Calvin rejects the idea that God has two wills: one perfect purpose revealed in scripture which excludes evil, and another mysterious purpose which is realized through the agency of evil.<sup>17</sup> Fourth, no part of creation is free to act contrary to the divine purpose, as though God must permit what God does not will.<sup>18</sup> Fifth, this divine determinism, which we find coursing through Calvin’s doctrine of providence, is also inseparably connected to his doctrine of predestination,<sup>19</sup> the logic of which means that the future is already fixed, leaving no room for chance or fate in the history of the world.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Institutes, I, XVII, 6. Note further: “It is an absurd folly that miserable men take it upon themselves to act without God, when they cannot even speak except as he wills!” (Institutes, I, XVI, 6). See also Institutes I, XVIII, 2.

<sup>15</sup>Calvin claims that his concept of providence does not interfere with the freedom or responsibility of human agency, but, in order to do so, he makes a careful distinction between human freedom and human will. Thus, freedom is the creaturely capacity to act this way or that as directed by the will. The human will, however, is itself governed (i.e., directed and controlled) by the divine will so as to realize God’s purposes. Calvin supposes, therefore, that God can determine the will without compromising the capacity of creaturely freedom.

<sup>16</sup>Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context*, 40.

<sup>17</sup>Institutes I, XVIII, 3. See Neisel, *The Theology of Calvin*, 76.

<sup>18</sup>See Institutes I, XVIII, 3; Parker, *Calvin*, 47f.

<sup>19</sup>See Institutes I, XVI, 7; Wendel, *Calvin*, 178.

<sup>20</sup>See Institutes I, XVI, 4.

**3. Religious Values and Problems.** Calvin's doctrine of providence allows for no easy theodicy, but he perceived it to be the plain teaching of scripture that all human experience, whether good or evil, is directly willed by God, and always serves God's justice and love. In this context, however, his primary concern is with the religious significance of God's providence for the life of faith.<sup>21</sup>

First, when we are in the midst of great suffering, our reason and experience suggest that we cannot possibly be in the providential keeping of a wise and good God. If this is the case, however, then we only fall out of God's hands and into the tyrannical grip of fate or chance, which robs our experience of purpose, and ultimately empties it of meaning.<sup>22</sup> For Calvin, having a view of life which is directed by chance events can only lead to anxiety, hopelessness, and despair. Rather, he wants us to develop a faith that can see things differently, such that even the apparently evil things which befall us actually come from the hand of God, that they are part of the divine plan for us, and serve our ultimate good. The limitations of our creaturely wisdom and understanding, however, mean that God's perfect purpose and plan remain "secret," "hidden," or "mysterious." From our finite creaturely perspective, "as all future events are uncertain to us, so we hold them in suspense, as if they might incline to one side or the other. Yet in our hearts it nonetheless remains fixed that nothing will take place that the Lord has not previously foreseen."<sup>23</sup>

Second, such a perspective of faith actually serves to set believers free *from* anxiety about their present circumstances and future uncertainties and free *for* a life of service and thanksgiving to God, whatever their circumstances may be. Freedom, for Calvin, is not about the capacity for choice or self-determination, but having the ability to fulfil one's nature, or to live authentically. So, human freedom is realized through submission to God's will, in true humility and service, experiencing the peace and hope that it brings.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup>It may be for this reason that Calvin removed his formal discussion of predestination from that of providence in the later editions of the Institutes, relocating it within his treatment of salvation. See Parker, *Calvin*, 48f.; Bouwsma, *John Calvin*, 173.

<sup>22</sup>See Institutes, I, XVII, 10.

<sup>23</sup>Institutes I, XVI, 9. See also Institutes, I, XVII, 8, 13.

<sup>24</sup>See Parker, *Calvin*, 47. This can be contrasted with divine freedom which means having a will that is necessarily realized according to God's personal attributes of wisdom and goodness.

Third, believers can be reassured that there are no meaningless experiences in life. Good comes by way of God's blessing or reward, and suffering is God's punitive or remedial action designed to promote introspection and the formation of a godly character. Justice is always done, even when the wicked seem to go unpunished, since they are experiencing God's forbearance, which will not last forever. In short, every event and experience of life represents God's way with us humans.

Anna Case-Winters severely criticizes Calvin's construal of divine power as operating in the mode of domination and control. This is a conception which, she argues effectively, disempowers, depersonalizes, and enslaves human beings.<sup>25</sup> For many of us, Calvin's worldview serves only to aggravate rather than alleviate the problem of evil, despite the many and worthwhile religious values it embodies. It seems to us that the determinism entailed in such "monological" concepts of divine providence and power leaves no other option but to make God *directly* responsible for human suffering, thereby seriously compromising God's wisdom, goodness and justice.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, monological conceptions of divine government finally undermine the biblical ideas of covenant and prayer as the ground of an interpersonal relationship, in which God and human beings are mutually responsible and responsive. It is hard to see how, for Calvin, prayer can be anything more than a means of simple submission to the dominating and controlling providence of God, including a passive acceptance of pain and suffering as a direct outworking of the divine will.

In the final analysis, there are very grave doubts whether the attempt to find meaning in suffering as divine punishment or as the necessary condition for human formation has any genuinely religious or lasting pastoral value. Experience has shown that the pain which it inflicts, the guilt which it encourages, the bitterness against God which it fosters, and the distortion of human personality which it effects, are all to be condemned and avoided rather than justified.

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<sup>25</sup>Winters, *God's Power*, 70f.

<sup>26</sup>With respect to moral evil, Calvin would agree that God is responsible, although not finally culpable, for the moral evil of human agents. This is because every action is realized through the simultaneous operation of both human will, whose intentions are evil, and the divine will, who intends and employs the action to bring about only good. So, Calvin argues that an action can be morally evil from the human perspective but morally good from the divine perspective at one and the same time. This argument cannot work, however, in accounting for the experience of natural evil, where God must be held both responsible and accountable for the suffering it causes.

**John Wesley: The God of Liberating Grace**<sup>27</sup>

In reading John Wesley's accounts of divine providence, we see how very near to the edge of Calvinism he actually comes. Like Calvin, however, Wesley also minted his views of divine power and providence against those of his time who would deny God's personal involvement in and particular care over creation.<sup>28</sup> The eighteenth century Deists, like the Stoics before them, affirmed God to be Creator of a world governed only by its own inbuilt natural laws; and like the Epicureans, they would set God apart in heaven with no real continuing interest in creation. Like Calvin, Wesley insisted that the eyes of faith would see God to be both Creator and Governor of the world—rejecting the idea of a remote and general providence in favor of a panergism which sustains and preserves the whole of creation, from moment to moment. Like Calvin, he believed that the idea of providence must necessarily rule out the operation of chance in the world: “Nothing comes by chance; that is a silly word; there is no such thing as chance,” says Wesley. “As God made the world, so he governs the world, and everything that is in it.”<sup>29</sup> Indeed, he argues that any view less than this amounts to atheism! “So far as fortune or chance govern the world, God has no place in it.”<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup>For a thorough treatment of Wesley's approach to the problem of suffering in the context of the experience of the early Methodists, see D. Dunn Wilson, *Many Waters Cannot Quench: A Study of the Sufferings of Eighteenth-century Methodism and their Significance for John Wesley and the First Methodists* (London: Epworth Press, 1969). Perhaps one of the more influential thinkers for Methodists in this century on the problem of pain and suffering is Leslie D. Weatherhead, whose works include *Pain and Providence* (London: Epworth Press, 1932), *Why Do Men Suffer* (London: SCM, 1935), and *Salute to a Sufferer* (London: Epworth Press, 1962). See also Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 58-62, and Thomas C. Oden, *John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 120-131.

<sup>28</sup>See Frank Baker, ed., *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press), vol. 3, Sermon 67, *On Divine Providence*; *Ibid.*, Sermon 77, *Spiritual Worship*; Oden, *Scriptural Christianity*, 112-120. For an account of Wesley's doctrine of providence and some of its contemporary implications, see my “Wesleyan Theology for a World Context,” in Philip Meadows, ed., *Windows on Wesley* (Oxford: Applied Theology Press, 1997), chapter 2.

<sup>29</sup>Baker, *The Bicentennial Edition*, vol. 3, Sermon 95, *On the Education of Children*, para. 14.

<sup>30</sup>Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Works of John Wesley* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958-59), 4: *Journal* (6 July 1781). See also WJW 2: *Journal* (12 March 1756); WJW 13: *Letter to Miss Hester Anne Roe* (11 Feb 1779): “Chance has no share in the government of the world”; WJW 12: *Letter to Miss Ball* (23 May 1773): “We know chance is an empty sound: the Lord sitteth on his throne and ruleth all things well. Love him; trust him; praise him.”

This pattern of thought means that we only endure the experience of suffering as it concurs with divine providence, but always in the context of God's benevolence and wisdom which, for Wesley, "are inseparably united, and continually act in concert with Almighty power, for the real good of all his creatures."<sup>31</sup> In his sermon *On the Imperfection of Human Knowledge*, Wesley insisted, like Calvin, that the appearance of chance must be put down to the limits of human understanding and ignorance.<sup>32</sup> Thus, he attributes all the inequalities of human experience, including the phenomenon of undeserved suffering, to God's inscrutable providence: "We cannot at all comprehend, why he raises some to wealth, honour, and power; and why, in the meantime, he depresses others with poverty and various afflictions."<sup>33</sup> Like Calvin, Wesley also saw this to be an issue of both divine sovereignty and human piety. On the one hand, it is only through the personal rule of God that the just receive God's approbation and reward, while the unjust are condemned and ultimately fail to flourish. On the other hand, it is God's primary purpose to transform human hearts and lives so that they might live in holiness and happiness.<sup>34</sup>

To the extent that Wesley shares Calvin's views on God's providence they also share similar religious values. With the eye of faith, one can penetrate the mystery of divine providence to see the wisdom and goodness of God at work, who directs every experience, including pain and suffering, to our ultimate good. The perception of a chanceful world is set in opposition to the government of God, such that the fear of chance leads to anxiety and despair, whereas the fear of God leads to peace and hope.<sup>35</sup> Insofar as Wesley can be aligned with Calvin, so far must their respective theodicies suffer the same criticisms.

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<sup>31</sup>Baker, *The Bicentennial Edition*, 2, Sermon 67, *On Divine Providence*, para. 14.

<sup>32</sup>Baker, *The Bicentennial Edition*, 2, Sermon 69, *On the Imperfection of Human Knowledge*, II.1. Wesley contends that "it is childish conceit, to suppose chance governs the world, or has any part in the government of it: No, not even in those things that, to a vulgar eye, appear to be perfectly casual."

<sup>33</sup>Baker, *The Bicentennial Edition*, II.9.

<sup>34</sup>For a detailed historical discussion of early Methodism on this point, see "Piety and Providence: Religious Experience and the Supernatural World," in Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 1992), 420-436.

<sup>35</sup>For a thorough examination of the religious values inherent in Wesley's understanding of suffering, and its Christological grounding, see Dunn Wilson, *Many Waters*, 137-151.

**1. *The Origin and Nature of Suffering.*** Wesley actually traces the origin of all evil and suffering back to the primordial sin of Adam, which resulted in the Fall of creation as a whole.<sup>36</sup> Insofar as all human beings share the problem of original sin and a fallen nature, suffering is an inescapable fact of experience: we suffer as a result of our own failings, through belonging to an imperfect human family, and from disaster and disease. Using a favorite therapeutic metaphor, Wesley says that “the world is, indeed, in its present state, only one great infirmary. All that are therein are sick of sin; and their one business is to be healed.”<sup>37</sup> So it is to this end that God puts the experience of pain and suffering—“he allots them just as much pain as is necessary to their health. . . . The pain of cure must, then, be endured by every man, as well as the pain of sickness.” Wesley does allow, however, that we can suffer as a result of ignorance and mistake, through weaknesses inherent in our creaturely finitude as well as the fallen condition. Whatever its cause, God uses suffering as a way of punishing sin, making the wicked good, and perfecting the good in holiness.

**2. *Sovereignty and Justice.*** We have seen how Calvin’s conceptualization of God’s power and sovereignty is remorselessly worked out in terms of the domination and control of the whole created order, logically entailing predestination and, from our perspective, the loss of true human freedom. With this comes the uncompromising view that God is directly responsible, if not culpable, for the world’s evil and suffering. In his *Thoughts Upon Divine Sovereignty*,<sup>38</sup> Wesley affirms that the idea of sovereignty denotes the irresistible and unconditional will of God, but reserves it for the divine activity of creation. So, he asserts that the creation and continuing existence of all creatures, with their various creaturely capacities and all their inequalities of being and birth, derive from God’s sovereign power and determination. On the one hand, it is by God’s sovereign will that the natural world is created inert, incapable of motion or self-direction. On the other hand, it is by God’s sovereign will that human beings are made in the divine image, with the God-like capacity of free agency, to exercise genuinely undetermined choice.

<sup>36</sup>For detailed treatments of Wesley’s thinking, see Barry Bryant, “John Wesley on the Origins of Evil,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 30:1 (Spring, 1995), 111-133; Dunn Wilson, *Many Waters*, 110f, 139f.

<sup>37</sup>Baker, *The Bicentennial Edition*, 3, Sermon 109, *The Trouble and Rest of Good Men*, intro.

<sup>38</sup>See Jackson, *The Works*, 10, *Thoughts Upon Divine Sovereignty*, 361f.

For Wesley, then, the difference between inanimate nature and human beings necessarily occasions a distinction between the way God governs each. The natural world, which is incapable of self-determination, is both created and governed by God's sovereign power, irresistibly and unconditionally moved and directed by the Spirit, who is the "Soul" of the world.<sup>39</sup> Here, Wesley still operates with a Calvin-like idea of God's sovereignty as over-ruling (or dominating and controlling) nature.<sup>40</sup> This principle also informs Wesley's anthropology insofar as the body derives its motion and agency from the controlling presence of the human "soul," which shares the divine spiritual nature. In creating human beings with the power of self-determination, however, Wesley departs from Calvin by reconceptualizing the mode of God's government in respect of human freedom as a matter of justice, mercy and grace, rather than sovereignty.<sup>41</sup> For Wesley, the Calvinistic notions of sovereignty and predestination actually compromise the justice of God who, according to Calvin's logic, punishes those not free to do right and rewards those not free to do wrong.<sup>42</sup> Rather, in his sermon *On Divine Providence*, Wesley says that "all the manifold wisdom of God (as well as all his power and goodness) is displayed in governing man as man; not as stock or stone, but as an intelligent and free spirit, capable of choosing either good or evil. Herein lies the depth of the wisdom of God, in his adorable providence; in governing men, so as not to destroy either their understanding, will, or liberty."<sup>43</sup> For Wesley, therefore, the idea of divine justice involves a limita-

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<sup>39</sup>See, for instance, Baker, *The Bicentennial Edition*, 4, Sermon 118, *On the Omnipresence of God*, II.8.

<sup>40</sup>Baker, *The Bicentennial Edition*, 2, Sermon 68, *The Wisdom of God's Counsels*, para. 4: "For the whole inanimate creation, being totally passive and inert, can make no opposition to his will."

<sup>41</sup>Baker, *The Bicentennial Edition*: "Whenever, therefore, God acts as a Governor, as a rewarder, or punisher, he no longer acts as a mere Sovereign, by his own sole will and pleasure; but as impartial Judge, guided in all things by his invariable justice."

<sup>42</sup>See Jackson, *The Works*, 10: *Predestination Calmly Considered*, 216, 223-4, 233-4.

<sup>43</sup>Baker, *The Bicentennial Edition*, 2, Sermon 67, *On Divine Providence*, para. 15.

tion of God's sovereignty in respect of, and response to, the genuine creaturely freedom of choice between good and evil.<sup>44</sup>

**3. Liberty and Grace.** Wesley typically describes human liberty as having three characteristics: a liberty of contradiction (the power to do or not to do), a liberty of contrariety (the power to act one way or the contrary), and the liberty of choice (the power to choose between good and evil, God and self).<sup>45</sup> While the liberty of contradiction and contrariety are properties 'natural' to the spirit of human beings created in the image of God, we do not have the liberty of choice by nature—the fallen condition means that we are unable to choose what is good or godly. Wesley tells us, however, that no human being is in a state of *mere* nature, since all have the prevenient grace of God, which is the Holy Spirit striving with the human heart to direct it into godly patterns of thinking and doing. In this sense, there is only true freedom insofar as God supernaturally imparts the liberty of choice through the gracious personal presence of the Spirit.<sup>46</sup> This liberty of choice is actually a function of conscience,

<sup>44</sup>See Baker, *The Bicentennial Edition*, 2, Sermon 68, *The Wisdom of God's Counsels*, para. 4: "Here evil men and evil spirits continually oppose the divine will, and create numberless irregularities." Despite this, Wesley continues, God continues by his wisdom "to carry on his own glorious design—the salvation of lost mankind. Indeed, were he to do this by an absolute decree, and by his own irresistible power, it would imply no wisdom at all. But his wisdom is shown by saving man in such a manner as not to destroy his nature, not to take away the liberty which he has given him." See also Baker, *The Bicentennial Edition*, 2, Sermon 63, *The General Spread of the Gospel*, para. 9: "Only suppose the Almighty to act irresistibly, and the thing is done; yea, with just the same ease as when "God said, Let there be light; and there was light." But then, man would be man no longer: His inmost nature would be changed. He would no longer be a moral agent, any more than the sun or the wind; as he would no longer be endued with liberty—a power of choosing, or self-determination: Consequently, he would no longer be capable of virtue or vice, of reward or punishment."

<sup>45</sup>Baker, *The Bicentennial Edition*, 4, Sermon 116, *What is Man?*, para. 11.

<sup>46</sup>See WJW 10: *Some Remarks on "A Defence of Aspasio Vindicated"*, para. 5, 356: "I believe that Adam, before his fall, had such freedom of will, that he might choose either good or evil; but that, since the fall, no child of man has a natural power to choose anything that is truly good"; Jackson, *The Works*, 10: *Some Remarks on Mr. Hill's Review*, 392: "We both steadily assert that the will of man is by nature free only to evil. Yet we both believe that every man has a measure of free-will restored to him by grace"; Jackson, *The Works*, 10: *Predestination Calmly Considered*, para. 45, 229: "I only assert, that there is a measure of free-will supernaturally restored to every man, together with that supernatural light which 'enlightens every man that cometh into the world.'"

which is not a property of human nature *per se*, but the mode of God's inward government, perpetually inviting and influencing human beings to live in holiness of heart and life.

Thus, for Wesley, God's power in human lives is not about domination and control, but actively guiding hearts set at liberty to choose what is good and godly. Since the goal of holiness is the condition for true creaturely happiness, God's power and providence act to open up the possibility for human flourishing. True freedom, therefore, is co-constituted by the undetermined freedom of the human spirit and the governing direction of the Holy Spirit, "strongly and sweetly influencing all, and yet without destroying the liberty of his rational creatures."<sup>47</sup> God rules without over-ruling—"without turning man into a machine."<sup>48</sup> In this way, Wesley attributes both the problem of evil and the possibility of virtue to genuine creaturely freedom.<sup>49</sup>

In contrast to Calvin, Wesley willingly asserts that the continuing existence of evil and suffering represents a limitation in the power, though not the sovereignty of God. It is actually God's own sovereign will that human beings should be free, therefore "He that can do all things else cannot deny himself. . . . Were it not for this, he would destroy all sin, with its attendant pain in a moment. . . . But in so doing he would counteract himself; he would altogether overturn his whole work, and undo all that he has been doing since he created man upon the earth."<sup>50</sup> In making room for creaturely freedom, therefore, Wesley carefully prizes apart the concepts of God's sovereign control and governing power, which Calvin had systematically conflated. Indeed, his strategy is similar to that of the Scholastic distinction between the absolute and the ordained power of God which Calvin vigorously denied. David C. Steinmetz claims that "Calvin's principal objection to the distinction is that, in his judgment, it

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<sup>47</sup>Baker, *The Bicentennial Edition*, 4, Sermon 118, *On the Omnipresence of God*, II.1.

<sup>48</sup>Baker, *The Bicentennial Edition*, 2, Sermon 67, *On Divine Providence*, para. 15.

<sup>49</sup>See Baker, *The Bicentennial Edition*, 25: *Letter to His Father* (15 Jan. 1731), 264-267. Here, Wesley is responding to Archbishop William King's *Origin of Evil*. Wesley also makes this point in an eschatological context in Baker, *The Bicentennial Edition*, 4, Sermon 140, *The Promise of Understanding*, and vol. 2, Sermon 60, *The General Deliverance*.

<sup>50</sup>Baker, *The Bicentennial Edition*, 2, Sermon 67, *On Divine Providence*, para. 15.

separates the power of God from his justice.”<sup>51</sup> Rather, for Wesley, it is in the very limitation of divine power that justice is done—genuine human freedom being an inviolable aspect of God’s sovereign will. The connection between creaturely freedom and the limitation of God’s power in Wesley’s understanding of suffering, however, means that the divine purpose can be either furthered or frustrated by the responsiveness or resistance of human beings to the influence of prevenient grace.

**4. Responsibility and Ambiguity.** Insofar as human beings are free to inflict pain and suffering on themselves and one another by inappropriate and ungodly activity, they must be held directly responsible for the consequences of their actions.<sup>52</sup> The same logic, however, cannot be applied to the vagaries of disaster and disease which we usually call “natural evil.” To account for this, Wesley uses two modes of theological discourse. On the one hand, he has a dynamic sense of life lived in a struggle with demonic powers which are held responsible for inflicting much human suffering.<sup>53</sup> This strategy has the virtue of making evil spirits, as free creaturely agents, directly responsible for natural evil. On the other hand, Wesley can also interpret natural disaster as the exercise of God’s sovereign control over nature. In his *Serious Thoughts Occasioned by the Great Earthquake at Lisbon*, he argues that God’s justice and “therapy” for sin, on both a personal and national scale, is exercised through the apparently unpredictable forces of nature, such as earthquakes. “Allowing there are natural causes of all these,” he says, “they are still under the direction of the Lord of nature: Nay, what is nature itself, but the art of God, or God’s method of acting in the material world?”<sup>54</sup> Despite some possible developments in Wesley’s thinking over time, this is a basic cosmological assumption which continues to condition his whole view of divine providence.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, God’s abil-

<sup>51</sup>Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context*, 49.

<sup>52</sup>This amounts to what has come to be known as the “free-will” defense. See Jerry L. Walls, “The Free Will Defense, Calvinism, Wesley, and the Goodness of God,” *Christian Scholar’s Review*, 13:1 (1984), 19-33.

<sup>53</sup>See Dunn Wilson, *Many Waters*, 113, 117ff, 155ff, 183f. Also, Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 432f.

<sup>54</sup>Jackson, *The Works*, 11: *Serious Thoughts Occasioned by the Late Earthquake at Lisbon* (1755), 1f. We see here many echoes of Charles Wesley’s earlier sermon, WJW 7: *The Cause and Cure of Earthquakes* (1750), 384f, in which he asserts that earthquakes are “God’s proper judicial act, or the punishment of sin: Sin is the [moral] cause, earthquakes the effect, of his anger.” The cure of earthquakes, then, comes down to fearing God, departing from evil, and repentance on a personal and national scale.

ity to subdue the natural world also grounded the early Methodists' belief in intercessory prayer: that God could respond to their supplications for meeting their spiritual and physical needs.<sup>56</sup>

For Wesley, the point is that suffering can never be assigned to the operation of chanceful or blind natural causes: divine providence is exercised in and through all the causes of our suffering, by way of *commanding* natural processes or *permitting* the agency of evil, to bring about God's good purpose. It is unfortunate, however, that the boundary between these two patterns of thought is unclear with respect to natural evil, making it difficult to distinguish between suffering directly commanded by God and that indirectly employed through divine permission. What is unambiguous, however, is Wesley's intention to affirm that our experience of evil and suffering should be read in terms of God's particular purpose for us.<sup>57</sup> The plain fact is that the Christian life means both *doing* and *suffering* the will of God.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>Dunn Wilson tends to see Wesley's view of God's direct responsibility for earthquakes, etc., as an aberration in his otherwise consistent thought that natural evil is caused by demonic powers (*Many Waters*, 131, 135, 137, 179). It may be unfortunate, but, as we have discussed, such divine activity is logically entailed by Wesley's idea of God's sovereign control over nature, and his attempt to harmonize what the scriptures teach about divine power and providence. Wesley's later writing allows for the possibility that even such things as earthquakes could be the result of demonic activity, and Dunn Wilson interprets this to be a shift in Wesley's thought to a more consistent position. We find, nevertheless, a constant connection God's sovereign control over nature and liberating-direction of human beings in Wesley's understanding of divine providence and his interpretation of human suffering.

<sup>56</sup>See Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 433; "Providentially Protected Person," in Richard P. Heitzenrater, *The Elusive Mr. Wesley*, Vol. II (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 125-130.

<sup>57</sup>In Wesley's letters to Miss Bolton, from 1771 through 1790, we find both of these modes of discourse employed to account for her lifelong illness, as she is exhorted to see the hand of God in all things. On the one hand, God is described as actively leading her into suffering and "inflicting" her with it. On the other hand, God is described as permitting Satan to attack her, or as deliberately employing Satan to chasten her. On this basis, it becomes difficult to defend Dunn Wilson's argument that the basic truth in Wesley's thought is that "it is evil which causes suffering and God who uses it" (137), as a strategy to absolve God of direct responsibility for human suffering. The plain fact is that, whether God commands or permits the experience of suffering, Wesley consistently and frequently ascribes it all to the providence, and the will, of God. See also Jackson, *The Works*, 13: *Letters to Mrs Loxdale* (15 August, 1781; 9 March 1782).

<sup>58</sup>This is an expression and pattern of thought found frequently throughout Wesley's works. See Jackson, *The Works*, 1: *Journal* (26 June 1736); WJW 4:

The distinction that Wesley makes between God's sovereign control over inanimate nature and liberating-direction of spiritual creatures lies at the root of this problem. In this, Wesley is clearly influenced by the science of his day, by allowing an indeterminism and unpredictability at the level of human freedom which is rejected at the level of nature as a whole. But what if science showed that there is an indeterminacy and unpredictability, not only in human agency, but at the heart of all nature—that there is a fundamental freedom in nature itself?

#### D. J. Bartholemew: The God of Chance

According to Calvin and Wesley, the perception that any of our life experiences result from the operation of pure chance, or that they are subject to merely natural causes, is demonstrative of human ignorance, and not the way the world actually is. Classical theism, in pitting chance against providence, randomness against meaning, and indeterminacy against purpose, has provided the context for some of modern science's most forceful attacks on the Christian faith. In his book *Chance and Necessity*, the French biologist Jacques Monod claims that, while there may (or may not) be a Creator of the world, evolutionary theory proves such a Creator could not be the God of providence affirmed by classical theism.<sup>59</sup> Evolutionary theory is grounded in the belief that natural selection is driven by random variations in the reproductive process, caused by mutations at the molecular level, which are the product of "pure chance, absolutely free but blind."<sup>60</sup> His argument is, therefore, the antithesis of classical theism: just as for Calvin and Wesley, providence ruled out chance, so now for Monod, chance rules out providence! Further, the introduction of ideas like Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, and quantum theory's image of the unpredictable atom, has demonstrated that there is a fundamental indeterminacy in nature at the sub-atomic level. So, the problem posed by modern science is how to reconcile the reality of a world full of chance with a God full of purpose.

*Journal* (26 November 1778); Baker, *The Bicentennial Edition*, 1, Sermon 12, *The Witness of Our Own Spirit*, para. 11, 2, Sermon 59, *God's Love to Fallen Man*, para. 7, 3, Sermon 84, *The Important Question*, III.6. That Christ is our example of this, see Baker, *The Bicentennial Edition*, 1, Sermon 20, *The Lord Our Righteousness*, I.4.

<sup>59</sup>Jacques Monod, *Chance and Necessity* (London: Collins, 1972).

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, 110.

**I. From Neo-Determinism to Neo-Deism.** Scientist-theologians have typically sought to demonstrate that the indeterminacy of the world is the very sphere within which God's providence is exercised. First, there is the option represented by thinkers such as William G. Pollard and Donald M. MacKay, who argue that God secretly but providentially determines things at the sub-atomic level.<sup>61</sup> This kind of approach can be described as "neo-determinism," for we are forced to conclude that what appears to be the unfolding of chance events at the lowest level is really a matter of human ignorance or illusion. Calvin would say "amen" to that!

A second approach, represented by people such as John Polkinghorne and D. J. Bartholemew, is that, although there may be a genuinely radical uncertainty at the sub-atomic level, the nature of the world as a whole cannot be reduced to nor be the product of pure chance.<sup>62</sup> The very regularities of nature which Calvin and Wesley appealed to in support of God's determining providence can be shown to grow from a bed of chance. Bartholemew observes that "random processes yield pattern and regularity when observed in the aggregate. So much so that it almost appears, over a wide range of experience, that randomness is a precondition of order."<sup>63</sup> Bartholemew's strategy, then, is to conceptualize God as the Creator of a world of chance who determines in the act of creation itself the nature of this chanceful process to be one in which the regularities of nature can arise.<sup>64</sup> Thus, God can be thought of as using chance to particular ends in the process as a whole.

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<sup>61</sup>See William G. Pollard, *Chance and Providence* (New York: Scribner, 1958); Donald M. MacKay, *The Clockwork Image* (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1974), and *Science, Chance and Providence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

<sup>62</sup>D. J. Bartholemew approaches this from the perspective of statistical mathematics. From the perspective of physics, see John Polkinghorne, *Science and Creation* (London: SPCK, 1988), and *Science and Providence: God's Interaction with the World* (London: SPCK, 1989).

<sup>63</sup>D. J. Bartholemew, *God of Chance* (London: SCM Press, 1984), 73. He describes the world as a giant "stochastic" process: that is, one which develops in time according to chance (or probabilities) rather than deterministic laws (75). Such a process, developing randomly in time, he says, "can exhibit regularities which are, in a sense, inherent in the laws of change themselves. In other words, order is a consequence of chaos" (78).

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, 102. Earlier, Bartholemew shows that deterministic systems (such as random-number generators) can be a source of unpredictability and chance. So, it is both true to say that chaos can arise out of order as well as order out of chaos.

We could clearly describe this pattern as a form of “neo-deism,” an argument for God’s general providence over creation, acting through the chancefulness of nature. What is more difficult, however, is to imagine how God might exercise any kind of particular or special providence, the kind which cares for the life experiences of individual creatures, and which Calvin and Wesley were at pains to defend.<sup>65</sup> In saying this, Bartholemew is clearly aware of the danger that his argument seems to press us into a rather deistic perspective, such that God creates the world and then leaves it to unfold according to its own chanceful process.<sup>66</sup> His strongest argument for particular providence consists in the opportunity God has to make a difference in the world through influencing the freely responsive activity of human beings.<sup>67</sup> This is what he describes as a “top-down” approach to providence, in which God is seen as exerting his direct influence at the highest level of creation rather than the “bottom-up” theology of the neo-determinists, where control is exercised from the lowest level.<sup>68</sup> This resonates with the way Wesley understands God’s gracious government of human beings. Wesley’s emphasis on particular providence, however, also requires a more “bottom-up” approach to the lower levels of creation.

**2. Religious Values and Problems.** Both Calvin and Wesley argued against employing the idea of chance to account for the problem of evil and suffering on the premise that it compromised the freedom and power of God, and was, therefore, the enemy of meaning and purpose. Bartholemew has sought to overcome this antithesis of chance and providence by arguing that indeterminacy itself is both the product and the means of God’s purposive action in the world. This approach, he claims, has a number of advantages.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 129, 140. Although he is reluctant to rule out the idea that God can act locally by determining particular events (in much the same way as human agents do), he does not find it very plausible.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 121. To avoid this conclusion, he identifies the “special” providence of God with the act of creation understood as both event and process: “Special providence is thus more accurately regarded as part of the continuing creative act rather than as a distinct and subsequent action of a different kind.” Gorringer has a helpful account of this idea which originates in Lutheran Orthodoxy (*God’s Theatre*, 15f).

<sup>67</sup>Bartholemew, *God of Chance*, 139.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 141.

First, a world of chance is the necessary formative environment for the emergence of intelligent and spiritual life, freely capable of loving God. This stands, therefore, as a powerful critique of Wesley's assumption that one can have genuine creaturely freedom in a natural world determined by the sovereignty of God. Second, in a world of chance the potential for genuine freedom and the problem of evil can be seen as opposite sides of the same providential coin. Thus, he goes some way to developing a theodicy in which the unequal distribution of human suffering is the inevitable consequence of a world process designed to bring about the greatest good.<sup>69</sup> Third, a world of chance provides the capacity for recovery and adaptability in the face of destructive forces. These would include the ecological harm done by human causes (e.g., pollution and consumption), and the human suffering that results from natural causes (e.g., disease and earthquakes). Fourth, he claims that a world of chance is also demonstrative of God's justice and impartiality, such that the rain falls on good and bad alike.<sup>70</sup>

Bartholemew argues that it seems reasonable "to suppose that a world with all the properties necessary for it to fulfil God's purposes could not avoid being one in which accidents happen. One of the purposes of the incarnation would then have been to demonstrate the difference between God's true nature and the accidental and harmful accompaniments of creation. This Jesus did in healing the sick, feeding the hungry and, supremely, by suffering crucifixion and rising again." There are, however, some important weaknesses in Bartholemew's position from the religious and pastoral perspectives. As the theological antithesis of Calvin's views on divine power and providence, Bartholemew's argument only succeeds in replacing the determinism of God with the tyranny of nature—the rule of God by the rule of chance. Either way, both Calvin and Bartholemew force a radical distinction between God and creation: Calvin by conceptualizing divine power and freedom in terms of domination and control, and Bartholemew by emphasizing the autonomy of the world as a chanceful process.

While we argue that Calvin's monological concept of divine power tends to depersonalize human beings, it could be argued that Bartholemew's process of chance tends to depersonalize God. On the one hand,

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 109. He continues this line of argument on pages 156-159.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 98-100.

Calvin's emphasis on divine power compromises the notion of human freedom as the capacity for undetermined choice. On the other hand, Bartholemew's emphasis on the autonomy of the chanceful world process compromises the power and freedom of God to act on behalf of individual creatures. Indeed, in his rejection of "neo-determinism," and despite his protestations to the contrary, Bartholemew's "neo-deism" means that the world stands separated from God, whose normal mode of activity lies only in externally "shaping" a chanceful "raw material" without collapsing its basic indeterminacy. The concept of God who works from the "top-down," but whose power to act is so radically compromised, however, means losing the central religious value of the *providential* care of a *personal* God over *particular* creatures. In doing so, the potentially valuable role of chance in providing a credible Christian theodicy is lost. So, we might want to ask whether the price paid throughout the history of personal human suffering could ever be justified by the potentialities of some generalized chanceful process.

From their different perspectives, Calvin, Wesley and Bartholemew use the argument that evil has a necessary function in the process of human formation, but if the goodness of classical theism's God is questionable on the grounds of willing human suffering, then the goodness of Bartholemew's God is equally questionable for permitting it on so grand a scale. The additional problem for Bartholemew, however, in appealing to the greater good of the *general* world process, is that suffering may or may not finally contribute to human flourishing at the *personal* level. He suggests that God must be "seen as *doing his best* to mitigate the unpleasant features of the world which are necessary for wider purposes."<sup>71</sup> God's best, however, may never be good enough. Given the fundamental chancefulness of nature and the powerlessness of God, it must remain uncertain as to whether or not the pain and suffering it entails, on a global as well as personal scale, will ever be finally redeemed.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 139. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>72</sup>Bartholemew is somewhat ambivalent on this point, and his rather agnostic conclusions are not particularly satisfying (Ibid., 100-102). Indeed, Bartholemew's appeal to the impartiality of events in a world of chance as being indicative of God's justice seems highly inadequate and lop-sided. The *impartial* operation of chance is really the *impersonal* action of God, who is unable to guarantee that the just will flourish in the end, and that injustice will be ultimately condemned.

It is ironic that neither Calvin nor Bartholemew do justice to the biblical view of prayer as the free petition of human beings to a gracious God for meeting the needs of life. Calvin's determinism compromises the freedom of human asking and Bartholemew's neo-deism compromises God's power to freely give. What they are both left with is a weakened version of intercessory prayer as a means of aligning the individual with God's will, whether it be in terms of submission or co-operation.<sup>73</sup> We might want to perceive Wesley, however, as struggling to find a more acceptable balance between the freedom of nature and the sovereignty of grace that can satisfy a truly biblical life of faith.

### **Toward a Contemporary Wesleyan Theodicy**

In conclusion, I want to identify some principles arising from this comparative study for the purpose of constructing a contemporary Wesleyan theodicy. In doing so, I seek a middle way "between blind chance and inexorable necessity," as Wesley put it, or between the somewhat "softer" options of neo-deism (as the tendency to abstract God from the world) and neo-determinism (as the tendency to understand God's power in terms of domination and control). I suggest that the strategy we see in Wesley's departure from Calvinism, in upholding genuine creaturely freedom, can be extended to nature as whole, without compromising God's personal and particular providence.<sup>74</sup> In doing so, I choose to accept and work with the current scientific view that chance or indeterminacy is a fundamental ingredient of the world in which we live, a world which God has made.

**1. Freedom as the Possibility for Flourishing.** We must take seriously the point that Bartholemew makes about the chancefulness of nature as a whole being the necessary condition for the nurture of genuinely free and spiritual life. While freedom is a spiritual value which Wesley would affirm, he would go further to define true freedom as the possibility for

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<sup>73</sup>Although Bartholemew does allow for the possibility of God's responsive action, it is within the severe limits already described for God's direct influence *on*, rather than *in*, the world.

<sup>74</sup>In doing so, I seek to recast God's relationship to nature as a whole in terms of liberating-direction. In this view, the divine-human relation and that obtaining between God and non-sentient creation are not the *same* (for this would be to make a category mistake) but *analogous*, i.e. following the same pattern but differently instantiated. Thus, God acts differently in human life and non-sentient creation, but by liberating and directing both.

holiness and happiness afforded by the prevenient presence of the Spirit, directing us through conscience. True freedom, therefore, is not the same as chancefulness: it is not being able to act in an *undetermined way*, but having the liberty to choose *God's way* for human flourishing.

Analogously, we could affirm that God's relation to nature as a whole is of the liberating-directing sort, though differing both in kind and degree from spiritual creatures. Instead of governing through sovereign control, the Spirit imparts and sustains a fundamental freedom in nature, and the possibility for flourishing, through the flexible regularity of moment to moment divine government, manifest in what we normally refer to as "natural laws." The liberating-directing presence of the Spirit, then, sets the *possibilities* and the *limits* within which nature as a whole can freely develop.<sup>75</sup>

Leslie Weatherhead puts it this way: "I am quite sure of the most important fact that God has guarded this universe. . . . Some terrible things can happen, but it is not true to say that *anything* can happen."<sup>76</sup> God does not govern by dominating and controlling any part of creation, but by liberating and directing the whole of it. An unpredictable world "guarded" or directed by grace may not yet be the best of all possible worlds, "but, *it is the world of best possibilities.*"<sup>77</sup>

**2. Freedom as the Gift of God.** There is a tendency among scientist-theologians to view both indeterminacy and the possibility for flourishing as an inherent characteristic of nature itself. So, in a rather Platonic way, Bartholemew prefers to think of the chancefulness of nature as the "raw material" on which God works from the outside.<sup>78</sup> John Polkinghorne

<sup>75</sup>Working with this tension, Polkinghorne describes nature as having a "freedom within regularity which is our basic human experience" (*Science and Providence*, 29). Necessity, he claims, is the ground of possibility. So, "chance in this context is the means for the exploration and realisation of inherent possibility, through continually changing . . . individual circumstances" (38-39).

<sup>76</sup>Weatherhead, *Salute*, 41-42.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>78</sup>See Bartholemew, 142, 138. "Once more we see how useful it is to think of randomness as a kind of 'raw material' which can be moulded into shape by external forces" (161). He claims that this mode of activity does not entail a collapsing of the basic indeterminacy of nature, but rather changes the constraints within which it is free to operate. It remains unclear, however, exactly how God could possibly exercise this level of "influence" or how effective it might be in achieving determinate ends. He does, however, posit the idea of psychokinesis as an analogy.

also prefers to speak of the laws of nature as being “the way matter actually *is*,” and that “this is the area in which Christian theism is ‘necessarily tinged with deism.’”<sup>79</sup> “That the universe is capable of such fruitfulness,” he continues, “speaks to me of a divine purpose expressed in the *given structure* of the world.”<sup>80</sup>

In refuting the deists, Wesley asserted that there was no such thing as *mere* nature, for all things are sustained only through the perpetual influx of God’s personal presence and power. True creaturely freedom, therefore, does not denote some inherent characteristic of nature, which sets it apart from God, but the possibility for flourishing relationally imparted by the Spirit’s own liberating-directing presence and power. The gift of true freedom is the gift of God’s very self to the world.

It is because Wesleyan theologians have understood the so-called “laws of nature” to be God’s moment to moment preservation and government of creation that they have always affirmed the possibility of divine action in the material world. From the analogy of human agency alone, God can at least be thought of as one agent among many, although universally present and infinitely more powerful. It is also for this reason that Wesleyan theologians have refused to rule out miracle—which is not so much God’s intervention in a natural process from the outside, but God’s choosing to do things differently for a moment on the inside.

**3. Freedom as the Possibility for Failure.** A world which is given the freedom to flourish must also have the freedom to fail, both personally and naturally speaking. So, we can reinterpret Bartholemew’s theodicy by redefining evil and suffering as the failure to flourish. This can occur as a result of sin, ignorance, or mistake at the personal or social level; or it may occur as a consequence of lawful but unhappy accident at the level of nature. It is in this vein that Polkinghorne helpfully extends the free-will defence of moral evil to the whole of creation, in terms of what he would call a “free-process defence.”<sup>81</sup> Just as we can say that failure to flourish personally and socially is the result of sin, so we can claim that disaster and disease result neither from sin, nor necessarily from demonic powers, but from the freedom of nature itself to fail us.

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<sup>79</sup>Polkinghorne, *Science and Providence*, 38.

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*, 66.

Insofar as creation as a whole has been set free to flourish and fail, we cannot avoid the conclusion that God is indirectly responsible for the possibility and even the probability of evil and suffering. But this is the necessary condition for the nurture of genuinely free spiritual beings capable of loving and serving God.

**4. *Freedom to Flourish through Failure.*** Dunn Wilson suggests that “Wesley bases his teaching upon three practical foundations; the Christian must expect to suffer, but he must not seek suffering, neither must he avoid it if it comes to him.”<sup>82</sup> We can affirm this approach on the basis that both flourishing and failure are inescapably connected in the Christian life. On the one hand, growth in holiness comes by way of a lifelong struggle against sin and the suffering that it entails, both personally and socially. On the other hand, suffering from natural causes belongs to our creaturely condition, living within the contingencies and vagaries of a world set free by God to become the best that it can be.

The general chancefulness and unpredictability of nature helps us to affirm with Wesley that failure and suffering have no intrinsic value, and are not to be sought out as such, but that they can be used by God to flourish human beings in co-operation with the providential and redeeming activity of the Spirit. We should also recognize, however, that the Spirit may actively lead us into the place of suffering, confident in the fact that God’s ultimate purpose is that we might flourish, personally and socially. Not all suffering is to be avoided, although it is always to be ameliorated.

**5. *Freedom to Fight against Failure.*** Dunn Wilson also suggests that the early Methodists’ view of the Christian life as a cosmic struggle between good and evil helped shape their attitude towards the sufferings of others: “firstly, that Christians must not cause suffering to others, and, secondly, that Christians must alleviate the sufferings of others.”<sup>83</sup> It is within this context, he argues, that much of the stimulus for Methodist philanthropy and social action, in the fight against poverty, sickness, vice (e.g., drinking and gambling), and oppression (e.g., the slave trade) is to be found.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>Dunn Wilson, *Many Waters*, 128.

<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, 121f.

Appealing to the agency of evil powers in nature may help to absolve God of direct responsibility for human suffering, but it also carries the danger of absolving human responsibility for the suffering caused by misguided and sinful self-interest (personally, socially, and ecologically). Reinterpreting the problem of evil as the freedom of creation to fail, however, means that the responsibility for suffering is placed where it belongs, in the ungodliness of human choosing and the unpredictability of nature in general. God's responsibility lies in the directing of nature by grace—providentially fighting against failure, through guiding and governing the human heart, challenging social institutions, and overcoming the harmful vicissitudes of nature itself. It is the responsibility of Christians to become partners in God's providence, co-operating with the Spirit in the divine project of personal, social, and global flourishing.

It is also in this context that we might think of suffering as being part of God's will for the Christian life, as the Spirit leads us alongside others in need to share in, transform, and redeem their pain and suffering. This pattern of evil and suffering, actively embraced and finally redeemed, is the pattern we see in Christ's own life, death, and resurrection.<sup>85</sup>

**6. Freedom as Vulnerable Love.** In upholding the freedom of God to providentially care for creation, the problem for theodicy lies in explaining the apparent inactivity of God to alleviate so much evil and suffering in the world. Wesley began to answer this question by appealing to a self-limitation of God's power which respects the freedom of human beings to both flourish or fail. In extending this to the natural world, we could also say that this self-limitation of divine power respects the freedom of creation as a whole, to flourish or fail. Weatherhead's definition, "power is the ability to achieve purpose,"<sup>86</sup> helps us rethink divine omnipotence as the sufficiency of God's power to fulfil the divine plan of ultimately flourishing creation as a whole and in every part. That purpose is to open up the possibility for creation to become the best that it can be through God's liberating-directing grace. God's powerful presence and providence, therefore, acts within creation to the furthest extent without compromising the gift of freedom itself.

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<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 144f. It is for this reason that we must depart from Leslie Weatherhead who consistently argues that it was not within God's plan and will that Christ should suffer and die, except insofar as developing circumstances within his life made it necessary.

<sup>86</sup>Weatherhead, *Salute*, 49.

Necessarily remaining hidden to us, however, are the boundaries within which God can act in nature while upholding a world process capable of nurturing genuine human freedom. We at least can be sure that the presence and power of God is able to redeem even the worst of human suffering, in one way or another, although God may have to continually readjust the work of providence to meet the moment to moment needs of a life which is free to fail. God's purpose for human flourishing may be frustrated, but it is never finally defeated. Our prayers are always helpful for discerning God's presence and becoming a partner in providence to ameliorate our own suffering and the condition of others through the exercise of godly vulnerable love.

The truth of this approach is that there are things God simply cannot do, and there is much that does not go God's way (except that the freedom to fail is actually a part of God's way). What we have, however, is a liberating power that makes itself vulnerable in its own self-limitation. In other words, God loves the world by setting it free. It is in this context that we can recover those other important biblical images of divine weakness and powerlessness which many contemporary theologies have brought to our attention (such as liberation, feminist, and process thought) as a means of helping us rethink rather than reject the valuable instincts of classical theism.<sup>87</sup> Perhaps most significantly, we see the deeply personal and relational nature of God's vulnerable love through the cross and resurrection. There God is revealed both as a fellow Sufferer and the One whose providence and power can ultimately redeem our suffering.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>For an account of the way that these approaches relate to Wesleyan theology, particularly in North America, see Theodore Runyon, ed., *Wesleyan Theology Today: A Bicentennial Theological Consultation* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, Abingdon Press, 1985). In part, the purpose of my argumentation here is to demonstrate that we can incorporate the insights of process theology from a theistic perspective, without having to subscribe to process metaphysics.

<sup>88</sup>For a classic modern exposition of this theological perspective, see Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (London: SCM Press, 1974); Paul S. Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

# WESLEY'S UNDERSTANDING OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION: IN WHAT SENSE PENTECOSTAL?

by

Randy L. Maddox

Laurence Wood recently graced this audience with an extensive essay on “Pentecostal Sanctification in Wesley and Early Methodism.”<sup>1</sup> Given the significance of this issue and the amount of material covered in Wood’s essay, I would like to pay it the honor of an equally extensive reply. Let me begin by commending Wood for the seriousness of research reflected in his essay and the passion he reveals for helping the Holiness Movement to recover a more vital model of Christian Perfection than that inherited from late nineteenth-century debates. I am also sympathetic to his emphasis on the importance of reading the “late Wesley,” though I find more scholars already doing this than he suggests. Finally, I affirm his background thesis, that following the publication of John Fletcher’s *Checks*, Methodists increasingly granted these a prominence alongside Wesley’s writings, leading many to read Wesley through Fletcher’s eyes on certain issues.

The question that this thesis makes central, of course, is whether such a reading was faithful to Wesley’s own concerns. The burden of Wood’s essay is to argue that a reading of Fletcher’s specific emphasis on “pentecostal sanctification” into Wesley’s later works (i.e., those follow-

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<sup>1</sup>Wood’s essay appeared in the *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 34:1 (Spring 1999): 24-63. I want to offer my sincere thanks to Larry for his help when I was preparing this response. He not only answered several questions, but also provided portions of his larger manuscript so that I could get a broader sense of his argument.

ing publication of Fletcher's *Checks*) is entirely appropriate. Indeed, he claims that, while Wesley had some initial questions about this emphasis, he was persuaded by Fletcher to "adjust slightly" his understanding of the relation of Pentecost to Christian Perfection and bring it into full agreement with Fletcher's dispensational model (p. 43). The focus of my response will be to explain why I believe that this claim overreads the evidence that is available, and to sketch an alternative analysis of Wesley's perspective on Fletcher's model of Christian Perfection.

### Three Models Connecting Pentecost to Christian Perfection

An assessment of Wood's argument is complicated by an ambiguity running through the various articulations of his central thesis. The way he puts the thesis in his conclusion is representative—namely, that "Wesley affirmed the connection between Pentecost and full sanctification after 1771" (p. 62). The issue left ambiguous in this claim is the type of connection being proposed. I will argue that Wesley had always affirmed a central connection of Pentecost to full sanctification, but that the later Wesley did not affirm the specific type of connection that Wood intends (namely, that championed by Fletcher).<sup>2</sup>

There are at least three models—with differing emphases—of the connection between Pentecost and Christian Perfection in the writings of Wesley and Fletcher. The first of these might be called the *Dispensations of Grace* model. The central claim of this model is that God chose to make available to humanity progressively more effective resources of grace, in parallel with the progressively more complete revelation offered (1) in nature, (2) to the Jews, and (3) in Christ. One major concern of this model was to affirm that God indeed offers true grace in a nascent form (i.e., prevenient grace) to all persons, even those who have no contact with special revelation. Another concern was to insist that the New Covenant went beyond God's gracious benefits to Israel, not only in offering justification by faith in Christ, but particularly in offering through the gift of the Holy Spirit more effective gracious empowerment to live holy lives. The first Christian Pentecost was the decisive moment in salvation history when this greater gracious gift was poured out on the church, becoming

<sup>2</sup>One of the best early examples is the 1741 Sermon 40, "Christian Perfection," §§II.11-13, *Works* 2:110-11. Note the defense of the expectation of holiness, but no call (anywhere in this sermon) for experiencing a personal and distinctly post-justification "Pentecost."

available to all thereafter. In this sense all Christians owe whatever degree of sanctification they attain in their lives to the “pentecostal” Spirit. But this does not mean that they had to be present at the original Pentecost, or that they must necessarily experience an *event* just like Pentecost in their lives. What they do have to experience is the regenerating *work* of the “Spirit of Pentecost,” by whatever means one assumes this work is initiated and nourished. While the term “dispensation” is rare, the central claims of this first model are standard through Christian history. Thus it can be found in Wesley long before he had contact with Fletcher.

The second model of the connection between Pentecost and Christian Perfection is less common in the history of the church, but not unexpected from an Anglican. Ironically, Wesley first invoked it to indict his Anglican colleagues at Oxford in his pointed 1744 sermon “Scriptural Christianity.” It might be called the *Pristine Church* model. This model goes beyond affirming that the historical Pentecost introduced the gift of the Spirit, which makes the goal of true holiness a possibility for Christians in this life. It advances the further claim that the community of disciples present at the first Christian Pentecost were so open and responsive to the Spirit that they *unanimously* and *immediately* were transformed into *full* holiness of heart and life. However, the rhetorical point of this claim was not so much to praise the earliest church as it was to emphasize how quickly and how far the subsequent church has fallen, such that *few* attain full holiness now and *rarely* is it attained at the initiation of one’s Christian walk, even though the same gracious resources are *still fully available!* Again, whatever one makes of the claims in this model, Wesley would have owed nothing in it to Fletcher.

Perhaps the most appropriate title for the third model of the relation of Pentecost to Christian Perfection is the *Personal Recapitulation* model. This model will be illustrated by Fletcher because it increasingly defined his understanding of the Christian life. The initial hint of its central claim can be discerned by comparing two early texts. In his 1758 treatise on *The New Birth* Fletcher contrasted the blessings of Christian regeneration to Jewish reformation in classic “dispensations of grace” terms, specifically emphasizing that the regenerating empowerment of the Spirit’s baptism begins at the same moment as justification.<sup>3</sup> In a slightly later (though

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<sup>3</sup>See *The New Birth*, Part IV, Sec. II, in *The Works of the Reverend John Fletcher, Late Vicar of Madeley*, 4 vols. (New York: Waugh & Mason, 1835; reprint, Salem, OH: Schmul, 1974), 4:111-4.

posthumously-published) essay on "The Test of a New Creature," Fletcher again affirmed that regeneration begins with justification, but this time he stressed that this provides only a small degree of divine life and should be followed by "a day of pentecost for believers; a time when the Holy Ghost descends abundantly." The potential implication here (which Fletcher later develops explicitly) is that Christians should expect to experience the pouring of divine grace into their lives today in progressive stages that recapitulate the sequential dispensations of outpouring of grace in salvation history.<sup>4</sup> This goes beyond the claim of the "dispensations of grace" model that full sanctification was only available after Pentecost, proposing rather that the typical pattern for the Christian journey for all subsequent Christians will include a personal post-justification experience of the "baptism of the Spirit," parallel to what those who were already disciples of Jesus experienced at Pentecost. In other words, while the first model can allow that individual Christians may appropriate in progressive degrees the full sanctifying grace that is *continually available* to them, the third model maintains that God actually makes this grace available to believers in a standard pattern of *progressive stages*, just as God did in history.

With the distinction between these models in mind, I believe it is fair to say that Wood's thesis is that Fletcher's articulation of the third model served to lead Wesley beyond the limited claims of the first model to embracing in his later writings (1) the importance of a personal post-justification baptism of the Spirit and (2) the equation of this baptism with the attainment of Christian Perfection (see pp. 31, 53). By contrast, I am convinced that the later Wesley remained uncomfortable with what he saw as implications of the third model, and that the pentecostal references and imagery in his later writings can be fully accounted for within the first two models. In particular, the later Wesley resisted any equation of the baptism of the Spirit with entrance into Christian Perfection.

### **Wesley's Earlier Engagement with the Notion of a Post-Justification Baptism of the Spirit**

To understand Wesley's concerns about emphasizing a post-justification baptism of the Spirit, it is helpful to note that the 1771 controversy

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<sup>4</sup>See Fletcher, "The Test of a New Creature," *Works* 4:267-70 (quote on 270). The potential implication is more explicit in letters that Fletcher sent to Miss Hatton in 1762 and 1765 (cited by Wood, p. 27).

around Fletcher's "late discovery" was not the first time Wesley engaged this notion. It played a role as well in his struggle shortly after Aldersgate to rethink the "great expectations" instilled by Peter Böhler that had led up to that experience.<sup>5</sup> Specifically, Wesley began to question the suggestion that conversion immediately provides (and thus one's justification is tested by) unfaltering assurance and entire holiness of heart and life. Wesley visited the Moravians in Germany in late 1738 to find some perspective on Böhler's views and was drawn to Christian David's defense of God's gracious acceptance of those whose faith and holiness were not yet fully alive, on the basis of an analogy with Jesus' disciples who were accepted before they were baptized with the Spirit. Wesley reprinted in a 1740 installment of his *Journal* an appreciative summary of Christian David's claim that Christians can be in justified relationship with God while lacking the "gift" or "indwelling" of the Holy Spirit.<sup>6</sup> Josiah Tucker, an early critic, immediately incorporated this claim into his derogatory account of the "principles" of Methodism. Perhaps to Tucker's amazement, in the 1742 *Principles of a Methodist* Wesley readily endorsed (at this point!) Tucker's suggestion that Methodists teach that justification does not include the indwelling of the Spirit, understanding this indwelling to come subsequently with sanctification or Christian Perfection.<sup>7</sup>

This might suggest that Wesley had fully embraced a "personal recapitulation" model nearly thirty years before encountering it in Fletcher, but such a conclusion is premature. Wesley actually began to reject distinctive aspects of this model in his writings shortly after 1742, because he increasingly recognized how implications of this model related to other aspects of Moravian theology (i.e., aspects beyond Böhler's distinctive emphases) about which he was already uncomfortable. This discomfort first surfaced in late 1739. It focused on the "quietist" suggestion of the Moravians that any attempts at holy living or disciplined use of the means of grace prior to receiving God's gracious gifts of faith and holiness were not only fruitless but actually prevent its reception, which comes by faith *alone*. Wesley's enduring concern about "responsible grace" led him to reject this suggestion, arguing for a vital interaction between God's gracious empowerment and our responsible appropriation.<sup>8</sup> This debate was

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<sup>5</sup>For more on this see Richard Heitzenrater's fine article "Great Expectations" in *Mirror and Memory* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1989), 106-49.

<sup>6</sup>See *Journal* (8 August 1738), *Works* 18:270-1.

<sup>7</sup>See the original text of *The Principles of a Methodist*, §29, *Works* 9:64-5.

originally framed in terms of the model of a single transition from being dead in sin to being fully alive in grace, but its implications would carry over to Christian David's model. If the newly justified do not yet have the empowering gift of the Spirit, and one assumes that this gift comes by faith *alone*, there would be no place for graciously-empowered responsible growth in the move from being newly justified to enjoying Christian Perfection—one should only wait and pray.

This point was driven home to Wesley in 1741 when Zinzendorf accused him of “changing his religion.” Zinzendorf specifically questioned Wesley's insistence on responsible growth in personal holiness within the Christian life, equating this with returning to a reliance on inherent merit (i.e., work's righteousness). Wesley's defense pivoted around an insistence that Christ's holiness is not just imputed to true Christians. Christ's Spirit is also present in them—graciously enabling them to achieve perfection.<sup>9</sup> But then how could he accept Christian David's model which specifically treated the merely justified as only having imputed holiness, not the empowering indwelling of the Holy Spirit? At this point Wesley may have been allowing that they were not “true” Christians in the full sense of the word. What he did not do is assume that this left the newly justified—or any Christian—free from the expectation to grow in holiness.

As Wesley pressed this expectation of growth, he was increasingly accused of moralism by critics beyond the Moravians. His consistent response from at least 1745 on was to insist that *all* Christians have “received” the Holy Spirit or have been “baptized” with the Spirit; therefore it is not by their inherent “works” but by “putting to work the grace of God” that they are able to grow in holiness. Importantly, he specifically leaned on Anglican authorities for this claim, including quoting the liturgies of the church to show that “receiving the Holy Ghost” is an ordinary operation coming through baptism (i.e., at the initiation of Christian life).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup>See *Journal* (1-7 November 1739), *Works* 19:119-21; *Journal* (31 December 1739), *Works* 19:132-3; and the discussions of co-operant salvation and the means of grace in Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 147-51, 192-201.

<sup>9</sup>See *Journal* (3 September 1741), *Works* 19:211-12.

<sup>10</sup>See esp. his 1745 *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, Part I, §I.6, *Works* 11:108; Part I, §V.23-4, *Works* 11:163-7; & Part II, §III.4, *Works* 11:253; and the 1746 Sermon 5, “Justification by Faith,” §III.6, *Works* 1:193. Note how he reprints the references to Anglican standards in his 1762 *Letter to the . . . Bishop of Gloucester*, §II.21-2, *Works* 11:519-22.

This move correlated with his progressive clarification of the distinction between initial and entire sanctification, and his emphasis on the difference between babes in Christ (the new birth), Christian adolescence (growth in grace), and adult Christian faith and holiness (Christian Perfection). He now insisted that even new believers have truly been born of the Spirit or have the Spirit indwelling them, even though they surely need to seek *more* power over sin and *more* peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.<sup>11</sup>

### Wesley's Concerns About Fletcher's "Late Discovery"

It was in this context that Wesley encountered Fletcher's "late discovery," probably first through reading Joseph Benson's now-lost treatise incorporating it, and jotted on a sheet of paper some notes expressing concerns about it. Wood contends that the only real concern expressed in these notes and related correspondence was that Benson and Fletcher were verging on Zinzendorf's mistake of failing to distinguish between a justified believer and a sanctified believer (pp. 40-41). I see more present in these materials. To help readers judge for themselves, I am appending a transcription of the manuscript of Wesley's notes, since it is presently available only in the Duke University archives and one unpublished dissertation.<sup>12</sup>

It is clear from the manuscript that the treatise Wesley was critiquing was arguing that persons can be justified (have God's favor) but not yet have "received" the Spirit or experienced "new birth" by the Spirit (cf. Wesley's notes on pp. 15, 19, 24). Moreover, the text apparently used a distinction between water baptism (conveying justification) and a subsequent Spirit baptism (conveying true spiritual "birth") to articulate a *personal recapitulation* model of Christian life (cf. notes on pp. 16, 24, 33, 38). Wesley rejected this correlation. He insisted that the "baptism" or ini-

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<sup>11</sup>Cf. Sermon 8 (1746), "The First-Fruits of the Spirit," §I.6 & §II.5, *Works* 1:237, 239; Letter to "John Smith" (25 March 1747), §4, *Works* 26:230; Sermon 36 (1750), "The Law Established By Faith, II," §III.6, *Works* 2:43; Sermon 38 (1750), "A Caution Against Bigotry," §I.13, *Works* 2:68; *NT Notes* (1755), Acts 1:5; Sermon 45 (1760), "The New Birth," §IV.3, *Works* 2:198; *Some Remarks on "A Defense of the Preface to the Edinburgh Edition of Aspasio Vindicated"* (1766), §4, *Works* (Jackson), 10:350; and Sermon 14 (1767), "The Repentance of Believers," §II.5, *Works* 1:349.

<sup>12</sup>The manuscript was first brought to scholarly attention by M. Robert Fraser, who appended a transcript in "Strains in the Understandings of Christian Perfection in Early British Methodism" (1988 Vanderbilt University Ph.D. thesis), 491-92.

tial “receiving” of the Holy Spirit comes at justification as the initiation of Christian life. Turning the point around, he claimed that the baptism of the Spirit does not bestow Christian Perfection (i.e., adult Christian holiness) but only the Christian faith of a “babe” (cf. note on p. 9). He willingly allowed that individuals may subsequently experience deeper immersions in the Spirit who indwells them at justification, but Wesley argued that these deeper immersions should not be confused with the “new birth” (cf. notes on pp. 21, 23, 24). In particular, he rejected the “metaphorical” use of “baptism” to refer not to initiatory Christian baptism but to some subsequent immersion in the Spirit (cf. notes on pp. 33, 38).<sup>13</sup>

I believe that Wesley’s critical responses to this treatise reflect pastoral concerns drawn from his earlier engagement with the personal recapitulation model, and that these concerns (or the basis for them) are evident in private correspondence among principal players at the time. One of Wesley’s concerns about the treatise is indeed that which Wood highlights. Wesley would have heard overtones of Böhler’s suggestion that one is not truly a Christian at all until one is a perfect Christian. In the terms used in the treatise, if one is not “born again” until that one experiences Christian Perfection, and one must be born again to enter God’s kingdom (John 3:5), then most newly-justified persons are still outside salvation. It is clear in Wesley’s letter to Benson on 28 December 1770

<sup>13</sup>Wood (p. 40) appears to derive from Wesley’s notes concerning pp. 33 & 38 of the treatise that Wesley viewed “baptism with the Spirit” simply as a metaphor for water baptism. Wesley is describing here the *treatise’s* “metaphorical” use of the phrase, not his own. Wesley never uses such phrasing in his own works and would be uncomfortable with it. He consistently sought to keep “baptism with the Spirit” and water baptism distinct, while maintaining their interconnection—criticizing both those like the Quakers (cf. his comment concerning p. 16 of the treatise) who reduced baptism to a merely spiritual (or metaphorical?) sense and those who presumed upon their water baptism when it was clear that they had long since shut out the spiritual life that it bestowed (if they were infants; if they were adults, whether the baptism of the Spirit accompanied water baptism depended upon their responsiveness). For representative treatments of this relationship in Wesley, see A Letter to a Person Lately Joined with the People Called Quakers (10 February 1748), *Letters* (Telford) 2:124; Sermon 18 (1748), “The Marks of the New Birth,” §1, *Works* 1:417 & §IV.2-5, *Works* 1:428-30; *Serious Thoughts Upon the Perseverance of the Saints* (1751), §23, *Works* (Jackson) 10:294; Letter to Rev. Mr. Potter (4 November 1758), *Letters* (Telford) 4:38; and Sermon 45 (1760), “The New Birth,” §IV, *Works* 2:196-200.

that Benson was drawing this conclusion about himself.<sup>14</sup> And Wesley would have feared that folk might draw the same implication from the suggestion that Fletcher made in a letter to Miss Hatton that believers are only fully assured of justification when they are subsequently “sealed by the Spirit,” or his insistence (specifically against Wesley) in a letter to Benson that none can have a constant witness of their adoption by God but the “baptiz’d.”<sup>15</sup>

A second pastoral concern drawn from the earlier debates is reflected in Wesley’s repeated insistence against the treatise that the term “new birth” be confined to our initial conversion. To understand this insistence it is crucial to see that for Wesley “receiving the Spirit” meant more than just receiving a *witness* of the Spirit to one’s justification (as per Wood, pp. 34, 40), it meant receiving the *empowering presence* of the Spirit into one’s life.<sup>16</sup> Since Wesley equated this empowering presence of the Spirit with grace,<sup>17</sup> he had come to recognize that any intimation that the newly justified still awaited the “birth” or “indwelling” of the Spirit would logically either degenerate into moralism (our efforts *apart from grace*) or leave these new Christians with little expectation of growing *in grace* until they were “born” in some subsequent event. The best evidence

<sup>14</sup>Note how Benson’s temptation to “cast away his confidence” in his justification is that he still senses the “inbred enemy,” in Letter to Joseph Benson (28 December 1770), *Letters* (Telford) 5:214. Note also Wesley’s comment about Benson’s faulty judgment “that he is not a believer who has any sin remaining in him,” in the letter to Mary Bishop (27 May 1771), quoted at length by Wood (p. 35).

<sup>15</sup>The letter to Miss Hatton (1 November 1762) is cited by Wood (p. 27). Fletcher’s letter to Joseph Benson (22 March 1771) in reprint in Fraser, “Strains,” 486-9 (see p. 488). When Wood says that at this time “both Benson and Fletcher believed every child of God may have the witness of the Spirit” (p. 39), he must mean that they believed that those not yet “baptized” may have this witness intermittently.

<sup>16</sup>This is clear throughout Wesley’s works. To cite just two early examples, note how he stresses that the power to believe and the power to love come from “receiving” the Spirit, in *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, Part I, §I.6, *Works* 11:108; and Sermon 5, “Justification by Faith,” §III.6, *Works* 1:193. Cf. the discussion of the character of grace in Wesley as “uncreated” in Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 86. Wood (p. 40) cites “Farther Thoughts on Christian Perfection,” Q. 19 (in *Works* [Jackson] 11:421) as evidence that Wesley equated “receive the Spirit” with the witness of the Spirit. Wesley here discusses receiving the Spirit (which he says gives sanctification as *one* of the things we freely receive) and then discusses the witness of the Spirit, but is not equating the two.

<sup>17</sup>See Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 119-20.

that Fletcher's "late discovery" reminded Wesley of the need to protect against any such intimation is that he went to great pains a year later (late 1772) when preparing the first collection of his *Works* to edit out of *The Principles of a Methodist* (without publicly admitting it!) all of the suggestions that Methodists teach that the "indwelling" of the Spirit comes not at justification but at a subsequent event of Christian perfection, suggestions that he had willingly affirmed in 1742.<sup>18</sup>

A third concern intimated in Wesley's response to the treatise was that in equating the "baptism of the Spirit" with Christian Perfection the author collapses the distinction between a newborn Christian and a mature Christian. Wesley reiterated this distinction in a letter to Benson shortly after reading the treatise.<sup>19</sup> This concern would again reflect the debates with the Moravians and Wesley's conviction that one can be truly born of God prior to reaching Christian Perfection. But it also reflects Wesley's caution growing out of the perfectionist debates that the Methodists weathered in the early 1760s. The focus of these debates had been the extreme claim of a few that a distinct state of Christian Perfection could be obtained immediately by even the most recently justified Christian through the simple affirmation "I believe," apart from any role for cooperant growth in grace between these events. Wesley's pastoral response to this debate had been to reiterate the importance of gradual growth *before* as well as after entire sanctification, and to suggest that, while we *can* experience Christian Perfection at any time, most believers actually *do* attain this level of maturity (if they ever do) only late in life.<sup>20</sup> Against this background Wesley's contesting of the equation of the baptism of the Spirit with Christian Perfection in the treatise was not just aimed at defending the presence of real spiritual life in those who are not yet perfect; it also was emphasizing that Christian Perfection should not

<sup>18</sup>See the alterations made in *The Principles of a Methodist* in the 1772 edition noted in *Works* 9:59 (note 88), 61 (note 94), 63 (note 4), 64 (notes 13, 14), and 65 (note 15). The changes are also schematized on pp. 546-7 (I comment on the 1777 edition below in note 72).

<sup>19</sup>See the Letter to Joseph Benson (16 March 1771), *Letters* (Telford) 5:229 (quoted by Wood, p. 39).

<sup>20</sup>For a discussion of this debate within the chronological developments in Wesley's conception of Christian Perfection see Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 180-7. His cautious position coming out of the debates can be sampled in Letter to Charles Wesley (27 January 1767), *Letters* (Telford) 5:39.

be confused with the *beginning* of one's growth in grace. Instead, it is a transition to a level of *adulthood* within ongoing growth.<sup>21</sup>

In other words, Wesley worried that Fletcher's "late discovery" could imply that the baptism of the Spirit instantaneously induced perfect Christian living in all recipients. That his worry was not totally off target is evident in Fletcher's own reflections on where the difference lay between him and the Methodist leader. In a 1774 letter to Charles Wesley, Fletcher ventured that the difference between himself and John Wesley was that Fletcher believed that the original disciples at Pentecost were introduced by that event itself into "at least the infancy" of the state of Christian Perfection.<sup>22</sup> This might sound like the same claim made in Wesley's "pristine church" model. But Wesley explicitly limited such uniform immediate perfection to the earliest church, while Fletcher was assuming that it continues to happen to all believers just as it had to the original disciples (i.e., personal recapitulation). Their difference on this point is subtly revealed in a slightly later unpublished essay where Fletcher quotes Wesley's comment in the *NT Notes* on Acts 8:15 that the believers at Samaria had not yet received the Holy Ghost in his "sanctifying graces" (a very typical "dispensations of grace" comment) and then glosses this to suggest that Wesley was intimating that all believers who are baptized with the Holy Ghost receive therein "those full and ripe ~~perfect~~ graces" [the strikeout is by Fletcher].<sup>23</sup> In reality, Wesley typically claimed that the new birth awakens in believers only the "seed" of every virtue, these seeds attaining mature (or ripe) strength and shape as we responsively "grow in grace." No wonder he wrote to Fletcher in 1775 suggesting that where their views on Christian Perfection differ is that Fletcher did not pay enough attention to the distinction between those

<sup>21</sup>This is why Wesley would never equate Aldersgate with his entrance into Christian Perfection, an equation that logically follows from the type of connection between the baptism of the Spirit and Christian Perfection that Wood is defending. Cf. Wood's embrace of this equation in "The Rediscovery of Pentecost in Methodism," *Asbury Theological Journal* 53.1 (1998), 7-43 (here, 26).

<sup>22</sup>See Fletcher's Letter to Charles Wesley (14 August 1774), in *Asbury Theological Journal* 53.1 (1998):92-3 (here, 93). Fletcher is clearly sensing here that he meant more by the "infancy" of Christian Perfection than John Wesley intended by the "infant" degree of Christian life.

<sup>23</sup>See Fletcher, "An Essay on the Doctrine of the New Birth," §IV, in *Asbury Theological Journal* 53.1 (1998), 45. This essay is likely from late 1775 or early 1776.

who are infants in Christian life, those who are adolescents, and those who are adults.<sup>24</sup>

Wesley's earlier engagement with the Moravians had alerted him to several pastoral dangers of even hinting that "full" holiness was typically attained in a single decisive event. One danger was that it would encourage folk to assume that God's work in the soul always takes dramatic—i.e., instantaneous and very perceptible—form, rendering them unappreciative of or insensitive to more gradual and subtle works of grace. It is revealing in this regard that Fletcher's initial evaluation of the debate at Trevecca over his "late discovery" was that he was battling the false notion "that believers are to grow in grace by *imperceptible dews*, and that we can do very well without a remarkable shower of grace and Divine effusion of power, opening in us a well of living water that is to flow to everlasting life."<sup>25</sup> This sounds a lot like Wesley immediately after Aldersgate, but stands in some contrast to the pastoral advice found in the letters of the late Wesley. While he never ceased valuing and defending the possibility of God's dramatic work in the soul, Wesley had come over time to appreciate the more gradual and subtle forms of God's work as well. Thus, within a year of Fletcher's resignation, Wesley can be found encouraging a correspondent that:

At many times our advances in the race that is set before us are clear and perceptible; at other times they are no more perceptible (at least to our selves) than the growth of a tree. At any time you may pray: "Strength and comfort from Thy word imperceptibly supply." And when you perceive nothing, it does not follow that the work of God stands still in your soul; especially while your desire is unto him and while you choose him for your portion. He does not leave you to yourself.<sup>26</sup>

And in a later letter Wesley could affirm the image of silent (i.e., imperceptible) dews:

You have faith, but it is only as a grain of mustard-seed. Hold fast what you have, and ask for what you want. There is an

<sup>24</sup>Letter to John Fletcher (22 March 1775), *Letters* (Telford) 6:144-5.

<sup>25</sup>From a manuscript likely written in March 1771 that is quoted in Luke Tyerman, *Wesley's Designated Successor* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1888), 183-4.

<sup>26</sup>Letter to Philothea Briggs (23 July 1772), *Letters* (Telford) 5:331.

irreconcilable variability in the operations of the Holy Spirit on [human] souls, more especially as to the manner of justification. Many find him rushing in upon them like a torrent, while they experience “The o’erwhelming power of saving grace.” . . . But in others he works in a very different way: “He deigns his influence to infuse; Sweet, refreshing, as the silent dews.” It has pleased him to work the latter way in you from the beginning; and it is not improbable he will continue (as he has begun) to work in a gentle and almost insensible manner. Let him take his own way: He is wiser than you; he will do all things well.<sup>27</sup>

Behind both of these letters we see the danger that persons who assume that God’s work will *always* take dramatic form can easily come to despair as to whether God is doing any work in their lives. The pastoral advice that Wesley gives them he would likely also have given to Fletcher if Fletcher had voiced to John the mournful evaluation he gave in 1774 in a private letter to Charles: “I am not in the Christian dispensation of the Holy Ghost and of power. I wait for it, but not earnestly enough: I am not sufficiently straitened till my fiery baptism is accomplished.”<sup>28</sup>

Fletcher’s comments to Charles could awaken fears of one other pastoral danger of identifying the move into “full” Christian holiness with a single event, a danger to which the Moravian controversy had made John Wesley very sensitive. The language of “waiting” until deliverance is decisively “accomplished” hints at a slightly quietist model of attaining Christian perfection, where cooperant growth within the means of grace is downplayed. At this point, even when Fletcher affirmed the contribution of the means of grace to the initial attainment of Christian Perfection, he typically highlights only the *passive* means of prayer and faith in the truth—reflecting his assumption that Christians cannot even earnestly desire to change their lives prior to the empowering baptism of God.<sup>29</sup> Wesley’s confidence in the gracious empowering work already begun in

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<sup>27</sup>Letter to Mary Cooke (30 October 1785), *Letters* (Telford) 7:298.

<sup>28</sup>Letter to Charles Wesley (4 July 1774), in *Asbury Theological Journal* 53.1 (1998), 91-2.

<sup>29</sup>For example, the only means of grace that he recommends to those seeking the sanctifying Spirit in the *Last Check on Antinomianism* is communal prayer (§XIX, *Works* 2:648). See also his claim in *Essay on Truth* (§V, *Works* 1:538) that it is “truth cordially embraced by faith [that] saves under every dispensation of divine grace, though in different degrees.”

the New Birth allowed him to value as well a *responsive* role for the means of grace as formative disciplines, and to make ongoing faithful participation in the full range of the means of grace central to the attainment of Christian Perfection.

Having sketched the range of concerns that I see in Wesley's immediate response to Fletcher's proposed equation of entire sanctification with a post-justification baptism of the Spirit, I need to comment on the relative *degree* of his concern. Wood portrays Wesley's initial response to Fletcher's proposal by judging it a "dangerous error" that threatened the Methodist movement, and then argues for a reversal of this evaluation a couple of months later (p. 46). I believe that this portrayal lacks sufficient nuance. Wood is assuming that Wesley's only concern was that Fletcher's proposal entailed that persons are not Christians until they are delivered from all sin. Wesley did indeed consider this specific possible implication a dangerous error, leading him to doubt Benson's appropriateness to serve as a Methodist preacher until he was assured that Benson (and Fletcher) allowed that penitent believers who have not yet attained Christian perfection are accepted by God.<sup>30</sup> But Wesley clearly distinguished between this specific implication and Fletcher's proposal *per se*, with its other possible implications. This is evident in his earlier concession to Benson that, while it is neither scriptural nor theologically quite correct, Methodist folk could call the "second change" of entire sanctification "receiving the Holy Ghost" if they liked.<sup>31</sup>

Those familiar with Wesley's "catholic spirit" will sense in this concession his characteristic willingness to "think and let think" within the Methodist fold concerning theological "opinions." These are matters about which there is legitimate room for debate because they are not decisively settled in Scripture or the creeds. The question of whether believers are accepted by God prior to their full deliverance from sin was not open for debate for Wesley because it is decisively settled in Scripture. The question of how entire sanctification relates to the baptism of the Holy Spirit is more ambiguous, hence open to competing opinions. But this does not mean that Wesley considered the latter item a matter of theological indifference! The language of "thinking" about theological opinions

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<sup>30</sup>Cf. Letter to Joseph Benson (9 March 1771), *Letters* (Telford) 5:228; and Letter to Mary Bishop (27 May 1771), *Letters* (Telford) 5:252.

<sup>31</sup>Letter to Joseph Benson (28 December 1770), *Letters* (Telford) 5:214-5.

hints at the seriousness with which he could debate alternatives. However, the point of such debate was not to excommunicate, it was to seek greater insight into and consensus about the desirability of one option over another. One of the major criteria in this discernment was the *practical* impact of each alternative—i.e., its likelihood of fostering or deforming authentic Christian character among the Methodist people.<sup>32</sup> It is precisely worries about this impact that filter through in Wesley's questioning of the broader range of possible implications of Fletcher's "opinion."

### **Evidences of Wesley Later Endorsing Fletcher's Discovery?**

However one assesses the degree of Wesley's initial negative reaction to Fletcher's proposal, is there convincing evidence that he later changed this evaluation? Wood provides a handy eight-point summary of the evidence that he believes "irrefutably" demonstrates that Wesley soon came to endorse Fletcher's proposed equation of the baptism of the Spirit with Christian Perfection (p. 63). My remaining task is to explain why I find this evidence much less convincing, and to propose a more modest outcome to their dialogue. I will touch on each of Wood's points, though in differing order. Where my analysis will most resemble that of Wood is the prominence of inferential evidence. Precisely because the issue between Fletcher and Wesley was one of theological opinions, neither of them made it a matter of public debate. Thus we must depend upon the few glimpses of their private dialogue and ponder the implication of indirect indicators like Wesley's 1772 decision to edit out from his collected *Works* the earlier positive comments on Christian David's "personal recapitulation" model.

**1. What Wesley Valued about Fletcher's Doctrine of Dispensations (Wood's Point 8).** I begin with Wesley's praise of Fletcher's discussion of dispensations. It is crucial to discern the specific aspects or applications of this discussion that he was endorsing. This requires taking the context in which Fletcher's *Checks on Antinomianism* were produced with utmost seriousness. Wood notes that the sparking event was the debate between Wesleyan and Calvinist Methodists over the *Minutes* of Wesley's 1770 conference with his preachers, but he does not highlight that the main accusation of the Calvinists was that these *Minutes* showed Wesley

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<sup>32</sup>For more on this, see Randy L. Maddox, "Opinion, Religion, and 'Catholic Spirit': John Wesley on Theological Integrity," *Asbury Theological Journal* 47.1 (1992), 63-87.

(with his emphasis on “works meet for repentance”) to be an enemy of grace.<sup>33</sup> In a rebuttal letter circulated among his preachers, Wesley made it clear that what *he* saw at stake in the attack on the 1770 *Minutes* was a rejection of the balance of his conception of God’s grace as “responsible grace.”<sup>34</sup> As Wesley’s self-appointed vindicator, Fletcher’s primary task in the *Checks* became defending Wesley—and then himself—against the charge of moralism (i.e., of stressing human obedience *rather than* gracious transformation).

Fletcher’s initial apologetic strategy was to cite honored Calvinist divines in defense of Wesley’s disputed claims, invoking Richard Baxter for example as the “John Wesley of the last century.” When such proof-texting stalemated, Fletcher turned to probing implications of the classic “dispensations of grace” model of God’s saving work. The implication that drew most of his attention was how this model portrayed good works by the unevangelized as possible only because of an initial degree of God’s prevenient gracious empowerment. This entailed that even in their case salvation was by grace, not by any inherent merit. Drawing a parallel with this case, Fletcher argued that the Wesleyan insistence on responsive obedience from those who did not yet enjoy full Christian holiness was also based on the assumption of ever-prior degrees of God’s gracious empowerment; thus, it too conformed to the doctrine of salvation by grace. When Wesley praised the “wonderful view of the different dispensations which we are under” that Fletcher offers in these initial efforts, what he valued most centrally was surely the way that Fletcher was using the classic notion of progressive dispensations of grace (a model that was assumed by most of Wesley’s critics) to rebut the accusation that Wesleyans teach that humans are “saved for our works.”<sup>35</sup>

The other specific aspect of Fletcher’s discussion of dispensations that Wesley explicitly commended is evident in a 1777 letter admonishing Alexander Knox:

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<sup>33</sup>Note the accusation of the Countess of Huntingdon recorded in Wesley’s Letter to John Fletcher (22 March 1771), *Letters* (Telford) 5:231.

<sup>34</sup>See Letter to Several Preachers and Friends (10 July 1771), *Letters* (Telford) 5:262-5.

<sup>35</sup>I.e., one should relate Wesley’s Letter to Elizabeth Ritchie (17 January 1775) to the earlier Letter to Mrs. Bennis (1 March 1774) which was written after Fletcher had introduced this notion in the *Third Check*; cf. *Letters* (Telford) 6:76, 137.

You should read Mr. Fletcher's *Essay on Truth*. He has there put it beyond all doubt that there is a medium between a child of God and a child of the devil—namely, a servant of God. This is your state. You are not yet a son, but you are a servant; and you are waiting for the Spirit of adoption, which will cry in your heart, "Abba, Father." You have "received the Spirit of grace," and in a measure work righteousness. Without being pained for what you have not, you have cause to bless God for what you have, and to wait patiently till He gives the rest by revealing His Son in your heart.<sup>36</sup>

Note that Wesley is valuing the warrant he discerns in Fletcher's detailing of progressive dispensations of grace for the conviction that Wesley had hammered out following Aldersgate. This conviction is that one can truly have "received the Spirit of grace" even if there has not been an immediate transformation into enjoying constant assurance and full holiness of heart and life. Reflecting his mature perspective on the model of Christian David, Wesley specifically avoids the suggestion that such nascent Christians have not yet "received the Spirit" and therefore need to pray for this dramatic immersion. Instead, he encourages his correspondent to "wait patiently" (in the means of grace?!) for further degrees of the Spirit's progressively enlivening work. In other words, Wesley framed his recommendation of this second aspect of Fletcher's published discussion of dispensations to counteract the very pastoral concerns that he was expressing privately about Fletcher's proposal of a post-justification baptism of the Holy Spirit!

Thus, Wesley affirmed in Fletcher's published discussion of dispensations the implications that Fletcher had drawn from the classic "dispensations of grace" model, not claims specific to his proposed "personal recapitulation" model. Wesley could make this affirmation with little fear because Fletcher did not press his distinctive claims (more evident in private letters and unpublished manuscripts) prominently in the *Checks*. For example, explicit "baptism of the Spirit" imagery occurs very rarely in the first five *Checks* and almost all of the occurrences fit easily in the "dispensations of grace" model. I could find only one passing hint at the notion of a personal post-justification "pentecostal baptism" for present-

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<sup>36</sup>Letter to Alexander Knox (29 August 1777), *Letters* (Telford) 6:272-3.

day Christians.<sup>37</sup> But what about the last two *Checks*? I will look at them more closely because Wood leans heavily on them in making his case.

**2. Specific Case of the Equal Check (Wood's Point 2).** The sixth *Check* was titled *An Equal Check to Pharisaism and Antinomianism* and appeared in three separate parts between May 1774 and March 1775. The longer title reflects a fine-tuning of Fletcher's apologetic agenda. The earlier *Checks* had deflected the accusation of moralism (Pharisaism) against Methodists by charging the accusers with the opposite danger (antinomianism); now Fletcher labored to portray authentic Methodist doctrine as the ideal balance between these opposing dangers. His overall goal remained the same as in the earlier volumes: maintaining authentic human cooperation with God saving grace.

Wood notes that Wesley almost immediately issued an edited second edition of *The First Part of an Equal Check*, along with a commendatory preface.<sup>38</sup> Wood takes this to demonstrate that "Fletcher literally spoke for Wesley almost as an amanuensis" (p. 49). While it indeed shows that Wesley saw an apologetic benefit in the book, I believe that any further implications are more likely the reverse of what Wood draws. Wesley took the theological refining of works that he judged generally beneficial for his people—like his brother Charles' hymns and the various writers abstracted in the *Christian Library*—to be among his most important roles as the "divine" (as theologians were called in the eighteenth century) of his movement. Fletcher's earlier *Checks* had proven helpful in the debate with the Calvinists. Their growing prominence in turn fostered the assumption among Wesley's critics that he endorsed (through editorial control) everything found in them. Wesley had found it necessary within

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<sup>37</sup>This evaluation is based on both a computer search and a quick read of the whole. The passing hint is in the *Third Check* when Fletcher seems to imply that John the Baptist and his disciples are a prototype of Christians who have not yet been baptized with the Holy Spirit (an equation he defends more explicitly in the last two *Checks*); cf. Fletcher, *Works* 1:160.

<sup>38</sup>The first edition published in Shrewsbury in 1774 had indeed been Fletcher's own complete work. Wesley's edited version was released later the same year by his publisher (London: Pine) as the second edition (cf. Wood, p. 48, note 77).

the past year to contest this assumption in a public letter.<sup>39</sup> Continuing fears about perceived endorsement of every opinion expressed in Fletcher's original text more likely explains why Wesley chose to issue an *edited* version so quickly.

A comparative reading of the two texts reveals that Wesley edited not just to condense the length but to delete material that he could not endorse. The most relevant example for our purpose comes near the end. In his Second Appendix to "An Essay on Truth" (the fourth section of *The First Part of an Equal Check*) Fletcher returned to his argument that the possibility of Christian perfection is one of the surpassing privileges of the Christian dispensation of grace. He then correlated the three dispensations (heathen, pious Jews and John the Baptist, and Christian) with three degrees of faith—hinting that some who are in the Christian dispensation may progress through these degrees sequentially. His final argument made such a sequential progression nearly normative by correlating it with the Anglican sequence of baptism and confirmation.<sup>40</sup> Those who are aware of Wesley's uneasiness with both the assumptions and practice of confirmation will not be surprised to find that his edited version deletes this final argument.<sup>41</sup> Whatever his reasons, the result of this deletion was that Wesley retained the elements of Fletcher's argument that fit the "dispensations of grace" model while removing the element that most favored a normative "personal recapitulation" model.

As Wood notes, the issue of editorial endorsement goes beyond what Wesley chose to retain in his edition of *The First Part of an Equal Check*. Wesley also marked several sections of the work with an asterisk to indi-

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<sup>39</sup>See *Some Remarks on Mr. Hill's "Farrago Double-Distilled"* (14 March 1773), §40, *Works* (Jackson) 10:438. Hill asks why Wesley let the expression stand in one of Fletcher's *Checks*: "Solomon is the chief of the Mystics." Wesley responded: "Perhaps because I thought it an harmless one, and capable of a good meaning. But I observe again: Mr. Hill takes it for granted, that I have the correction of Mr. Fletcher's books. This is a mistake: Of some I have; of others I have not." Fletcher had made this claim in the *Second Check*, Letter 2 (*Works* 1:90), and then tried to clarify it in the *Fourth Check*, Letter 5, footnote (*Works* 1:238).

<sup>40</sup>See Fletcher, *Works* 1:589-94 (this edition of *Works* reprints Fletcher's first edition of *The First Part of an Equal Check*). Note that Wood advances the same argument as Fletcher on pp. 31-2.

<sup>41</sup>Compare Wesley's edited edition (London: Pine, 1774), 181; to Fletcher's edition in *Works* 1:594-5. I am grateful to the staff at the United Methodist archives at Drew University for making a copy of Wesley's edited edition available to me.

cate their particular usefulness. Wood claims that the sections marked specifically highlight Wesley's endorsement of Fletcher's equation of the baptism of the Spirit with full sanctification, particularly in "An Essay on Truth" which Wood characterizes as "saturated with Pentecostal terms, such as 'the baptism of the Spirit,' as expressing the meaning of holiness" (p. 49). My investigation of this work did not substantiate Wood's claim.

While general references to the importance of the work of the Spirit permeate the book, I could only locate a half dozen specific references to the "baptism of the Spirit" (or closely related terminology).<sup>42</sup> The first reference (which Wood emphasizes that Wesley highlighted) articulates the classic "dispensations of grace" claim that the full benefits of the Spirit were not available *until* Pentecost, but now come to *all* true Christians.<sup>43</sup> The last reference (which Wesley again highlights) marvels in "pristine church" terms at how the gift of the Spirit miraculously formed that first Christian community into a harmonious whole.<sup>44</sup> Between these two bookends are a couple of passages that Wesley lets stand where Fletcher suggests that some present-day persons experience only the baptism of John (penitence) and not the baptism of the Spirit (assurance) that makes them truly Christian.<sup>45</sup> By contrast, Wesley deleted a section containing the phrase "a spiritual Christian is baptized in the Spirit," which could connote that there are some (nonspiritual) Christians who were not so baptized.<sup>46</sup> The remaining reference (which Wesley retains without

<sup>42</sup>This count does not include the tangential references in Fletcher's Address to Baptized Heathen in "An Essay on Truth," where his concern is to challenge the widespread presumption based on the mere fact of one's (infant) baptism as automatically bestowing salvation; or Fletcher's quote of Wesley's "pristine church" model in the sermon "Scriptural Christianity" (see *Works* 1:585).

<sup>43</sup>Fletcher argues in his Preface that believers in earlier dispensations did not always have assurance, but that assurance is inseparably connected with the Christian dispensation which was fully instituted by Christ's outpouring of the baptism of the Spirit on Pentecost. He then says, "Nobody therefore can truly believe, according to *this* dispensation, without being *immediately* conscious both of the forgiveness of sins, and of peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." Wesley could easily affirm this within his "dispensations of grace" model (cf. his edition, pp. vi-vii)!

<sup>44</sup>See Fletcher, *Works* 1:593; Wesley's edition, 180-1.

<sup>45</sup>Wesley highlights the more subtle occasion (*Works* 1:580; Wesley's edition, 161-2) but not the more overt one (compare *Works* 1:590 to Wesley's edition, 176-7; the \* in *Works* is Fletcher's notation for a footnote; Wesley's edition replaces it with † to distinguish it from his highlighting!).

<sup>46</sup>Compare *Works* 1:536 to Wesley's edition, which deletes the entire Section IV of "An Essay on Truth."

emphasis) is Fletcher's exhortation to those who already enjoy sanctifying power that they be "daily baptized" with the Spirit.<sup>47</sup>

It is hard to see in any of this a strong endorsement of the equation of entrance into Christian Perfection with a post-justification baptism of the Spirit. Wesley specifically minimized the distinctive aspects of Fletcher's proposed "personal recapitulation" model in the edited version. This is particularly striking in light of a meeting that Wesley held with Fletcher between the release of the original and edited editions of *The First Part of an Equal Check*, precisely to discuss questions being raised about Fletcher's proposed model of Christian Perfection.<sup>48</sup> Fletcher insists that he satisfied Wesley's concern at this meeting, but Wesley's subsequent editorial work suggests that, while he may have been satisfied that there was room for continuing discussion of Fletcher's opinion in Methodist circles, he remained uncomfortable with some of its apparent implications.

Ironically, in this same period between release of the first and second part of *An Equal Check* Fletcher was becoming increasingly convinced that identifying the move into Christian Perfection with a unique act of divine empowerment (i.e., a distinct baptism with the Holy Spirit) was the most hopeful way to finally convince opponents that the Wesleyan Methodist emphasis on holiness did not amount to works' righteousness.<sup>49</sup> This apologetic motivation led him to express more clearly in the remaining two parts of *An Equal Check* the equation of the move into full Christian salvation with a post-justification baptism of the Spirit.<sup>50</sup> This more overt resolve may explain why Fletcher sought neither Wesley's editorial revision nor a commendatory preface for these two volumes. The fact that Wesley allowed them to be published through Methodist channels would signify his continuing openness to Methodists discussing Fletcher's opinion, but falls far short of proving that Wesley embraced this opinion himself. Indeed, Wesley's private complaint to Fletcher about collapsing the distinction between infant and adult Christian life was in direct response to these two volumes.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>47</sup>*Works* 1:571; Wesley's edition, 149-50.

<sup>48</sup>Fletcher describes this meeting in his letter to Charles Wesley (14 August 1774), *Asbury Theological Journal* 53.1 (1998), 92.

<sup>49</sup>See his comment to Charles in this regard in *ibid.*

<sup>50</sup>See esp. *Second Part of an Equal Check*, §XII, *Works* 2:110; and *Third Part of an Equal Check*, *Works* 2:135.

<sup>51</sup>Cf. Letter to John Fletcher (22 March 1775), *Letters* (Telford) 6:144-5.

**3. Specific Case of the Last Check (Wood's Point 6).** This brings us to Fletcher's influential *Last Check* that defends the Wesleyan claim that Christians can be delivered from indwelling sin during this life. The main apologetic task in this regard was exegetical, explaining those scriptures that appear to teach that a sinful principle remains in believers until death or that emphasize the continuing need of all Christians for God's gracious forgiveness. Even so, Fletcher's assumptions about how one attains the state of freedom from indwelling sin are laced through the discussion, particularly in his concluding exhortations.

A careful reader will sense in several places Fletcher's distinctive conviction that a post-justification baptism of the Holy Spirit is the primary means by which our sin-enslaved lives are freed for holy obedience. It comes through most clearly in the prayer he proposes for Christians seeking entire sanctification:

Lord, I want a plenitude of thy Spirit, the full promise of the Father, and the rivers which flow from the inmost souls of the believers who have gone on to the perfection of their dispensation. I do believe that thou canst and wilt thus "baptize me with the Holy Ghost and with fire:" help my unbelief: confirm and increase my faith, with regard to this important baptism.<sup>52</sup>

However, one is also struck by the way that Fletcher appears to be trying to satisfy Wesley's private objections in this volume. For example, his opening definition of Christian Perfection identifies it as "that maturity of grace and holiness which established adult believers attain to under the Christian dispensation" and makes no immediate connection to the baptism of the Spirit.<sup>53</sup> While Fletcher assumed such a connection, his definition was broad enough that one working within a "dispensations of grace" model could fully embrace it. Likewise, Fletcher defends at some length in this text the possibility of *gradual* perfecting in love as well as instantaneous transformation, now saying that to deny this "is as absurd as to deny that God waters the earth by daily dews, as well as by thunder showers!"<sup>54</sup> Finally, while privileging the method of seeking perfection by laying hold of it in simple faith, Fletcher insists that "in the meantime we should do the works of faith." It is difficult not to hear muted echoes of

<sup>52</sup>*Last Check*, §XIX, *Works* 2:656.

<sup>53</sup>*Last Check*, §I, *Works* 2:492.

<sup>54</sup>*Last Check*, §XIX, *Works* 2:636-8.

ongoing friendly dialogue between Wesley and Fletcher behind the relatively greater prominence that these points find in the *Last Check*.

The other evidence of dialogue over their continuing differences that one finds in the *Last Check* is Fletcher's frank admission that he differs from Wesley in assigning sanctifying faith specifically to "the baptism (or outpouring) of the Spirit," while Wesley attributes it (in his sermon "The Scripture Way of Salvation") in more general terms to the Spirit's various enlivening effects on the soul.<sup>55</sup> Fletcher suggests that this is merely a verbal difference, with Wesley using more technical theological terms while he is sticking closer to Scripture. Given his own tendency to speak in scriptural phrases, I think Wesley would have described it instead as a continuing difference of opinion over *which* scriptural imagery (with related implications) best captures the dynamics of attaining Christian perfection.

While we have no record of Wesley's actual response to Fletcher's suggestion, his brief evaluation of the *Last Check* in a letter to Fletcher is revealing.<sup>56</sup> First, there is the tantalizing line "I do not perceive that you have granted too much, or that there is any difference between us." Unfortunately Wesley does not reveal the exact topic about which Fletcher worried that he had granted too much, and I have found no independent indicator. But then Wesley goes on to say: "The Address to the Perfect I approve most, and think it will have a good effect." In this case his reference is clear. The "Address to the Perfect" concludes the *Last Check* with a series of admonitions for those claiming Christian Perfection to remain sensitive to their human fallibility, faithful in their spiritual disciplines, humble in their spirit, and constantly growing in grace. That Wesley highlighted this section over the section where Fletcher stresses seeking the baptism of the Spirit by faith is significant. As Wesley goes on to say in his letter, "the doctrine of Justification and Salvation by Faith are grievously abused by many Methodists. We must guard as many as we can." The 1760s holiness debate had left Wesley hypersensitive to the danger of playing instantaneous sanctification by faith off against ongoing responsive participation in the means of grace. What he most valued in Fletcher's *Last Check* was not Fletcher's emphasis on the benefits of a post-justification baptism of the Spirit, but the way that Fletcher had

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<sup>55</sup>See *ibid.*, 647.

<sup>56</sup>Letter to John Fletcher (18 August 1775), *Letters* (Telford) 6:175.

counterbalanced this emphasis with an admonition for responsible growth in grace.

**4. Wesley's Endorsement of Fletcher—Neither Carte Blanche Nor Unique (Wood's Point 1).** In light of all of this, what are we to make of the 1782 letter that Wood cites where Wesley says to Fletcher, "I am satisfied with your motives and you had from the beginning my *Impri-matur*"? Once again it would help to know the specific topic that sparked this comment, and in this case I have not been able to locate the letter that Wood cites to check its larger context, let alone any indication of Fletcher's inquiry to which Wesley was responding.<sup>57</sup> Even so, I am confident that we should not take this to mean that Wesley was expressing "complete and unqualified approval of Fletcher's writings" (cf. Wood, p. 48). Wesley would not grant such *carte blanche* approval to any human author's work. More to the point, we have noted several places where Wesley expressed privately his personal disagreement or uncomfortableness with aspects of Fletcher's various published works. I would hesitate to press Wesley's implication in this comment beyond the point that he had found nothing in Fletcher's writings that stepped outside of the legitimate range of differing *opinions* that Wesley was willing to allow within his Methodist camp.

To take this a step further, while Wesley valued Fletcher's writings, it is not obvious that he granted them a unique place of privilege in defining the doctrine of Christian Perfection, or Wesleyan doctrine in general. It is true that Wesley encouraged his preachers to read the *Checks* in the "Large Minutes" (notably, with specific reference to refuting Calvinism). But it is not true that Fletcher is the only one so recommended. Earlier in this same document Wesley instructed his preachers to read the entire *Christian Library*, which contained a range of theological voices—including a few which Wesley recognized stood in some tension with his own.<sup>58</sup> More significantly, the lists of suggested reading in general theology that Wesley sent to his preachers and lay members in the years between the completion of the *Checks* and Fletcher's death all include alongside Wes-

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<sup>57</sup>Wood unfortunately was not able to make a photocopy at the time he jotted down the excerpt he quoted. Peter Nockles, curator of the Methodist archives in the John Rylands Library, made a search for the letter at my request but could not locate it (the collection is not yet fully indexed).

<sup>58</sup>See "Large Minutes," Q. 29, *Works* (Jackson) 8:314.

ley's own works Bishop Pearson's *On the Creed* (a long-time Wesley favorite), but nothing by Fletcher.<sup>59</sup> Would this be the case if Fletcher (and his distinctive view of Christian Perfection) carried Wesley's unique endorsement?

**5. Supposed Standard Encoding of "Baptism of the Holy Spirit"?** (Wood's Points 3b & 7). Against this background of Wesley's clear—but *focused* and *not uncritical*—appreciation for Fletcher's writings, I must challenge Wood's assertion that Fletcher established "the baptism of the Holy Spirit" as a standard encoded phrase for Christian perfection among Methodists by as early as 1774 with *The First Part of an Equal Check* (cf. pp. 47-8, 58). I believe I have shown that this is not obvious in Wesley's case. It is beyond the scope of this response to consider all of Wesley's eighteenth-century colleagues or the developments in nineteenth-century Methodism, but a greater divergence of views than Wood allows can be demonstrated there as well. Fletcher's theology did assume a prominent role in nineteenth-century Methodism, particularly in North America, and his "personal recapitulation" model of Spirit baptism did become normative for one major branch of this movement, but it never held the unquestioned universal role that Wood implies.<sup>60</sup>

The real problem with Wood's assertion of this standard encoding is methodological. It leads to circular reasoning. On the basis of his assumption that this encoding was in place, Wood attributes to every instance of Wesley's infrequent use of "the baptism of the Spirit" all of the implications of Fletcher's proposed model (even if these implications are not mentioned in the context), and he reads Wesley's frequent affirmations of the Spirit's *general* role in sanctification as all implicitly focusing this

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<sup>59</sup>See Letter to Alexander Knox (5 June 1778), *Letters* (Telford) 6:314; and Letter to [his niece] Sarah Wesley (8 September 1781), *Letters* (Telford) 7:83. Compare earlier recommendations of Pearson in *Journal* (23 February 1749), *Works* 20:263; and Letter to Margaret Lewen (June 1764), *Letters* (Telford) 4:247.

<sup>60</sup>For a fine treatment of the differing emphases in early British Methodism, see Fraser, "Strains." I have discussed the tensions in American Methodism (involving differing assessments of Fletcher's proposal) in "Holiness of Heart and Life: Lessons from North American Methodism," *Asbury Theological Journal* 51.1 (1996), 151-72. For evidence of the growing role of Fletcher's theology in American Methodism, see Maddox, "Respected Founder/Neglected Guide: The Role of Wesley in American Methodist Theology," *Methodist History* 37 (1999), 71-88, esp. footnotes 13-17.

work in the specific event of the baptism of the Spirit.<sup>61</sup> Thereby, his operating assumption obscures the very evidence that could suggest a difference of emphasis between Wesley and Fletcher. It would have the same effect when applied to other Methodist thinkers.

**6. Wesley's Own Preaching (Wood's Points 3a & 5).** Let me illustrate this methodological problem by considering the preaching of the "late Wesley" that Wood emphasizes. I will start with the sermons that Wesley published in the *Arminian Magazine*. Wood argues that these sermons contain extensive use of Pentecostal phrases as encoded nomenclature for Christian perfection (pp. 51-55). Emphasis on the work of the Spirit can be found in all of them, and many contain references to Pentecost in relation to the possibility of Christian perfection, but all of these references remain within Wesley's long-standing embrace of the "dispensations of grace" and "pristine church" models.

For example, the 1781 sermon "On Zeal" has a section describing the balanced religion "which our Lord has established upon earth, ever since the descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost." Nothing in this section goes beyond the "dispensations of grace" model to hint at the distinctive notion of a post-justification baptism of the Spirit for present believers. Nor are there such hints in the 1782 sermon "God's Love to Fallen Man," which emphasizes how God's response to the fall included providing the Holy Spirit to renew the image of God in our soul and seal us unto the day of redemption.<sup>62</sup> The most telling sermon in this regard is the 1788 "On Faith." In this sermon Wesley sets out to map the various species of faith, drawing an explicit parallel with Fletcher's detailed distinctions of the various dispensations of grace. But in his parallel Wesley makes a significant refinement of Fletcher. We noted that in the later *Checks* Fletcher equated the state of a Christian who is forgiven but not yet Spirit baptized with the dispensation of John the Baptist. In his sermon Wesley quickly dismisses the need to discuss a type of present faith fitting the dispensation or faith of John the Baptist "because these, as Mr. Fletcher well describes them, were peculiar to himself"! Wesley instead

<sup>61</sup>Note for example how easily he concludes that Wesley intended by "sealed with the Spirit" the same thing Fletcher assigned to the "baptism with the Holy Spirit" (p. 51).

<sup>62</sup>Cf. Sermon 92, "On Zeal," §II.5-6, *Works* 3:313-4; and Sermon 59, "God's Love to Fallen Man," §I.2-3, *Works* 2:426-7.

moves to the Christian dispensation and distinguishes *within* this dispensation between those who have only the faith of a servant and those who have the full faith of a son. Those who have the faith of a servant are sensitive to the Spirit's awakening work in their lives and Wesley exhorts them not to halt by the way until they "receive the Spirit of adoption." He then makes clear that this event is not their entire sanctification by exhorting those who have received this Spirit to "go on to perfection." His specific advice for attaining this perfection is to "walk in all the *good works* whereunto ye are created in Christ Jesus," not to seek some yet-lacking baptism of the Spirit.<sup>63</sup>

Wesley's 1785 sermon "On the Church" requires distinct attention. Wood argues that it teaches that water baptism only gives the Spirit in a "lower sense," while the baptism of the Spirit is reserved for fully sanctified believers. He bases this on the quote "Some indeed have been inclined to interpret this [water baptism (Wood's addition)] in a figurative sense, as if it referred to that baptism of the Holy Ghost which the apostles received at the day of Pentecost, and which *in a lower degree* [Wood's italics] is given to all believers."<sup>64</sup> A check will reveal that the referent of "this" in the excerpt Wood quotes is not water baptism but the scriptural text on which Wesley was preaching: "There is one baptism." In this passage Wesley is actually arguing *against* those (like the Quakers) who overlook the unique dispensational situation of the apostles at Pentecost and draw the faulty conclusion that the "spiritual" baptism that they received is totally distinct from (and replaces) water baptism in Christianity. His comment about those who receive the baptism of the Spirit "in a lower degree" refers not to those who have only water baptism, but indeed to *all* Christian believers other than (i.e., subsequent to) the apostles. This comment is reminiscent of Wesley's "pristine church" model.

Indeed, the most striking of Wesley's later sermons explicitly revive his "pristine church" model, this time using it to indict his own Methodist people rather than the broader Anglican community. In the 1783 "The Mystery of Iniquity" Wesley reiterates the claim that Acts demonstrates that the community present at the first Christian Pentecost was so open and responsive to the Spirit that its members *unanimously* and *immedi-*

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<sup>63</sup>See Sermon 106, "On Faith," *Works* 3:492-501. The most significant paragraphs, from which the quotes are taken, are I.7, I.10-13, and II.5.

<sup>64</sup>Compare Wood's quote (p. 53) to Sermon 74, "Of the Church," §I.12 , *Works* 3:49-50.

ately were transformed into *full* holiness of heart and life. The particular evidence of this transformation that he highlights is their willingness to share “all things in common.” Then Wesley described in woeful terms how quickly and universally the Christian church had fallen from this ideal, and argues that the chief culprit in this fall had been the desire for riches.<sup>65</sup> Lest his Methodist people see themselves as an exception, Wesley recapitulated the argument in the 1784 “The Wisdom of God’s Counsels,” this time focusing particularly on how quickly the early Methodist movement lost its spiritual focus.<sup>66</sup> In both sermons Wesley’s prescription for recovering the spiritual life evident at Pentecost included nothing about seeking a new baptism of the Spirit; instead he exhorted his people to repent and again begin to share their riches with those in need. If they would do so then the “Pentecost” of Methodism might fully come—with Methodist converts moving quickly from Christian infancy to maturity, unlike what was now the case.<sup>67</sup>

If there is no clear endorsement of the identification of the attainment of Christian perfection with the baptism of the Spirit in Wesley’s later published sermons, what about his oral sermons? Wood highlights a couple of 1783 reports of Wesley preaching on the passages in Acts about being “baptized” or “filled” with the Holy Spirit (pp. 57-58). It would not be hard to add other examples such as Wesley’s decision on Pentecost 1781 to preach on “They were all filled with the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:4) and show “in what sense this belongs to us and to our children.” But should we assume from this (as Wood does) that Wesley’s sermons expounded Fletcher’s “encoded” claims? I do not think so. While it is

<sup>65</sup>See Sermon 61, “The Mystery of Iniquity,” *Works* 2:452-70; the appeal to Pentecost is in §8. The emphasis on holding all things in common as the key evidence of the full sanctification of the Pentecost community was present already in his initial invocation of the “pristine church” model in Sermon 4, “Scriptural Christianity,” §1.10, *Works* 1:165.

<sup>66</sup>Sermon 68, “The Wisdom of God’s Counsels,” *Works* 2:552-66; appeal to Pentecost in §7. For a slightly earlier sermon that is less explicit in its critique of Methodists see Sermon 63, “The General Spread of the Gospel,” §§13-20, *Works* 2:490-4. Cf. his 1788 “Thoughts upon a Late Phenomenon,” *Works* 9:534-7.

<sup>67</sup>This is the context in which to understand Wesley’s comment to Fletcher, “The generality of believers in *our* Church (yea, and in the Church of Corinth, Ephesus, and the rest, even in the Apostolic Age) are certainly no more than babes in Christ; not young men, and much less fathers. But we have some, and we should certainly pray and expect that our Pentecost may fully come.” Letter to John Fletcher (1 June 1776), *Letters* (Telford), 6:221.

well known that Wesley's oral sermons were not exact copies of his written sermons, their general themes were surely the same. I can see no reason to assume that the content of these oral sermons was any different than that in the contemporaneous written sermons just discussed. Indeed my guess is that Wesley's Pentecost 1781 sermon was a ringing indictment of growing materialism in the Methodist movement.

**7. Publications in the *Arminian Magazine* (Wood's Point 4).** It remains only to touch on Wood's claim that Wesley published (and thereby editorially endorsed) articles by others in the *Arminian Magazine* that highlighted the baptism of the Holy Spirit as the meaning of Christian perfection. The only example that Wood cites is an article by Benson in volume four (1781). In scanning this volume I found no other *articles* relating Christian perfection to the baptism of the Spirit, though there were several letters by his Methodist followers. As Wesley admonishes in the prefaces to early volumes of the magazine, these letters must be read with a critical eye. He selected for inclusion those that most effectively expressed Christian experience and practice, though he allowed that their particular manner of expression was sometimes controversial.<sup>68</sup> The letters included in volume four are an excellent example of this mixture. They come from the early stages of the 1760s holiness debates and several suggest the claim (which Wesley explicitly rebutted in his sermon on "Wandering Thoughts") that believers can have and must seek a *third* blessing of the Spirit that removes all wandering thoughts and places them above temptation!<sup>69</sup> Wesley's printing of these should not be taken as a total endorsement of their contents.

By contrast, I agree with Wood that in printing Joseph Benson's article "Thoughts on Perfection" in this volume Wesley was endorsing it.<sup>70</sup> But just what was he endorsing? Wood twice (pp. 24, 44) quotes from this article Benson's claim that "God *may*, and, . . . *does, instantaneously* so baptize a soul with the Holy Ghost and with fire, as to purify it from all dross, and refine it like gold, so that it is *renewed in love, in pure and per-*

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<sup>68</sup>See *Arminian Magazine*, 2 (1779), Preface §§4-7, in *Works* (Jackson) 14:282-3; 3 (1780), Preface, §§3 & 7, in *Works* (Jackson) 14:285-6; and 4 (1781), Preface, §3, *Works* (Jackson) 14:287.

<sup>69</sup>See esp. the letters in *Arminian Magazine* 4 (1781):110-1, 278-9, 334-5, 442-6. Cf. Sermon 41, "Wandering Thoughts," *Works* 2:126-37.

<sup>70</sup>See "Thoughts on Perfection," by Mr. J. B., *Arminian Magazine* 4 (1781):549-53.

fect love.” In both cases Wood elides a significant qualifier by Benson. What Benson wrote is that “God *may*, and that he often *does* . . .”(p. 553). Wesley would have little trouble endorsing this claim. His “pristine church” model requires the possibility that the Spirit’s baptism (coming at one’s initial conversion) *can* instantaneously bring about full renewal, even as this model laments that this is currently not frequently enough the case. What Wesley resisted was a standardized model where present believers were led to expect that the move into Christian perfection could *only* come in this rapid way. The strategic “often” in Benson’s article shows that he had come to accept Wesley’s qualification. More importantly, the occasion of Benson’s article was his concern about instances of misconduct by those professing Christian perfection, and the substance of the article was a series of exhortations to watchfulness and humility (like Fletcher’s “Address to the Perfect”). I fail to see how publishing Benson’s article shows Wesley endorsing the identification of Christian perfection with a post-justification baptism of the Spirit. Instead it appears to show that Benson, like Fletcher, was nuancing his earliest claims as a result of his dialogue with Wesley! This move on Benson’s part is even clearer in two sermons on sanctification he published in 1782. Benson avoids equating entire sanctification with the baptism of the Holy Spirit in these sermons, attributing entire sanctification instead to an *increase* of the influences of the Spirit that was given to us at our conversion, and stressing the role of responsible participation in the means of grace in nurturing this increase.<sup>71</sup>

## Conclusion

Let me wrap up this overly-long response to Wood’s essay with two conclusions. The first is historical. I believe that what the Fletcher/Wesley dialogue over the baptism of the Holy Spirit reveals is that there was *diversity* on this topic within the early Methodist movement, even among these two close friends. While Wesley saw Fletcher’s proposal as an allowable opinion, he expressed privately to Fletcher various concerns about it. Fletcher’s response was not to surrender the proposal but to temper his presentation of it in ways that addressed Wesley’s concerns. As a result, by the late 1770s this issue faded from the focus of their interac-

<sup>71</sup>See Joseph Benson, *Two Sermons on Sanctification* (Leeds: J. Bowling, 1782), esp. pp. 28-9, 34-5, 47.

tion, though both retained their differing opinions.<sup>72</sup> The question posed by the later history of Methodism is whether Wesley's concerns about the possible implications of Fletcher's proposal have proven warranted.

My second conclusion embraces Wood's commendable concern for how we as Wesley's and Fletcher's heirs can recover an appreciation for the doctrine of Christian perfection and a commitment to pursuing this in our lives. Wood's suggestion is that we need to break out of the moralism that engulfed the twentieth-century holiness movement and focus our people's attention again on experiencing the renewing infilling of the Spirit. Like Wesley, I would endorse strongly the importance of Christians at all stages in their journey nurturing their openness to the Spirit's affect in their lives. However, I also share Wesley's concern about focusing exclusively on experience when seeking to nurture holiness of heart and life. Thus I would suggest that we need to recover the balance found in Wesley's purported response to the question of what should be done to keep Methodism alive after his death:

Preach our doctrine, inculcate experience, urge practice, enforce discipline. If you preach doctrine alone, the people will be antinomians; if you preach experience only, they will become enthusiasts; if you preach practice only, they will become Pharisees; and if you preach all of these and do not enforce discipline, Methodism will be like a highly cultivated garden without a fence, exposed to the ravages of the wild boar of the forest.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>This is indicated by the fading of evidences of private discussion of this issue after 1776. It is also suggested by the reissuing of the tract *The Principles of a Methodist* in 1777 (the first reprint since the edited version in the 1772 collected *Works*). Wesley's method of revising such tracts for reprinting was to take the prior edition and mark in his changes. In this case, rather than trying to extract and edit the pages in the *Works*, Wesley used the earlier separate edition that contained his endorsement of Christian David's model (see the schemata in *Works* 9:546-7). While Wesley introduced some minor changes into the 1777 edition, he did not sense it necessary now to covertly excise this endorsement as he had in 1772. This *might* be because he now agreed again with the "personal recapitulation" model, but lacking other strong evidence of such a change I take it to show instead that this topic was not presently as focal to his concerns as it had been in 1772.

<sup>73</sup>Cited in Franz Hildebrandt, *Christianity According to the Wesleys* (London: Epworth, 1956), 11-12. Hildebrandt takes this from a caption under a picture in Nicolson Square Church, Edinburgh. As he notes, there is no corroborating record of this precise quote, but it epitomizes Wesley.

APPENDIX

This manuscript is housed in the Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library of Duke University, and is published here with permission. It is by John Wesley and most likely records his reaction notes while reading Joseph Benson's (now lost) paper on "The Baptism of the Holy Ghost." Richard Heitzenrater has kindly shared his expertise in polishing the following transcription (which expands all abbreviations).

- p. 9 Q? If Cornelius then received any more than the *Christian faith* of a Babe?
- p. 10 Q? If any more than this is implied in John 14.15, etc.
- p. 15 Is not an assurance of God's favour the fruit of "receiving the Holy Ghost"? i.e. in the first degree?
- ib. "Is *any one* of these Christian Dispensations?"
- Q? Is any more than one?
- p. 16 No. 8 This sentiment, I think, is utterly new. I never yet baptized a real Penitent who was not then baptized with the Holy Ghost. See our Catechism. *One Baptism* includes the Outward Sign and the Inward Grace. The Quakers only speak otherwise in order to set aside Water Baptism.
- p. 19 I allow all that is said in the latter end of this page. But let us confine the term *New Birth* to its one Scriptural meaning.
- p. 23 "Ought to be distinguished." Επεχω
- p. 24 Every *Penitent* is then baptized with the Holy Ghost; i.e., receives righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.  
I have proved it over and over.  
I do not think the Doctrine of the threefold Dispensation requires one word to be said about Water baptism. It may be built on a less disputable Foundation.
- p. 20. Q? Is this a parallel case?
- [p.] 21. Or this? Still I scruple the term *Birth*.
- [p.] 23. Have ye received the Holy ghost. He does not use the term *Birth* here.

- [p.] 24. *Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost*—i.e. shall receive him as ye have not yet done.
- [p.] 25. St. Paul certainly means that to Christians there is but *One Baptism* or Outward sign of the New Birth.
- [p.] 29. I doubt if the *Expression* be worth so much dispute; it *seldom* occurs in the Bible.
- [p.] 33. Were it needfull, I should make many Queries here. But *tis lis de verbis*.<sup>74</sup> Still I doubt, whether we need say a word about Water Baptism. I doubt if the word *Baptism* is ever used (unless twice or thrice metaphorically) for any but Water Baptism. And we can sufficiently prove our whole Doctrine, without laying any stress on those metaphorical Expressions.
- [p.] 38. It will never quit<sup>75</sup> (could it be done) to confute our Church Catechism. The thing I object to all along, is the laying so much stress on the metaphorical expression, “Baptized with the Holy Ghost.”

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<sup>74</sup>Latin: “Merely strife over words.”

<sup>75</sup>“Quit” is probably used in sense of “clear us of charges.”

# HISTORIOGRAPHICAL CRITICISMS OF RANDY MADDOX'S RESPONSE

by

Laurence W. Wood

In this issue of the *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, Randy Maddox has responded to my earlier article.<sup>1</sup> He concedes that “Wesley saw Fletcher’s proposal [of the baptism with the Spirit] as an allowable opinion,” but he believes there are “indirect indicators” revealing that Wesley had some serious reservations about it. Because his assumption of so-called “indirect indicators” are factually questionable, in my view Maddox hypothesizes too freely, leading him to make curious interpretations and misinformed judgments.

Let me begin with a methodological issue. He assumes that Wesley’s brief notations in a recently discovered Fragment represented Wesley’s final views. These fragmentary notations were probably written down in 1770, when Fletcher was 40 years old and Benson was 21 years old. This came before Wesley had discussed any of these issues with Benson or Fletcher and before Fletcher had written his *Checks*. There are three things Wesley did not like according to his notations: (A) the Benson/Fletcher interpretation of “receiving the Holy Ghost” and “an assurance of God’s favour”;<sup>2</sup> (B) their doctrine of dispensations;<sup>3</sup> and (C) their inter-

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. “Pentecostal Sanctification in Wesley and Early Methodism,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 34.1 (Spring, 1999): 24-63.

<sup>2</sup>Fragment, p. 15, implied in p. 9. Cited by Maddox.

<sup>3</sup>Fragment, *ib.* and p. 24.

pretation of the phrase, “baptized with the Holy Ghost.”<sup>4</sup> We know from subsequent developments that Wesley changed his mind on (B) and (C), but not on (A). After Fletcher’s *Checks* were written, Wesley had nothing but high praise for Fletcher’s doctrine of dispensations (B), and he affirmed Fletcher’s use of “the baptism with the Holy Ghost” (C), but he persistently stayed after Fletcher until he revised his idea of the meaning of the phrase, “receive the Holy Spirit” (A). My earlier article showed that Wesley’s real concern was a fear that Benson and Fletcher were falling into Zinzendorf’s confusion that denied babes in Christ the witness of the Spirit. We know that this debate ended, and nothing but harmony is evidenced in their relationships after July 26–28, 1771, when Wesley visited Fletcher at Madeley and read his manuscript for *The First Check*. We also know that in Wesley’s mind the debate had ended because of a letter he wrote to Benson, Sept. 10, 1773, noting that “at Trevecca you were a little warped from this [‘plain, old Methodist doctrine laid down in the *Minutes* of the Conference’]; but it was a right-hand error.”<sup>5</sup> This shows that Wesley considered his dispute with them over with, despite their continued use of the “baptism with the Spirit” and the doctrine of dispensations.

### Series of Historiographical Criticisms

Following are twenty-two points at which I contend that Randy Maddox has fallen into historiographical inaccuracies. I welcome his response to any or all of these criticisms.

1. Maddox mistakenly reported that Fletcher took sole responsibility for publishing his *Equal Check* and “sought neither Wesley’s editorial revision or a commendatory preface.” Fletcher in fact asked for Wesley’s “*corrections*” of this manuscript. He wrote a letter to John Wesley on May 30, 1773: “I send you for your *corrections* the 2 first parts of my equal check.”<sup>6</sup> Notice that Fletcher asked for Wesley’s “*corrections*” [italics Fletcher’s]. The manuscript was passed back and forth between Wesley and Fletcher for nine months as can be seen from a letter that Wesley wrote to Fletcher on February 24, 1774: “You will please send the *Essays*

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<sup>4</sup>Fragment [p.] 38, p. 24.

<sup>5</sup>Telford, *Letters* 6:40 (to Joseph Benson, Sept. 10, 1773).

<sup>6</sup>The original letter is contained in a large portfolio called *Letters Relating to the Wesley Family* in the archival collection of John Rylands University Library of Manchester, p. 48.

and *Equal Check* to London unstitched.”<sup>7</sup> A month later, Fletcher went to Wolverhampton (March 21, 1774) to see Wesley. Wesley commented in his journal on their consultation together: “We took sweet counsel together.”<sup>8</sup> Fletcher’s visit was obviously in connection with the upcoming publication of *The Equal Check*, especially since Fletcher had earlier spoken of their impending meeting together so that Wesley could “help me by word of mouth.”<sup>9</sup> Two months later, Fletcher put the manuscript in final form (May 21, 1774). Maddox noted that *The Equal Check* was published at Shrewsbury (close to Madeley). He suggested that Fletcher went out of his way to get this work published because of Wesley’s possible disagreement, but the data appears to argue just the opposite. Maddox failed to note that, although the book was published at Shrewsbury, the cover page says it was sold at the Foundery in London (the center of Methodism). This shows that Wesley intended to promote it. For Fletcher to have gone around Wesley to publish anything would have been contrary to Wesley’s specific instructions to his preachers: “Print nothing without my approbation.”<sup>10</sup>

We know that as early as November 24, 1771 (in a letter to Charles Wesley) Fletcher was in the process of systematically developing this Pentecostal aspect of Wesley’s theology.<sup>11</sup> Fletcher’s *Third Check* (finished on Feb. 3, 1772) introduced the doctrine of dispensations, highlighting Pentecostal sanctification. It was more fully developed in his *Equal Check* (finished on May 21, 1774), and comprehensively explained in *The Last Check* (finished in March, 1775).

Why did Wesley so quickly produce an abridged edition of *The Equal Check*? There is a natural explanation. Wesley advised Fletcher, as he was writing his next manuscript on *The Last Check*, not to make it too lengthy because it will come into “fewer hands.”<sup>12</sup> Wesley wanted his people to read Fletcher’s *Equal Check*, and immediately he reduced its

<sup>7</sup>Telford, *Letters* 6:75, (to John Fletcher, Feb. 26, 1774).

<sup>8</sup>*The Works of John Wesley, Journal and Diaries*, (1765-75), ed. W. Reginald Ward (Journal) and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Diaries), (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 22:400 (March 21, 1774).

<sup>9</sup>Fletcher’s letter (Feb. 6, 1773) to Wesley, cited by Henry Moore, *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley*, 2:259-260.

<sup>10</sup>*Works* (Jackson), 8:317, “Minutes of Several Conversations.”

<sup>11</sup>A letter contained in *The Fletcher Volume* in the archival collection of The John Rylands University Library of Manchester, 38.

<sup>12</sup>Telford, *Letters*, 6:175 (a letter to John Fletcher 18, 1775).

length to make it more reader-friendly. This is very likely why Wesley said in the preface of *The Equal Check*, “N.B. I have considerably shortened the following tracts; and marked the most useful parts of them with a \*. J.W.” Because Maddox assumed that Wesley had not corrected Fletcher’s first edition, he imagined that Wesley’s intent was to produce an abridged edition in order to distance himself from Fletcher’s views. As a result, Maddox struggled to minimize Fletcher’s frequent use of “baptism with the Holy Spirit” in this special edition.<sup>13</sup>

Comparing Fletcher’s original edition with Wesley’s special edition, I found one incidental instance where Wesley deleted the phrase “baptism with the Spirit,” only because he had deleted an entire section which was tangential to Fletcher’s larger argument.<sup>14</sup> The other instances remain intact, including the distinction between “imperfect Christians, who, like the apostles before the day of Pentecost, are yet strangers to the great outpouring of the Spirit” and those who live in the dispensation of the Spirit who “are filled with righteousness, peace, and joy, in thus *believing* [in the Holy Ghost].”<sup>15</sup> It is explicit in Wesley’s special edition that perfect Christians are baptized with the Spirit, while imperfect Christians are not. This distinction is not an incidental exposition that Wesley reluctantly allowed. It forms the core of Fletcher’s “Essay on Truth” in *The Equal Check* as it is highlighted in the “First Appendix” and the “Second Appendix.” Maddox imagines that this abridged edition does not use the so-called “personal recapitulation mode,” although he admits Wesley “let stand” a few passages which did use this model. But if Wesley was so quick to abridge *The Equal Check* in order to delete the alleged objectionable parts, why would he “let stand” anything that contradicted his ideas on this important point? Fletcher quoted extensively from Wesley’s sermon on “Christian Perfection,” insisting that is where he got his idea for his doctrine of dispensations, and Wesley did not delete this claim.<sup>16</sup> The whole point of Fletcher’s doctrine of dispensations is to call believers today to a Pentecost-like experience, “the opening of this dispensation in our hearts,” which “requires on our part, not only faith in Christ, but a

<sup>13</sup>John Fletcher, *The First Part of An Equal Check to Pharisaism and Antinomianism*, abridged and edited by John Wesley, the third edition (London: G. Paramore, 1795), 172-173. Cited hereafter as Wesley’s Special Edition.

<sup>14</sup>*The Works of John Fletcher*, (New York : Phillips & Hunt, 1883), 1:536.

<sup>15</sup>*An Equal Check* (Wesley’s edition), 169-170.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 168.

peculiar faith in 'the Promise of the Father;' a faith this, which has the *Holy Ghost* for its great object."<sup>17</sup>

This theme sets the tone of everything that Fletcher wrote in Wesley's special edition. Fletcher noted elsewhere that it was Wesley's custom in all his writings to cut out things in his manuscript that he disagreed with, and so *The Checks* quite literally were already edited and corrected versions, although they were not all "shortened" versions, as *The Equal Check*. It was shortly after the publication of the *Equal Check* that Wesley praised his doctrine of dispensations (which culminated in the baptism with the Holy Spirit) as the very reason why God had raised up Fletcher among the Methodists.<sup>18</sup> It would have been impossible for Wesley to praise Fletcher's doctrine of dispensations and not also affirm his doctrine of the baptism with the Holy Spirit because that constituted it climax. Wesley once noted that no one since the days of the Apostles had written with greater clarity than Fletcher had,<sup>19</sup> and there is no evidence that Wesley ever changed his mind. Maddox imagines that Wesley supported Fletcher's dispensationalism only because it corresponded with his "dispensation of grace" model. If so, why did Wesley not offer this qualifier? The answer seems obvious—because Wesley did not know anything about such a qualifier.

I have read *The Equal Check* many times, including Wesley's special edition and the original version. It is my view that it is not the case that Wesley deleted supposedly objectionable parts from it. There were four essays that made up the (the first part of) *An Equal Check*, and only "The Essay on Truth" developed the Pentecostal focus of Christian perfection. Yet, the other essays received considerable shortening as well, while the focus on the Pentecostal interpretation of sanctification in "The Essay on Truth" remained completely intact. Soon after Wesley's special edition was published, Fletcher pointedly said: "My friend [Wesley] . . . rests the doctrine of Christian perfection in being baptized and filled with the Spirit." He further noted: "This is Mr. Wesley's sentiment."<sup>20</sup> No friend-

<sup>17</sup>John Fletcher, *An Equal Check* (Wesley's Special Edition), 170-171.

<sup>18</sup>Telford, *Letters*, 6:137 (to Elizabeth Ritchie, January 17, 1775).

<sup>19</sup>Telford, *Letters*, 6:79-80 (to Mrs. Bennis, May 2, 1774).

<sup>20</sup>Fletcher, "An Essay on the Doctrine of the New Birth," *The Asbury Theological Journal*, 53:1 (Spring 1998), 46-47. Ironically, in the 1770 Fragment, Wesley complained that the baptism with the Spirit/Christian perfection was a "sentiment . . . utterly new." Now Fletcher says it is "Mr. Wesley's sentiment."

ship was more intimate than theirs, and I believe that Fletcher's report of Wesley's feelings is trustworthy. Wesley's asterisks in *The Equal Check* also confirm Fletcher's perception.

2. Maddox reported that "Wesley chose to issue an *edited* version so quickly" because of "continuing fears about perceived endorsement of every opinion expressed in Fletcher's original text." There is nothing in the literature that implies such a disposition.<sup>21</sup>

3. Maddox imagines that Wesley had a lot of private reservations and personal qualifiers about Fletcher's theology, but where is the data to support this perception? There are no "indirect indicators" for this negative judgment after *The Checks* were completed. Quite to the contrary, Wesley continued to express exuberance about Fletcher's theology. This can be seen in a letter to Fletcher, March 22, 1775. Wesley wrote: "I know not whether your last tract [*The Last Check*] was not as convincing as anything you have written."<sup>22</sup> This *Last Check* (which was Fletcher's main exposition of Christian perfection similar to Wesley's *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*) highlighted the baptism with the Holy Spirit even more extensively than *The Equal Check*, and it apparently was so "convincing" that Wesley had no complaint against it—unlike his earlier prejudgment expressed in the 1770 Fragment. It was apparently "convincing" to Francis Asbury as well. *The Last Check* was printed in Philadelphia in 1796, and it was also printed in New York the same year under the title, *Christian Perfection* (and in the following years—1837, 1844, 1852, 1855, 1857, 1861, 1875). Appropriately, Wesley's *Plain Account of Christian Perfection* and Fletcher's *Last Check* were printed

<sup>21</sup>Maddox's footnote 39 misconstrues Wesley's remarks about not having the right to make corrections to Fletcher's works. Cf. Wesley, *Works* (Jackson), 10:438, "Some Remarks Mr. Hill's 'Farrago Double-Distilled.'" Notice that Wesley admitted that he let stand Fletcher's remark about mysticism in *The Fourth Check* "perhaps because I thought it an harmless one, and capable of a good meaning." The implication being that he could have changed it as its editor if he had wanted to. On the other hand, Wesley admitted that he did not have the arbitrary right to do with Fletcher's manuscripts anything that he wanted to do. In fact, it was Wesley's custom to ask Fletcher to make changes which he thought needed to be made, though on occasions Wesley did make changes without Fletcher's prior approval which Wesley referred to as "here and there made some small corrections." Cf. Telford, *Letters*, 6:174-175, (to John Fletcher, August 18, 1775). Unless Wesley made changes or asked him to make changes, Fletcher assumed that Wesley agreed with his writings altogether.

<sup>22</sup>Telford, *Letters*, 6:146 (to John Fletcher, March 22, 1775).

together in the same volume on occasions in the nineteenth century, both in Britain and America.

4. and 5. Maddox is incorrect when he says that "Wesley's private complaint to Fletcher about collapsing the distinction between infant and adult Christian life was in direct response to the *Equal Check*. First, Wesley did not fault Fletcher for "collapsing the distinction between infant and adult Christian life," but for implying that "babes in Christ" had not "received [the witness of] the Spirit," which Fletcher corrected. Second, this disagreement came in 1775 as Wesley was editing Fletcher's manuscript on *The Last Check*, not in response to *The Equal Check* as Maddox reports.<sup>23</sup> Wesley's complaint has nothing to do with Wesley special edition of *The Equal Check*.

With Wesley's special edition of *The Equal Check* (which was subsequently reprinted in Britain and America), it was inevitable that "the baptism with the Spirit" would be an encoded phrase for Christian perfection. Wesley's abridged edition insured it had a wider reading audience. One of those persons who read it was Thomas Coke, who noted that "The Essay on Truth," was a major factor in making him a Methodist, and Coke also used "the baptism with the Holy Ghost" as an encoded phrase for Christian perfection. Two widely read devotional books are the diaries of Hester Ann Rogers and Mary Bosanquet Fletcher, which went through numerous reprintings. Both of these used "baptism with the Holy Ghost" to describe their own experience of Christian perfection.<sup>24</sup> These two women were dear friends of Wesley and were living in his home, taking care of him at the time of his death. These two women were also his most respected women class leaders. After Fletcher's *Checks* in 1775, I have found no evidence to show that there was a view of Christian perfection contrary to Fletcher's theology. Nor is there a single letter that I have found (or data of any kind) that Wesley had private conversations with Fletcher about his alleged reservations on the use of "the baptism with the Holy Spirit" (as Maddox claims). It is a fair assumption that if Adam Clarke reported that he heard Wesley preaching on the baptism of the Holy Spirit, it would have been consistent with what his closest friends

<sup>23</sup>Telford, *Letters*, 6:146, (to John Fletcher, March 22, 1775).

<sup>24</sup>*Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Hester Ann Rogers*, with an introduction by Thomas O. Summers (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1870), 62; Henry Moore, *The Life of Mary Fletcher* (New York: Hunt and Eaton, 1817), 125.

understood by it, such as these two women and Fletcher himself. If it represented an entirely different perspective, I believe Adam Clarke would have noted that fact, since he too embraced Fletcher's understanding.

6. Maddox says we do not know why Wesley asserted that there was no difference between himself and Fletcher in 1775. But we do know exactly why Wesley said they were in agreement because of two letters that Wesley wrote Fletcher regarding his manuscript on *The Last Check*. The first letter shows that Wesley requested Fletcher to change his view of the meaning of "receiving of the Spirit," and the second letter shows that Wesley was fully satisfied with his revision. Since 1771, when Wesley's debate with Benson and Fletcher ended, this is the only time where Wesley expressed a difference of opinion with Fletcher on a theological matter. Here is the sequence of events. In March 1775, Fletcher gave Wesley his manuscript, *The Last Check to Antinomianism*. On March 22, 1775, Wesley returned Fletcher's manuscript and informed him that their views were "a little different, though not opposite" regarding the meaning of the phrase, "receiving the Holy Spirit." For Wesley the primary (though not exclusive) meaning of the phrase "receive the Holy Spirit," was to receive the witness of the Spirit. Wesley had told Benson in 1771 that his connection between "receiving the Spirit" and Christian perfection was "Mr. Fletcher's late discovery," but now in 1775 Wesley toned it down to say to their views were "a little different," since Wesley now knew that Fletcher made a distinction between "holiness begun" in justification and "finished holiness" in entire sanctification.

Even so, Wesley wanted Fletcher to affirm that "babes in Christ" have the witness of the Spirit in some measure, however small. Wesley took the phrase "little children" from the First Epistle of John where a distinction is made among little children, young men, and fathers (1 John 2:12-14), and it is John's letter which so much emphasizes that the "Spirit is the witness because he is the Spirit of truth (1 John 5:7). That is why Wesley (after reviewing the manuscript, *The Last Check*) told Fletcher to take another look at John's comments about "little children." Wesley equated "receive the Spirit" with the witness of the Spirit in this dispute (a point which Maddox downplays). Here is what Wesley said to Fletcher in that letter:

It seems our views of Christian Perfection are a little different, though not opposite. It is certain every babe in Christ has

received the Holy Ghost, and the Spirit witnesses with his spirit that he is a child of God. [Notice here that Wesley equates “received the Holy Ghost” and “the Spirit witnesses with his spirit”]. But he has not obtained Christian perfection. Perhaps you have not considered St. John’s threefold distinction of Christian believers: little children, young men, and fathers. All of these had received the Holy Ghost [that is, they had received the witness of the Spirit]; but only the fathers were perfected in love.<sup>25</sup>

Wesley expected Fletcher to make an adjustment in his thinking, and Fletcher consented. Significantly, Wesley expressed no disagreement with Fletcher’s use of “the baptism with the Holy Spirit.” Fletcher had prominently featured “the baptism with the Holy Spirit” in many different sections in this manuscript as the means for being made perfect in love. He had specifically highlighted a Pentecostal interpretation of perfection with quotations from Wesley’s *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*. Wesley did not say a word of disagreement about his use of “the baptism with the Holy Spirit,” though he insisted that Fletcher must change his view on the meaning of “receiving the Spirit.”

If Wesley disagreed with the link between Pentecost and full sanctification, if Wesley disagreed with the use of the baptism with the Holy Spirit, if Wesley thought that Fletcher had misappropriated his own writings by giving them a Pentecostal view of sanctification, then Wesley would have said so, even as he did in reference to the meaning of “receiving the Spirit.” And he would have asked (expected!) Fletcher in this same manuscript to revise his mistaken notion. Instead, Wesley wrote on August 18, 1775: “I have now received all your papers, and here and there made some small corrections.” Wesley goes on to say: “I do not perceive that you have granted too much [to babes in Christ by allowing that they too have received the Spirit], or that there is any difference between us.”<sup>26</sup> In other words, Wesley was totally satisfied that in his revised manuscript Fletcher affirmed that justified believers may receive (the witness of) the Holy Spirit that they have been forgiven and regenerated.

The difference between Fletcher and Wesley over this phrase “receiving the Holy Spirit” was more verbal than substantive, though Wesley viewed it as a substantive matter. Fletcher believed that the ordi-

<sup>25</sup>Telford, *Letters*, 6:146, (to John Fletcher, March 22, 1775).

<sup>26</sup>Telford, *Letters*, 6:174-175, (to John Fletcher, August 18, 1775).

nary meaning of the phrase “receive the Holy Spirit” was like a technical phrase used interchangeably with “filled with the Spirit,” and “baptized with the Spirit.” For Fletcher, “to receive the Spirit” implied to *receive the fullness* of the Spirit according to the Christian dispensation, and in his revised manuscript Fletcher still linked the phrases “baptise me with the Holy Ghost: fill me with the Spirit!”<sup>27</sup> while qualifying the phrase “receive the Holy Spirit” to mean that the Spirit “is received in its fullness” in order to satisfy Wesley’s concern that babes in Christ have also received the witness of the Spirit.<sup>28</sup>

Maddox speculated that Wesley permitted “baptism with the Holy Spirit” as “an allowable opinion,” but Wesley says there is no “difference between us” (despite the fact that Wesley had earlier ridiculed the Benson/Fletcher idea of the “baptism of the Holy Ghost” in the 1770 Fragment). What Maddox fails to account for is that Wesley began publishing the complete works of Fletcher in 1788, including his special edition of *The Equal Check* and also his *Last Check*, which is even more Pentecostal in focus. This edition was completed in 1795.<sup>29</sup> If Wesley felt uncomfortable with Fletcher’s views, why did he not issue an abridged edition of *The Last Check*, cutting out its numerous Pentecostal references. The answer seems obvious—for the same reason he did not cut them out of *The Equal Check*. Wesley edited and corrected both *The Equal Check* and

<sup>27</sup>*The Works of John Fletcher*, 2: 526, “Last Check to Antinomianism.”

<sup>28</sup>Fletcher, *Works*, 2:630, “Last Check to Antinomianism.” Cf. Fletcher, “An Essay on the Doctrine of the New Birth,” *The Asbury Theological Journal*, 53.1 (Spring, 1998): 45.

<sup>29</sup>In Wesley’s “Last Will and Testament,” Wesley specified that the Paramores be retained for publishing a number of books following his death. Cf. Wesley, *Works* (Jackson) 4:500, “Mr. Wesley’s Last Will and Testament.” This special edition appears to have been one of them, because they published it in 1795. This would indicate Wesley’s high praise of this book, and his desire that it be continued reading among the Methodists. In fact, Wesley had begun to publish the *Works of John William Fletcher* in 1788, and this edition was not completed until 1795. This 1788-1795 edition of *The Works of John Fletcher* was being published at the same time in America. Melvin Dieter owns a personal copy of this First American Edition. It is specifically titled “First American Edition,” and the first and second of the six volumes were published in 1791 by Joseph Crukshank in Philadelphia; Crukshank published the third volume in 1792; Parry Hall published the fourth volume in 1793; and Henry Tuckniss published volume five in 1794 and volume six in 1796 (all of these in Philadelphia). The first American edition of Fletcher’s *Works* included Wesley’s special edition of Fletcher’s *Equal Check*. Cf. *The National Union Catalogue*, 175:232, for a list of Fletcher’s published writings.

*The Last Check* before they were published. Maddox believes that Wesley “felt uncomfortable” with the concept of the “baptism with the Spirit,” that he “resisted it,” and “worries” about its impact, but Maddox nowhere provides evidence for this perception after 1771. If Maddox is relying on the 1770 Fragment as the basis of his argument against Fletcher, it hardly seems possible to say that this concept was “an allowable opinion.” In the 1770 Fragment, Wesley was more than just a little worried about it. He ridiculed it: “This sentiment, I think, is utterly new” (p. 16 No. 8). He further said: “It will never quit. . . . The thing I object to all along . . .” ([p.] 38). But in 1774, after editing and correcting Fletcher’s *Equal Check*, he issues a special edition of it and commends Fletcher’s Pentecostal interpretation of Christian perfection with his asterisk. And after his corrections of Fletcher’s *The Last Check*, he specifically noted his agreement with Fletcher’s views—after Fletcher had altered his wording on the meaning of “receiving the Spirit.”

Wesley only used “baptism with the Holy Ghost” two times in his published writings. Maddox discussed the latter use of it in the sermon “On the Church” and acknowledged that it included the concept of full sanctification, but with his curious qualification that it referred only to the original Pentecost Church model and not to a post-justification event thereafter. Wesley rarely used this particular phrase, probably for the same reason he said that he infrequently used “conversion”—because it was rarely used in Scripture.<sup>30</sup> Along this line, Fletcher noted that Wesley’s “standard sermons” represented a semantic difference from his Pentecostal focus (a point that Wesley agreed with because he did not edit it out of the manuscript),<sup>31</sup> but Wesley’s later sermons affirmed explicitly a personal connection between Christian perfection and Pentecost.

7. Maddox is mistaken in his interpretation of Benson’s article in *The Arminian Magazine*. He unnaturally forces Benson into his narrowly defined “Pristine Church” model. Maddox says that “Wesley would have little trouble endorsing this claim,” that “the Spirit’s baptism (coming at one’s initial conversion) *can* instantaneously bring about full renewal.” At least Maddox recognized that Wesley was endorsing Benson’s use of the “baptism with the Holy Ghost.” Benson’s purpose of writing this essay

<sup>30</sup>*The Works of John Wesley, The Appeals to Men of Reason and Religion and Certain Related Open Letters*, ed. Gerald R. Cragg, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 11:368

<sup>31</sup>Fletcher, *Works*, 2:647, “The Last Check.”

was to encourage sanctified believers not to become careless in their relationship with Christ. Though they had been fully sanctified through the baptism with the Holy Spirit, “those who love Him *perfectly*, may love him *more perfectly* still.” To suggest that Benson or Wesley understood this as conversion-initiation is implausible.<sup>32</sup> It also contradicts Benson’s testimony (1777) that as a justified believer he sought to be “baptized with the Spirit.”<sup>33</sup>

8. Maddox thinks that Benson did not employ Pentecostal sanctification in his two sermons on sanctification that he published in 1782, but he did. There Benson writes: “So that, in order to our *full, perfect, and entire* Sanctification, we must *be filled with the Spirit*, must receive all those measures of him purchased for us, and promised to us; must *be filled with all the fullness of God, must dwell in God, and God in us*.”<sup>34</sup> Reading through his diaries will also show that Benson continued to use this Pentecostal imagery, including “baptism with the Holy Ghost.”

9. Maddox says he could find “no other *articles* relating Christian perfection to the baptism of the Spirit” in this volume of *The Arminian Magazine*. But there is Wesley’s sermon in that same issue. Though Wesley did not use the precise phrase “the baptism with the Holy Spirit,” he used “the descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost” to speak of the possibility of perfect love. There also is a letter by Fletcher to Wesley that Wesley published in *The Arminian Magazine* in January, 1782, addressing the issue of mysticism (a concern of Maddox). In this letter, Fletcher said:

Nothing throws *unscriptural* mysticism down like holding out the promise of the Father, and the fullness of the Spirit, to be received *now, by faith* in the two Promisers, the *Father* and the *Son*. Ah! what is the *penal fire* of the Mystics, to the *burning love* of the *Spirit*, revealing the glorious power of the *Father and the Son*, according to John xiv.26, and filling us with all the fullness of God? Plain Scripture is better than all Mystic refinements.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>“Thoughts on Perfection,” *The Arminian Magazine* 4 (January, 1778), 553.

<sup>33</sup>*Memoirs of the Rev. Joseph Benson*, ed. James MacDonald (New York: Bangs and Mason, 1823), 25, 52.

<sup>34</sup>Benson, *Two Sermons on Sanctification* (Leeds, 1782), 29.

<sup>35</sup>“A Letter from John Fletcher to John Wesley,” *The Arminian Magazine* 5 (January 1782): 49.

Does this not show that Wesley agreed with Fletcher's so-called "Recapitulation" model? Otherwise, why would Wesley have published this letter sent personally to him?

Let me cite one more instance of Wesley's approval of the idea of a personal Pentecost. It is a "remarkable" testimony that he published in *The Arminian Magazine* with an enthusiastic recommendation. It is a testimony of one who has experienced justifying faith and is now praying for entire sanctification. It links "the descent of the Holy Ghost on the Apostles" with full sanctification, not justifying faith. It is given with Wesley's blessing, and it shows that Wesley affirmed the idea of a personal Pentecost-like experience.

This morning I thought much of *the descent of the Holy Ghost on the Apostles, and prayed that He might rest upon me* [italics mine]. But I found little answer till the singing of the first hymn, when his Spirit made me deeply sensible of his presence. I then pleaded with him, and that with many tears, to make me a partaker of his sanctifying love, by removing for ever the bitter root of pride, self-will and unbelief. . . . In that instant I felt the Spirit of God enter into my heart with mighty power, and as it were literally accomplish that promise, *I will take away the heart of stone, and give you a heart of flesh*: the old heart seeming to be taken away, and God himself taking possession of my soul in the fulness of love.<sup>36</sup>

There is ample evidence showing that Wesley's views came to be the same as Fletcher's on this subject. Ironically, Fletcher claimed his interpretation was only making explicit what was in implicit in Wesley's so-called *Standard Sermons*.

Whether or not one agrees with Fletcher's and the later Wesley's Pentecostal emphasis is a separate matter from recognizing their agreement on this issue. So far as I have been able to determine, no one imagined that Fletcher's Pentecostal interpretation of Christian perfection was something that Wesley was "uncomfortable with"—until now. If this "late discovery" is true, where is the evidence?

10. Maddox claims that "Wesley went to great pains" to delete "all of the suggestions" about "the indwelling of the Spirit" out of the 1772

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<sup>36</sup>"An Extract from the Journal of Mr. G. C.," *The Arminian Magazine*, 6 (May 1783), 244-245.

edition of “The Principles of a Methodist.” Maddox thinks that Wesley once adopted an explicit post-justification concept of the “indwelling of the Spirit” under the influence of the Moravian, Christian David.<sup>37</sup> This view was expressed in “The Principles of a Methodist,” but supposedly he abandoned this Pentecostal view shortly after his break with the Moravians, and having recovered from that view, he became afraid that Fletcher and Benson were espousing it again in 1770. But Wesley did not recover from this view because it formed part of the debate with Count Zinzendorf in 1741;<sup>38</sup> it also is implicit in *The Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (1965), where Wesley described Christian perfection as a daily experience, noting that “God hardly gives his Spirit [italics mine] even to those whom He has established in grace, if they do not pray for it on all occasions, not only once, but many times.”<sup>39</sup> Is it surprising that early Methodists (like Captain Webb) spoke of entire sanctification as “having the Spirit”? They, like Fletcher, learned this language from Wesley.

Maddox says that Wesley went to great pains to delete all suggestions about “the indwelling of the Spirit” out of the 1772 edition. This is incorrect since it is still retained in one place: “He may be justified . . . and not have the indwelling of the Spirit.”<sup>40</sup> This edition was a printer’s nightmare for Wesley because it carelessly misprinted and omitted numerous items. Jackson has an informative discussion of this problem, noting that Wesley was particularly annoyed with “the inexcusable negligence of the printer and corrector.”<sup>41</sup> Frank Baker has noted that this edition was “more poorly printed than many of his writings.” Hence, Wesley “never followed these texts in any later editions of his writings.”<sup>42</sup> Seeming to be unaware of the printing difficulties with this 1771-1774 edition, Maddox hypothesizes that Wesley dropped this phrase “indwelling of the Spirit” in 1772 because he was worried about the way Benson and Fletcher were speaking of a post-justification experience of the indwelling of the Spirit

<sup>37</sup>*The Works of John Wesley, The Methodist Societies*, ed. Rupert E. Davies (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 9:60, “The Principles of a Methodist.”

<sup>38</sup>Cf. *The Works of John Wesley, Journal and Diaries*, II (1738-43), ed. W. Reginald Ward (Journal) and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Diaries), (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 19:211-215.

<sup>39</sup>*Works* (Jackson), 11:437, “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection.”

<sup>40</sup>Davies, *The Methodist Societies*, 9:60, “The Principles of a Methodist.”

<sup>41</sup>*Works* (Jackson), 1:iv, “Preface to the Third Edition.”

<sup>42</sup>Frank Baker in “Appendix A,” in Outler, *Sermons*, 4:421.

and the baptism with the Spirit. He then suggests that Wesley reinstated this phrase in the 1777 edition because "he did not sense it necessary now to covertly excise this endorsement as he had in 1772." Continuing his circular reasoning, Maddox offers the view that the re-appearance of "He may be justified . . . and not have the indwelling of the Spirit" in the 1777 edition "*might* [his italics] be because he now agreed *again* [italics mine] with the 'personal recapitulation' model, but lacking other strong evidence of such a change I take it to show instead that this topic was not presently as focal to his concerns as it had been in 1772." I insist instead that the reason why this phrase re-appeared in all four instances in the 1777 edition was because Wesley discarded the 1772 edition because of its printing errors. It had nothing to do with alleged fears about Benson and Fletcher.

11. Maddox jumps from the final rift with the Moravians in 1740 to the 1770 Fragment, asserting that Wesley was opposed to using the phrases, "indwelling of the Spirit" and "baptism with the Spirit" as a designation for Christian perfection. He asserts: "His consistent response from at least 1745 on was to insist that *all* Christians have 'received' the Holy Spirit or have been 'baptized' with the Spirit." His main source is Wesley's *Appeals*, but I have looked in vain for the phrase "the indwelling" of the Spirit" in the *Appeals*. Here Wesley is defending himself largely against the charge of enthusiasm brought against him by Anglican clergy. He often used the phrase "receiving the Spirit" for justification, but I have not found a single instance where Wesley used the phrase "the baptism of the Holy Ghost" for conversion-initiation in any of his published works. He used it once in *The Appeals* to denote a post-repentance experience, saying explicitly that he agreed with the Quakers on this issue. He says: "There is still a wider difference in *some* point between us and the people usually termed Quakers. But not in *these* points." Wesley then immediately follows this with: "The Spirit alone *reveals* all truth, and *inspires* all holiness; that by his inspiration men attain *perfect love*."<sup>43</sup> I am not saying Wesley here in 1745 shows that he has developed a consistent view of the baptism with the Holy Spirit, linking it to perfect love, but it is understandable why Fletcher would claim that Wesley's views, when altogether consistent on this issue, would

<sup>43</sup>Cragg, *The Appeals*, 11:253-254, "A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, Part II."

reflect such a view. But it is historiographically incorrect that Maddox should claim Wesley consistently used “the baptism of the Holy Ghost” for conversion-initiation from 1745 onward throughout his life.<sup>44</sup>

12. Maddox misreads how Wesley and Fletcher interpreted Pentecost as being available today. He has proposed three models for helping us to understand this issue. His models, especially the Pristine Church and the Recapitulation models, are configured too literally to represent either Wesley or Fletcher. I would like to propose these alternative models—the “Salvation History” model, the “Easter/Pentecost” model, and the “Personal Appropriation” model. The Salvation History model, has received considerable attention in contemporary theology with Oscar Cullmann, Jürgen Moltmann, and Wolfhart Pannenberg as its ablest exponents. It affirms that God has been progressively revealed as Trinitarian Persons in the course of salvation history.

The Easter/Pentecost model has received considerable attention in the ecumenical, liturgical renewal movement which has led to the development of a new baptismal liturgy adopted now in most denominations. It recognizes that the larger meaning of Christian baptism is more than just the rite of water baptism, but also includes the rite of the laying on of hands and/or chrismation. These two rites of Christian baptism are performed as distinct rituals, but are both part of the larger meaning of Christian baptism.

The reason for this new liturgical development is related to the new information available today which was not available to the sixteenth-century Reformers. This new information shows that Christian baptism included both water baptism and baptism with the Spirit as two distinct but inseparably related moments of Christian initiation in primitive Christianity,<sup>45</sup> even though it is believed that there was at least a five minutes interval between the two ceremonies. After the fifth century, there was a space of many years between the two rites. Now the two rites are being brought back together in close proximity in the baptismal liturgy. Pannen-

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<sup>44</sup>Wesley’s brief comments in *The Explanatory Notes on the New Testament* on the various Pentecostal passages in Acts are too ambiguous to give a definite interpretation, though Fletcher interpreted them according to his attempt to make Wesley “consistent” on this issue.

<sup>45</sup>Gerard Austin, *Anointing with the Spirit, The Rite of Confirmation: The Use of Oil and Chrism* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1985), 92. Geoffrey Wainwright, *Worship with One Accord, Where Liturgy & Ecumenism Embrace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

berg, for example, has noted that if Luther had been aware of this new information derived from *The Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus*, he would have recognized the “sacramental” status of confirmation by virtue of its link to baptism.<sup>46</sup>

13. Maddox thinks that Wesley dropped confirmation (the rite of the Spirit) from the *Sunday Service* because he disagreed with its theological implication about a post-justification experience of the Spirit of Pentecost. On the contrary, Wesley said he supported it and encouraged others in his care to be confirmed whenever the bishop was present. He publicly noted in a reply to his critics that he promoted confirmation, along with other church practices, with “scrupulous exactness” as a loyal priest of the Church of England.<sup>47</sup> He acknowledged, however, in another context that it did not seem that Jesus ordained it as a sacrament.<sup>48</sup> That is the probable reason why he left it out of *The Sunday Service*. Some of Wesley’s closest friends (Hester Ann Rogers, Mary Bosanquet, and Adam Clarke) spoke of its beneficial influence in their lives. Fletcher once asked Wesley to seek permission from the archbishop to perform confirmation for the Methodists, and Fletcher often noted its link to Christian perfection.

One of the problems of confirmation in Western Christianity has been that, when it was separated in the fifth century from water baptism, its meaning was largely lost. Now it has been recovered by its re-incorporation into the liturgy of Christian baptism. I believe if Wesley had had access to the information available today, he too would have approved of its legitimate role in Christian baptism. Apparently the United Methodist Church believes this because this revision made its way into *The United Methodist Hymnal* in 1989, though its presence in the liturgy is still largely unknown by lay people, and some ministers still use the older liturgy out of habit. Up to this point, there was no liturgical foundation for Wesley’s doctrine of Christian perfection after Wesley deleted confirmation from *The Sunday Service*, but Wesley had no way of knowing what is now known about the rite of the Spirit as essential to the meaning of baptism.

14. Maddox is incorrect when he says the “standard through Christian history” is that regeneration-initiation is linked to Pentecost. The seal

<sup>46</sup>Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 267-268.

<sup>47</sup>Cragg, *The Appeals*, 11:79-80, “An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion.”

<sup>48</sup>Wesley, *Works* (Jackson) 10:116-117, “A Roman Catechism.”

of the Spirit<sup>49</sup> was signified in the rite of the Spirit, connecting Pentecost primarily with the perfection (sanctification) of the Christian life, while water baptism (Easter) symbolized forgiveness of sins (justification). Dom Gregory Dix, the most influential scholar in the liturgical renewal movement, noted the Jewish origins of Christian baptism and showed that water baptism and physical circumcision in Jewish Proselyte baptism became respectively water baptism and baptism with the Spirit in Christian baptism.<sup>50</sup> Fletcher made the same connection between Jewish Proselyte baptism and Christian baptism, noting that Wesley's view of the circumcision of the heart (= Christian perfection) and the baptism with the Spirit were the same in meaning.<sup>51</sup> This is a view which Maddox and Wesley scholars in general need to explore.

For Wesley and Fletcher, the "Personal Appropriation" model is first and foremost sacramental/liturgical. Its basic assumption is that the two primary events of salvation history, Easter and Pentecost, are shared with us today through baptism and Holy Communion. Only moments after his episcopal ordination, Fletcher immediately made his way to West-Street Chapel to help Wesley serve Holy Communion to the overflow<sup>52</sup> crowds. Wesley once commented: "Mr. Fletcher helped me again. How wonderful are the ways of God! When my bodily strength failed, and none in England were able and willing to assist me, He sent me help from the mountains of Switzerland; and an help meet for me in every respect: where could I have found such another?"<sup>53</sup> Fletcher's daily ministry included serving Holy Communion in churches, in homes, and in the open air. This was the primary way that Christian perfection was attained, and it was the primary way it was retained. Preaching services also constituted a primary means of sanctifying grace. Testimonies of those who fell to their knees (or were sitting in their seats) seeking Christian perfection while Wesley was preaching are common in the literature. They did not have what we today know as "altar calls." That was a phenomenon of the American frontier.

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<sup>49</sup>Wesley equated the seal of the Spirit with Christian perfection.

<sup>50</sup>Gregory Dix, *Confirmation, or Laying on of Hands?* (London: S.P.C.K., 1936), 16.

<sup>51</sup>Fletcher, "An Essay on the Doctrine of the New Birth," *The Asbury Theological Journal*, 53.1 (Spring, 1998): 35-36.

<sup>52</sup>Davies, *Works*, 9:466, "Short History of People Called Methodists"; cf. Benson, *The Life of the Rev. John W. De La Flechere*, 42.

<sup>53</sup>Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries*, 21:89 (March 20).

15. Maddox takes Fletcher out of his Anglican context, and that is why he assumes that Fletcher was tainted with quietistic mysticism. An example of this is Maddox's suggestion that Fletcher "typically highlights only the *passive* means of prayer and faith." This is not true. It is true that John and Charles Wesley, as well as Fletcher, had mystical tendencies that they had to keep in check. Wesley noted that because Fletcher was a self-effacing person, he did not keep a personal journal. Wesley believed that such a mystical quality kept us from knowing more about his personal life.<sup>54</sup> On the other hand, Fletcher rejected introspective mystical theology. His wife once noted that Fletcher called Baron Swedenborg's mystical theology "a snake in the grass."<sup>55</sup> Fletcher's regard for the sacraments, especially Holy Communion, was equally as important to him as to Wesley and any other High Anglican. Fletcher regularly used the liturgy and the homilies of the Church of England as a basis for his sermons. On one occasion, he mentioned to Joseph Benson the importance of maintaining an emphasis on the "Word of Truth" along with "the doctrine of the Spirit" in order to keep from falling into the imbalance of mysticism.<sup>56</sup>

Reading Fletcher in a selective manner as Maddox has done has caused him to overlook those places where Fletcher highlights the corporate nature of Christian worship as the place where believers experience the means of grace. In *The Last Check*, Fletcher shows that sanctifying grace is primarily experienced in worship as believers join together in praise of God. He cites the corporate experience of the disciples on the day of Pentecost when they were filled with the Holy Spirit and of the believers at Samaria, "while Peter and John prayed with them, and laid their hands upon them."<sup>57</sup> I believe this "Personal Appropriation" model fits better what Fletcher believed than Maddox's narrowly defined "Recapitulation" model.

<sup>54</sup>Cf. Telford, *Letters* 8:93 (to Sarah Wesley (September 26, 1788)).

<sup>55</sup>This was Fletcher's assessment of Swedenborg's theology as he became acquainted with his writings. Henry Moore, *The Life of Mrs. Mary Fletcher* (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1880), 340. Fraser misinterprets Fletcher as embracing "Swedenborgianism" (cf. M. Robert Fraser, Ph. D. dissertation from Vanderbilt University, *Strains in the Understandings of Christian Perfection in Early British Methodism*, reproduced by University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1992), 393. Apparently Maddox has been influenced by this wrong perception.

<sup>56</sup>Benson, *The Life of the Rev. John W. De La Flechere*, 166.

<sup>57</sup>Fletcher, *Works*, 2:648.

16. Maddox thinks that Fletcher believed later Christians “had to be present at the original Pentecost, or that they must necessarily experience an *event* just like Pentecost in their lives.” After his death, *The Christian Observer* accused Fletcher of this kind of literalism: “To expect another Pentecost, as Mr. Fletcher evidently did, is, as we conceive, wholly unscriptural, and can tend only to spiritual delusion.” Joseph Benson, who had been like Fletcher’s ministerial understudy, responded with a vigorous defense:

This is a point which I can speak upon with assurance, having very frequently conversed and corresponded with Mr. Fletcher upon it, so that I knew his views thereon perfectly. Now the questions are, What did he expect himself? What did he teach others to expect? And what did he himself experience? “He expected,” says the conductors of that Miscellany, “another Pentecost.” In some sense he did; but not in the sense they imagine. He expected a Pentecost, not literally, but figuratively speaking. . . . He expected only those ordinary operations and graces of the Spirit in a full and mature state which the holy Scriptures declare to be essential to the character of a true and perfect Christian.<sup>58</sup>

It appears that Maddox has not adequately reflected on the New Testament meaning of “participation” (2 Cor. 10:16). What does Christian memory mean? What do symbols mean? What does liturgy mean? These are issues which Wesley and Fletcher could help us with if we see them in their Anglican context instead of reading their writings in isolation from it. A frequent difficulty with those of us brought up in the Holiness Movement is that we are extremely literalistic, and Maddox superimposes such literalism on to Fletcher.

17. Another mistaken proposition is Maddox’s view that Wesley identified regeneration-initiation with the meaning of Pentecost. He concedes (through email exchange) that the disciples were justified by faith before Pentecost, but they are the only exception due to their unique position in the dispensation of grace. Wesley identified justification with Easter (that one is “justified by the blood of Christ”) and sanctification with Pentecost (one is “sanctified through the Spirit”). Wesley and

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<sup>58</sup>Joseph Benson, *The Life of the Rev. John W. De la Flechere* (New York: Lane & Scott, 1850), 389-390.

Fletcher affirmed that Easter and Pentecost are distinct but inseparably related events, so that Pentecost represented the completion of the work of salvation begun in the Easter event. This is why it is wrong to think of justifying faith and entire sanctification as separated events, though they are distinct. In justifying faith (Easter) one is already enjoying the benefits of sanctification through the Spirit (Pentecost), and in entire sanctification (Pentecost) one is reaping the fullness of the benefits of Jesus' death/resurrection (Easter).

18. Minimizing the Pentecostal motif in early Methodism after 1776, Maddox mistakenly says that there was "a greater divergence of views" and tensions over doctrinal issues among "Wesley's eighteenth-century colleagues." This is true prior to 1771. Certainly Wesley thought Benson and Fletcher in 1770-1771 had gotten involved with this Moravian error, but it is not true that Methodism suffered from serious theological tensions after 1775 when Fletcher's *Checks* had been completed. Maddox admits that "this issue faded from the focus of their interaction." To be sure, there were personal tensions and serious conflicts that often rattled the Methodists, but Fletcher's writings virtually settled all theological arguments for Wesley's Methodist followers, as often is noted by Methodist historians.<sup>59</sup>

Fletcher's writings became required reading for Wesley's preachers.<sup>60</sup> Wesley continued to press Fletcher to become his successor after *The Checks* had been completed. Fletcher responded in a lengthy letter (January 9, 1776) to Wesley's appeal: "But your recommending me to the societies as one who might succeed you . . . is a step to which I could by no means consent."<sup>61</sup> Why would Wesley be so insistent on Fletcher being his successor if he felt so negatively about the concept of the baptism of

<sup>59</sup>William C. Larrabee, *Wesley and his Collaborers*, ed. B. F. Tefft, (New York; Carlton & Lanahan, 1851), 2:256; Abel Stevens, *The History of the Religious Movement of the Eighteenth Century, Called Methodism* (London: George Watson, 1864) 2:55; John Fletcher Hurst, *John Wesley the Methodist* (New York; The Methodist Book Concern, 1903), 204-205.

<sup>60</sup>Robert E. Chiles writes: "In the early years Wesley was regarded as the spiritual father of the church, and his writings, along with those of John Fletcher and the hymns of Charles Wesley, supplied the standards for theological judgment and belief." *Theological Transition in American Methodism* (New York: University Press of America, Inc., 1983), 38

<sup>61</sup>A letter contained in a large portfolio, called the "Fletcher Volume" (p. 103), in the Fletcher archival collection in the John Rylands University Library of Manchester.

the Holy Spirit, which was Fletcher's primary doctrinal motif? If Wesley "resisted" Fletcher's views (as Maddox thinks), why would Francis Asbury require his American preachers to study Fletcher's writings. These writings were first published in America in 1791 and they remained a standard textbook in the conference course of study until 1880.<sup>62</sup>

I have found no evidence where the basic Wesleyan distinctives, including Fletcher's Pentecostal motif, were in debate or created tensions in Methodism from 1775 until well into the second half of nineteenth-century American Methodism, and even then, it was not a dispute over whether Fletcher misinterpreted Wesley. The doctrinal complaints after 1775 were that some Methodists were too indifferent about them. So where is the evidence for the "greater divergence of views" that is found in Methodism since the 1770s? Maddox cites himself and M. Robert Fraser, who is to be credited for making the significant discovery of the undated Wesley Fragment, which indeed helps to place the 1770-1771 controversy in proper perspective.<sup>63</sup> Fraser's really fine doctoral dissertation has identified the "strains" and "conflicts" in early British Methodism up to and including 1771, but his work discloses no serious doctrinal conflict thereafter. John L. Peters and Robert E. Childs show that American Methodism was uniform in its doctrinal beliefs until the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>64</sup>

19. Another historiographical problem can be seen in the way that Maddox misconstrues Wesley's sermon "On Faith" as if Wesley intentionally redefined Fletcher's doctrine of dispensations. On the contrary, Wesley praised Fletcher's doctrine of four dispensations, noting that his intention was "to draw some practical inferences" from it. With regard to the faith that is typical of those like John the Baptist, he notes that "Mr. Fletcher well describes them." Wesley's intent was to use this model to encourage growth in grace, including those who had attained perfect love. Wesley used Fletcher's doctrine of dispensations to show that "a single divine event" represented an inadequate view of Christian perfection. Outler has noted that this essay represented Wesley's most mature views

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<sup>62</sup>Cf. Chiles, 42.

<sup>63</sup>M. Robert Fraser, Ph. D. dissertation from Vanderbilt University, *Strains in the Understandings of Christian Perfection in Early British Methodism* (reproduced by University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1992).

<sup>64</sup>Chiles, 39. Peters, 96, 128.

on the different degrees of faith, and it can be seen here that Fletcher was a significant influence upon the later Wesley.<sup>65</sup>

20. Maddox is mistaken when he says that Wesley recommended "nothing by Fletcher" to his preachers and lay members regarding a list of suggested readings in general theology. First, there is no standardized list, except the recommendations in *The Large Minutes*, and Fletcher is included there. Maddox noted that Wesley proposed a recommended program of study for his niece, Sarah Wesley (and incidentally Fletcher was her godfather who stayed in close contact with her), but this was not a standardized list of suggested readings in general theology. If so, the only thing of Wesley's own writings that he recommended was his *Notes*. Maddox's other illustration was a letter to Alexander Knox, but there is no list of books in general theology give here either. If so, all of Wesley's writings (except his *Notes*) are omitted! The index of Jackson's edition of *Wesley Works* includes a long list of references to John Fletcher. Thumbing to those particular page references, one will find that Wesley often recommended Fletcher's writings to his lay preachers and others as the best source for understanding Methodist doctrine. Maddox failed to see that Wesley recommended Fletcher's writings to Alexander Knox (see Maddox's footnote 59). Wesley wrote to Alexander Knox (August 29, 1777): "You should read Mr. Fletcher's *Essay on Truth*."<sup>66</sup> Notice also that Wesley recommended to him "The Essay on Truth" which is the Pentecostal essay on Christian perfection in *The Equal Check*. In a letter to Mrs. Bennis (May 2, 1774), John Wesley said Fletcher had written with a clearer understanding on the theme of "pardon and holiness" than "scarcely any one has done before since the Apostles."<sup>67</sup>

21. Maddox is mistaken when he denies that Fletcher's writings were given "a unique place of privilege" by Wesley. This judgment contradicts the consensus of interpreters throughout Methodist history. As I have shown, Wesley specifically said Fletcher had his "imprimatur" from the beginning, and this very term entails "a unique place of privilege." Wesley edited, corrected, published, and promoted Fletcher's *Checks*, demonstrating that his writings were given "a unique place of privilege," along with the fact that Wesley began publishing a complete list of

<sup>65</sup>Outler, *Sermons* 3:491-501, "On Faith."

<sup>66</sup>Telford, *Letters*, 6:272-273 (to Alexander Knox (August 29, 1777).

<sup>67</sup>Telford, *Letters*, 6:79-80 (to Mrs. Bennis (May 2, 1774).

Fletcher's works in 1788. In a letter to Elizabeth Ritchie, he noted that Fletcher's doctrine of dispensations was the best explanation ever given. He further says: "It seems God has raised him for this very thing."<sup>68</sup> This appraisal sounds like much more than just saying "Wesley valued Fletcher's writings," as Maddox contends. In fact, Wesley gave him "a unique place of privilege" in this statement. In a letter to one of his women leaders, Wesley writes: "He preaches salvation by faith in the same manner that my brother and I have done, and as Mr. Fletcher (one of the finest writers of the age) has beautifully explained it." Here Wesley places himself, his brother, and Fletcher together as the model of preaching on salvation, with a special commendation of Fletcher. If Wesley said no one had written with greater clarity on "pardon" and "holiness" since apostolic times, that is also "a unique place of privilege." Fletcher's unique place of privilege is further instanced by his selection as Wesley's designated successor. In a letter to Fletcher (July 21, 1773, which is two months after Wesley had received Fletcher's *Equal Check* for editing and correcting), Wesley noted that his writings had earned him the right "in the minds of the people" to be his successor.<sup>69</sup> This letter shows that Fletcher and his writings were given "a unique place of privilege" by Wesley. So unique was Fletcher that the only biography Wesley ever wrote was on Fletcher.

22. Maddox inaccurately reports that Fletcher was Wesley's "self-appointed vindicator." Fletcher offered to defend Wesley, and Wesley readily accepted it. In fact, Fletcher offered to withdraw *The First Check* from publication because his Calvinist Methodist friends offered to withdraw their objections and to apologize to Wesley. Since Fletcher had given the manuscript to Wesley when he came to Madeley, July 26-28, 1771, Wesley refused to withdraw its publication despite the outcry of the Calvinist Methodists and even the willingness of Fletcher to halt its publication. Fletcher's label as Wesley's vindicator was approved by Wesley himself, and Fletcher assigned Wesley full responsibility for even the very wording of his manuscripts.<sup>70</sup> The correlation between Fletcher

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<sup>68</sup>Telford, *Letters* 6:137 (to Elizabeth Ritchie, January 17, 1775).

<sup>69</sup>Telford, *Letters*, 6:33-34 (to John Fletcher, July 21, 1773).

<sup>70</sup>Cf. Fletcher's letter to Mr. Shirley (Sept. 11, 1771), in Luke Tyerman, *Wesley's Designated Successor* (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1883), 194-196. Cf. Tyerman's discussion of the problem, 191ff.

as Wesley's Vindicator and as Wesley's Designated Successor shows that this was not just a private notion of Fletcher, as Maddox implies.

Fletcher's interpretation of Wesley prevailed until the end of the nineteenth century when Liberalism began to take over Methodism and Wesley was considered largely irrelevant. In 1935, G. C. Cell, *The Rediscovery of John Wesley*, helped the twentieth century to rediscover Wesley, but Fletcher still remains in the forgotten past. My appeal is for Wesley scholars to recognize the importance of being a Fletcher scholar in order to appreciate the way that Wesley was perceived in early Methodism.

# BIBLICAL TEXTS: PAST AND FUTURE MEANINGS

by

Clark H. Pinnock

In my article recently published in this journal<sup>1</sup> I referred to the need of reform in theological method and explained how to get beyond the rational/propositional method and adopt a larger concept symbolized by what is called the “Wesleyan quadrilateral” or (more precisely) the rule of Scripture within a trilateral hermeneutic of tradition, reason, and experience.<sup>2</sup> In this essay, I want to explore the fecundity of this excellent rule and in particular how it is that Scripture is able to serve up such a sumptuous feast.

## The Test of Cruciality

Millard Erickson has remarked: “I think that the issue of contemporizing the biblical message is possibly the single most important issue facing evangelical hermeneutics today.”<sup>3</sup> Erickson is referring to what could be called the test of cruciality in theology. He recognizes that, in order to follow Jesus in our generation, we need to have an ear *for* the Word of God even as we listen *to* the Word of God. We need to be able to discern and

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<sup>1</sup>Clark Pinnock, “Evangelical Theologians Facing the Future: Ancient and Future Paradigms,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 33:2 (Fall 1998), 7-28.

<sup>2</sup>W. Stephen Gunter, Scott J. Jones, Ted A. Campbell, Rebekah L. Miles, and Randy L. Maddox, *Wesley and the Quadrilateral: Renewing the Conversation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997).

<sup>3</sup>Millard Erickson, *Evangelical Interpretation: Perspectives on Hermeneutical Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 56.

speaking a timely word in modern situations and circumstances. This is not so easy for evangelicals who often have a certain fear of new interpretations because of the trauma of their experience with liberal theology; but God is calling us nonetheless to grow as hearers of the Word of God.<sup>4</sup>

Some readers of the Bible seem content to be antiquarian with regard to its meaning. Once they have established (as they suppose) the past meaning, they think the job is finished, although it is not. We have also to be concerned about the Word of God coming alive in new contexts. Scripture ought not to remain a dead letter, but should constitute a living challenge to people of every present time.

When I speak of “future” meanings of the biblical text, I refer to the ways in which the Bible addresses us today. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once asked: “Who is Jesus Christ for us today?” To be sure, one could say in reply that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Nevertheless, the proclamation of Jesus comes to people in ever new ways through the Spirit, and the present context always represents an opportunity for a fresh hearing of the gospel. Bible reading which is mature requires the readiness on our part to consider fresh interpretations and applications, even if they shake us up. Our Lord says: “Every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old” (Matt. 13:52).

Cruciality is an important test of theological faithfulness. It means that we ask not only whether a given interpretation is true to the original meaning, but also whether it is pertinent to the present situation or an evasion of what really matters now. Is this reading (we ought to be asking) what God wills or is it not? We must distinguish between the original meaning of the words and the truth toward which they are pointing us. Martin Luther King, Jr., had a good sense of this when he wrote to fellow clergy from a Birmingham jail saying it was time for white churches to stop standing on the sidelines and take a stand against racism. In his discernment of the will of God, King named the truth toward which the

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<sup>4</sup>On this point, see Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 211, 179. Evangelicals often have difficulty with the call to timeliness and cruciality in the task of biblical interpretation. Fear was palpable in the symposium entitled “The Future of Evangelical Theology” by Roger E. Olson and others in *Christianity Today* (February 9, 1998, pp. 40-50) when Timothy George expressed the conviction that a theologian who questions tradition and projects a fresh interpretation is a self-seeker, not a servant of the church.

Scriptures were pointing at that moment—and time has confirmed the rightness of his conviction. He was sensitive to Jesus’ distinction: “You tithe mint, dill, and cummin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith” (Matt. 23:23).<sup>5</sup>

Having listened to the text and attempted to grasp what it is saying in its own context, we have to let it speak to us. The language of “applying” the text to a situation is too weak an expression to render what has to happen. More than a rational exegetical decision, we must be open to God challenging our very being and impacting our world through the text. Hermeneutics has the responsibility to reflect on the Word of God in relation to contemporary experience and contexts. Not to do so is to invite Jesus’ criticism: “You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky—why do you not know how to interpret the present time?” (Lk. 12:56).<sup>6</sup>

### **Future Meanings**

Witnesses to the gospel cannot be content with past meanings in an antiquarian way. In order to be timely in our testimony, we need to be able to access future meanings as well. That is, we need to cultivate an eye and an ear not only for the meanings of human authors in their various historical settings, but also for the directions and trajectories which belong to the flow of God’s historical redemptive project. While making use of literary and historical scholarship, we are not the prisoners of a textual past, but are privileged for the opportunity and accountable for listening for the Word of the Lord and watching for the fulfillment of God’s promises which are still outstanding.

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<sup>5</sup>See Martin Luther King, Jr., *Why We Can’t Wait* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964). On cruciality as a test of theological faithfulness, see Christopher Morse, *Not Every Spirit: A Dogmatics of Christian Disbelief* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1994), 65-66.

<sup>6</sup>Theology at its best always has been contextual and correlational and has sought to be timely. In the Bible itself, the themes are interpreted in different contexts and cultures creating the rich diversity with which we are all familiar. Classic church theologians also sought to make sense of the faith in terms of culture. Augustine leaned on Plotinus and Thomas used Aristotle as material for a synthesis of Christian doctrine. But evangelicals are more often warned about the dangers of giving context a voice instead of the danger of not working contextually. Harvie Conn makes this point in the *Westminster Theological Journal* 52 (1990) 51-63 and it is the theme of Stephen B. Evans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), chap. 1.

The historical study of Scripture can help us to hear God's Word, because God has become Self-revealed in the particularities of history—in specific persons, places, and events. So naturally we want to know as much about them as we can. It is the same with Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. Because we respect his humanity and historicity, we want to know as much as we can about his historical career. In the same way, we respect the human reality of the biblical witnesses and pay close attention to how they express themselves. At the same time, we want to avoid being like the scribes of Jesus' day who studied the text carefully but were blind to ways in which its message was being worked out in their own generation. They were scriptural positivists (as it were) in relation to the past meanings of texts. They were not sensitive to the fact that the reason we engage the narratives of Scripture is not just to refresh our memories about what they said, but also because the history of salvation of which they speak is not finished and we anticipate greater actualizations of the promises of God.

Tom Wright offers a helpful analogy. Suppose we discovered a Shakespearean play (he suggests) whose fifth act has been lost. The four extant acts contain a wealth of characterizations and dynamics of plot and so the work cries out to be performed. But what should we do? Wright suggests that we should not try to write a fifth act in a detached scholarly way, but rather commit the text to experienced actors who, having immersed themselves in the four extant acts, would work out what the fifth act might reasonably be like had the Bard himself written it. It would be based, as it were, on the authority of the first four acts, and the drama would be brought to completion in an appropriate manner. Living as we do after Acts 28, it is our responsibility to fill in details of our faith and practice out of a patient watching and waiting on God.<sup>7</sup>

The event of Jesus Christ, which is the centerpiece of Scripture, cannot fully be understood apart from the future which it has put into motion. It is not a story to be read with nostalgia for Bible times. To read it properly, we have to go beyond the historical descriptions and consider the extension of the story into the present and future. We need to read the Bible both historically and with prayerful sensitivity to the directions in which it is moving us. Migliore comments: "We must ask of Scripture,

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<sup>7</sup>N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 140-43.

not only what past it calls us to remember, but what promises it wants us to claim and what future it wants us to pray and work for.”<sup>8</sup>

The full significance of the Christian message was not actualized in the life of the early church. The need for Christians, individually and corporately, to grow as hearers of the word of God remains, because interpretation is an unfinished task. Even if revelation were mainly a deposit of propositions essential to faith (which it is not), we would still be in the position of having more to learn about God and God’s reign than we presently know. Our best knowledge, as St. Paul says, is like seeing things in a mirror dimly. At the same time, our knowledge, limited though it is, anticipates a fuller understanding toward which God is leading. Theology is therefore a venture in hope and always capable of enrichment and reform.<sup>9</sup>

The meaning of the Bible is not static and locked up in the past but is something living and active. There is untapped potentiality of meaning in these texts, a surplus which can be actualized by succeeding generations of disciples in their various situations. The Bible is more than a collection of facts requiring analysis; it has a potentiality of meaning which is waiting to break forth as it engages real life situations by the Spirit.

### **The Underlying Rationale**

The existence of this potentiality of meaning that is waiting in the biblical text to be realized is due to a number of factors. Let me enumerate the ones that come to my mind most forcibly. No doubt there are others.

**Factor One.** One factor leading to a potentiality of meaning in the biblical text is the nature of divine revelation itself as seen in the gracious self-disclosure of God in the history of Israel and in the life and ministry of Jesus. Revelation refers first of all, not to the Bible, but to God’s activities in history where the purposes of God are disclosed for all to see. Revelation, while including rational and propositional dimensions, goes beyond these by being a form of inter-personal communication which cannot be totally pinned down conceptually. Such revelation, therefore, is always open to deeper penetration by Spirit-led interpreters.

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<sup>8</sup>Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 51.

<sup>9</sup>Wolfgang Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), I:16, 55-58.

This openness may be glimpsed in the way in which Old Testament texts are said to be fulfilled in the New Testament, often in surprising ways which go beyond the terms of the original propositions. This phenomenon shows God moving forward and expanding the scope of divine promises by a pattern of divine responses to new situations. These responses sometimes are unprecedented and give humankind more than was actually promised in the beginning. Was it not the scriptural literalists in Jesus' day who, because they only had room for past meanings, could not bring themselves to recognize who Jesus was? They refused to accept the central fact that God was (is) free and sovereign in the making of divine decisions about how God's kingdom project should be worked out. They had their own restrictive view of God's freedom which ruled out God's doing new things which had not been specifically spelled out in advance.<sup>10</sup>

**Factor Two.** A second factor which fosters the retrieval of future meanings arises from the nature of Scripture as a grand meta-narrative. Apart from the Bible, we would know little of the good news of God's revelation in history through Jesus Christ. Were Scripture to be ignored, the availability of God's revelation would be diminished drastically. Scripture gives us access to Jesus, the Word of God, and the light that shone on his face gets transmitted to us through the prism of the biblical witnesses. The central authority of the Bible resides in its witness to God's world-transforming revelational activity culminating in Christ, and it is the Bible's character as story which opens the text to future meanings.

Often people think of the Bible in a Koran-like way, as a book of rules to obey and doctrines to believe. This intellectualistic approach is a legacy of the Enlightenment and helps explain why many Christians cannot get very far with the idea of future meanings. But if story is the comprehensive category that best describes the Bible, and if it is the book that tells the story of God's care for the world, stretching from creation to new creation, then its basic authority lies in the narrative and upholding its authority involves a believer entering, inhabiting, and becoming part of

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<sup>10</sup>On the liberty taken in the fulfilment of Old Testament promises, see Stephen Travis, *I Believe in the Second Coming of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 135-43, and James DeYoung and Sarah Hurty, *Beyond the Obvious: Discover the Deeper Meaning of Scripture* (Gresham, Oregon: Vision House, 1995). Also see Clark Pinnock, *Flame of Love* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 223-27.

the story. In that case, something more than intellectual assent is required because, like all great stories, the Bible draws us into its own world, engages us imaginatively, and calls us to grow up into Christ from within it.<sup>11</sup>

In terms of interpretation, the story character of the Bible gives it a flexibility with regard to future meanings which the Bible, viewed as a collection of abstract truths, would not. Consider the way in which the Koran binds people to ancient Arab culture and hinders the ability of Islam to contextualize itself in the modern world. The results have been cataclysmic for these nations. By way of contrast, the nature of the Bible as story makes it flexible when it comes to the adapting of its message to changing circumstances and to yielding future meanings. The Bible encourages us to believe, not so much in the Bible itself as in the living God rendered by the Bible's story. In a variety of ways, the Bible brings us into a relationship with God in Jesus Christ and thus with others and with the whole creation. The Bible witnesses to God's liberating activity in Jesus in whom God is identified and by which we are led into new life.

Nicholas Wolterstorff uses speech-act theory to illuminate how God speaks to us through the Bible. Classic texts (he rightly says) not only *say* something but also *do* something. They do not just communicate content, but through the Spirit propel readers into a confrontation with God. They transform readers by getting in touch with the depth of our very selves. Through Word and Spirit, the revelatory activity of God is kept open and the process of ever-fresh interpretation goes on.<sup>12</sup>

**Factor Three.** A third factor which keeps the meaning of the text open for the future is (paradoxically) its ambiguity and variety. Texts normally have several possible interpretations which require us to discern how to take them. For example, does Paul teach double predestination in Romans chapter 9 or not? John Piper says yes and John Ziesler says no. Both cannot be right, but the ambiguity takes us back to root metaphors,

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<sup>11</sup>Alister McGrath calls our attention to the centrality of story in the Bible and the evangelical neglect of it. See his *A Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 105-116. Along the same lines, see Richard Bauckham, "Scripture and Authority," *Transformation* (April 1988), 5-11. Neglecting this results in a barren, rationalistic type of hermeneutics.

<sup>12</sup>See Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

to systematic considerations, and to issues of discernment. It forces one to ask why we read texts the way we do and to become more self-conscious about issues of our social location, etc. Often texts open up different paths that could be followed and the resulting communal reflection can be rich and beneficial.

Diversity can have the same kind of effect on us.<sup>13</sup> Different answers are given in the Bible to similar sorts of issues because the text itself has been contextualized in different ways. This leaves room for us to decide about future meanings and applications. Sometimes there are even trajectories developing within the Bible, as Richard N. Longenecker has shown. Using Galatians 3:28, he reveals how gospel principles are applied to specific situations and how texts can be viewed as signposts at the beginning of a trajectory, indicating paths to be followed by future disciples. God's project is an ongoing historical project; therefore, texts may not only set a standard but indicate a direction in which we ought to be moving.<sup>14</sup>

**Factor Four.** A fourth factor which opens up future meanings is the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. Interpretation is dynamic because the Spirit is integral to our theological method. Having inspired the text and guided the people of God to a canon, the Spirit continues to open up its meaning to us. Jesus gave the Spirit so that there might be a fuller understanding of his life and ministry by disciples in the future. We look to the Spirit for unfolding meaning because of the divine presence with and alongside the text, making it a truly living word. The Spirit, at work in the contexts of our lives, helps us to grasp the divine intent of Scripture for our time. What is given is not the communication of new information, but a deeper understanding of the truth that is there. Deeper understandings can be surprising, as illustrated in Acts 15 where what the Spirit was evidently doing in the world (pouring the Spirit out on the gentiles) showed the leaders how to interpret the Old Testament text in a new way. Because Scripture is spiritual, it has to be spiritually appraised (cf. 1 Cor. 2:13b).<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Consider the diversity discussed by John Goldingay, *Theological Diversity and the Authority of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), and by James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1977).

<sup>14</sup>Richard N. Longenecker, *New Testament Social Ethics for Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 14f, 26-28.

<sup>15</sup>Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), chapter 5. Roger Stronstad discusses Spirit-oriented pentecostal hermeneutics in his *Spirit, Scripture and Theology: A Pentecostal Perspective* (Baguio City, Philippines: Asia Pacific Theological Seminary Press, 1995).

Donald Bloesch writes: “It is commonly thought in lay circles more than in clerical that the surface meaning of the biblical text is sufficient and that this meaning is available to any searching person. But more often than not what first appears to be the sense of the text may not at all be the meaning that the Spirit of God is trying to impress on us through this text. It is not enough to know the words of the text: we must know the plentitude of meaning that these words carry for the community of faith at that time and for our time.”<sup>16</sup>

There are valid concerns surrounding the idea of illumination, of course. We all fear uncontrolled subjectivity which might simply displace biblical authority. In the evangelical family, the scholastic tendency would be more alarmed about this happening than the pietistic tendency because the latter makes more room for experience. However, there is another danger to be aware of and that is the danger of placing a fence around the Word and excluding the Spirit from the work of interpretation. After all, God gives gifts of wisdom and knowledge to help the community with its interpretation and we must respect these gifts alongside the exegetes. The relative and oft noted silence about illumination among evangelicals is suggestive of a certain rationalism. We have to learn to trust the Spirit-empowered Word more and not be so afraid of it.<sup>17</sup>

Illumination, even when room is made for it in evangelical interpretation, is often narrowly conceived in terms of issues of individual piety. In J. I. Packer (for example), illumination mainly serves to confirm truths of Scripture to the individual (elect) believer concerning his or her own salvation and is not thought of as applying to the larger and urgent issues of mission in our day. In contrast, the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church sets a better example for us in “*Gaudium et*

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<sup>16</sup>Donald G. Bloesch, *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration and Interpretation* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 172. Bloesch speaks out boldly but does not provide specific examples of how his thesis works out.

<sup>17</sup>Erickson opposes the hermeneutical rationalism he sees in Kaiser and Fuller (chaps. 1-2). Others agree, including: DeYoung and Hurty, *Beyond the Obvious*, chap. 6; Donald G. Bloesch, *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration and Interpretation*, chap. 6; and Clark H. Pinnock, “The Work of the Holy Spirit in Hermeneutics,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 2 (1993), 3-23, and “The Role of the Spirit in Interpretation,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36 (1993), 491-497, and *The Scripture Principle*, chap. 9.

Spes” where it does address challenges that confront the church’s mission today.<sup>18</sup>

### **Growing as Hearers**

The faith community needs to grow and mature as hearers of the Word of God, not approaching the Bible as a magical answer book, but as an inspired witness to the love of God and the reign of God breaking through. The authority of the Bible is important, but almost equally important is the decision about the kind of text it is and how to use it. It does not generally operate on a rationalistic plane but in the context of relationship and lived experience. Bloesch speaks of Scripture as a sacrament of our encounter with God in the present day. I would add that we need to listen to Scripture, not as isolated individuals, but in communities, allowing ourselves to be open to the readings of Scripture by other churches in contexts different from our own. Growing as hearers is essential because the truth of profound matters is not easily grasped and all implications are not immediately apparent. It is important to be on watch for the ways in which the Spirit is leading God’s people into deeper understanding and fuller obedience. A better comprehension is always possible of a revelation that is unsurpassable and inexhaustible.<sup>19</sup>

History presents us with examples of future meanings which appear to have been successful. Here are two examples. First, in the history of doctrine, classical Christians accept that the Spirit helped the church in the early centuries to read the biblical narrative in a trinitarian way. The community was led to see that this was the direction in which the biblical narrative was tending and there was a growing realization of what the gospel was indicating. They discerned that Father, Son, and Spirit constituted the identifying description of God and the key to an understanding of the Bible as a whole. This doctrine of the Trinity became the concep-

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<sup>18</sup>See Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, *The Role of the Holy Spirit in Biblical Interpretation: A Study in the Writings of James I. Packer* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Andrews University, 1998). One of the only modern social challenges that Erickson comments on is the consumption of alcoholic beverages. Ironically, he had to admit that he arrived at his position from extra-biblical influences, not from Scripture (*Evangelical Interpretation*, 75-76).

<sup>19</sup>Postliberal theology and the Yale School are strong on the importance of a communal reading of the text and a corporate discernment of its meaning. In agreement is Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 208-210.

tual framework for interpreting the whole meta-narrative. The fondness for trinitarian doctrine today among classical theologians reflects the fact that the model represents a revelation-based understanding of God uncorrupted by philosophical presuppositions.<sup>20</sup>

Second, on an ethical matter, Christians agree that in the case of slavery the full significance of the Christian message was not completely grasped by earlier generations, but only subsequently in terms of the abolition of slavery. The direction of revelation was discerned only after many centuries and the implication recognized. Interestingly, it was those (like Hodge) who read the Bible like a rule book who argued in favor of slavery, while those who read it as the story of human liberation saw the truth of the matter more readily. The truth about slavery was inherent in the gospel from day one, but became plain at a later time, thanks to the providence of God and the illumination of the Spirit.<sup>21</sup>

Harder to discern are issues in our own day which are still being debated and where there is the need of further illumination. Being finite, we have difficulty understanding exactly how and where God is working in our world. Sometimes we think we know, but others caution by telling us that it is not the way they see it. There is no way to avoid risks in interpretation and modesty is essential all round. The examples that I name inevitably reflect my own situated beliefs about how God is leading and need to be considered on a broader basis than the individual. Certainly, for a new item to enter tradition, it would have to be more than an intuition and a passing fashion. A solid Scriptural basis would have to be indicated and a widespread consensus in the churches secured. These two criteria are especially good indicators that the mind of Christ is being revealed and rightly perceived.

### **Current Openings of God's Word**

To provoke discussion and to share my own insights, let me indicate a few items where I discern an opening up of the Word of God in timely ways today. They are not necessarily the best or only examples of such

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<sup>20</sup>This is the theme of Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being: Hors Texte* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) and Alister McGrath, *Passion for Truth*, 112f.

<sup>21</sup>Richard N. Longnecker, *New Testament Social Ethics for Today*, chap. 4, and Willard M. Swartley, *Slavery, Sabbath, War and Women* (Scottsdale, Pa: Herald Press, 1983), chap. 1.

timely interpretations, but they represent what is possible by way of fresh and fruitful interpretations of our dynamic rule, the biblical base in concert with the Spirit's ongoing ministry of illumination.

**1. Universal salvific will of God.** First, there is a strong tendency nowadays to rank the universal salvific will of God higher on the hierarchy of theological truth than was formerly the case. This biblical opening arises not from mere sentimentality, but from a better grasp of God's vast generosity. One sees this illumination in Vatican Council II, in mainline Protestantism, and among the many evangelicals who seek some form of a wider hope for lost humanity. Such thinking is on the rise and reflects less restrictive modes of biblical interpretation. It has the makings of a fresh interpretation which is gaining in strength.<sup>22</sup>

**2. Salvation includes justice issues.** Second, it has become clearer to more Christians than it was before that the gospel of Christ necessarily relates to issues of social justice in the world as well as to issues that affect individuals and churches. Thus a new theological emphasis (not unprecedented) pioneered by Latin American theologians has arisen which concentrates more on the practical and social implications of theology. There is a widespread agreement now that theology must address the human struggle for justice and freedom. More than merely a humanitarian impulse, it arises from the recognition of Christ's solidarity with the poor and from the social dimensions of sin and salvation. It represents a better reading of the Bible and an enrichment of traditional theology (whatever mistakes have been made in pursuing it). At the same time, the particular model of liberation developed by the Latin Americans is not a universal norm and has not been an especially impressive option for many evangelicals. Nonetheless, the fundamental thrust and direction of political theology is not going to go into recession.<sup>23</sup> There is Spirit illumination in process here.

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<sup>22</sup>See Francis A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 199-204, and Richard H. Drummond, *Toward a New Age in Christian Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1985). John Sanders documents the rise of wider-hope thinking among evangelicals in his *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992).

<sup>23</sup>Simon Chan, for example, does not see the relevance of the Latin model for his Asian setting, although he agrees with the basic principle (Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 32).

**3. Concern for the non-human creation.** Third, the relevance of the Bible for ecological concerns also is more widely recognized now than formerly. More and more Bible-oriented Christians are coming to see that the non-human creation is not just something to be exploited and that the gospel is concerned about nature as well as salvation. The spirit of St. Francis of Assisi, which was formerly the exception, is now becoming the rule. We are now seeing that the natural world is more than a stage for the divine-human drama and that the value of non-human creatures is intrinsic to human welfare, not merely instrumental. Modern pressure on the ecological web of life has challenged anthropocentric interpretations of the Bible and alerted us to view the creation from a more inclusive point of view.<sup>24</sup>

**4. The gifts and callings of women.** Fourth, from the experience of the Sunday School and the foreign missionary movements as well as from trends in culture, God seems to be leading us into a clearer recognition and stronger support for the gifts and callings of women.<sup>25</sup> Although debates remain over female ordination in some church settings, the conviction is growing that both men and women share in ministry as they share in baptism. More and more serious Bible readers are asking why people would be excluded from certain ministries on the basis of gender when God calls all believers to minister and gifts them all. Although it will likely be a point of tension for some time to come, the impulse to include women in the full range of Christian ministries is likely to persist and even prevail. I think it is clear that the Spirit is pointing us to those aspects of the biblical tradition which point in the direction of affirming and not quenching the Spirit's liberating activities.<sup>26</sup> At the same time, one must remember that feminism as such is a product of Western liberalism and not a universal value. Any application of it in other parts of the world (e.g., Asia) will have to take account of the nature of those societies.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>See H. Paul Santmire, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), and Jürgen Moltmann, "Ecology of the Creative Spirit," *The Source of Life: The Holy Spirit and the Theology of Life* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1997), 111-24.

<sup>25</sup>I appreciate that this point, perhaps obvious to many, was made by Roger Nicole in Alvera Mickelsen, editor, *Women, Authority and the Bible* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 47. Nicole is a staunch paleo-Calvinist and must have taken some criticism for his observation.

<sup>26</sup>Richard N. Longenecker, *New Testament Social Ethics for Today*, chap. 5; and Willard M. Swartley, *Slavery, Sabbath, War and Women*, chap. 4.

<sup>27</sup>Compare Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 31.

**5. Openness to the full range of spiritual gifts.** Fifth, the rediscovery of the power of Pentecost in the twentieth century has led to a widespread correction of the cessationist traditions of biblical interpretation. Openness to the full range of spiritual gifts as inherent in the kingdom proclamation of Jesus is now characteristic of the thinking of a large percentage of Christian people, even outside pentecostal and charismatic circles. Again, the material was already there in the Bible, but had been pushed to the side. Now the balance of interpretation has noticeably shifted to support of the proposition that charismatic experience is not a fad but intrinsic to Christian existence.<sup>28</sup>

**6. Relational interpretation of the doctrine of God.** Sixth, the interpretation of the doctrine of God in the Scriptures is moving in a relational direction away from the unrelational and/or deterministic motifs characteristic of Augustinianism, Thomism, and Calvinism. There is developing a more relational model of a God who sympathizes with and responds to what happens in the world. The pressure toward a more relational model comes from many quarters—from Orthodoxy, from Wesleyan/Arminian traditions, from Hendrikus Berkhof's and Karl Barth's neo-reformed thinking, and from the social trinitarians who ground the model in a trinitarian relational ontology. It is influenced also, of course, by the modern ethos which favors more dynamic metaphysical interpretations. This has moved Thomists like Norris Clarke and Calvinists like Alvin Plantinga to question the non-relational thinking of their own traditions. At the same time, opposition to this trend is strong in the evangelical coalition that for so long has been dominated by the paleo-Reformed impulse and can be fierce in its critique. In the newly formed Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals with its Cambridge Declaration, one sees a vigorous campaign to defend the causal categories of the conservative Reformation.<sup>29</sup>

**7. Permanent election of the children of Israel.** Seventh, we are seeing a rejection of the supersessionist account of the church in relation

<sup>28</sup>Jon Ruthven lays out the exegetical issues forcefully in *On the Cessation of the Charismata: The Protestant Polemic on Postbiblical Miracles* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).

<sup>29</sup>John Sanders' recent book will play a central role in this struggle: *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1998). The book is of high quality and it will be interesting to see whether the critics will be able to answer it or have to resort to questionable tactics to counter it.

to Israel. Supersessionism refers to the theory that the church displaced and replaced Israel as the people of God. In part the shift stems from events like the Holocaust and the return of the Jewish people to the land God gave to Abraham. But it also arises out of a fresh reading of St. Paul in Romans: “As regards the gospel they are enemies of God for your sake but as regards election they are beloved for the sake of their ancestors—for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom 11:28-29). Paul taught the permanent election of the children of Israel who are and remain God’s “treasured possession” (Dt. 7:6). Christian theology has no right to nullify the promises of God. Israel is the root and we gentiles are and remain branches. There may be disagreement about what this affirmation entails and what it will mean for our Christian faith and practice. But it must surely mean at least that God loves the people Israel, even though they have rejected the gospel of their Christ. Dispensationalism gets criticized by almost everybody, so it might be opportune to say that it never endorsed supersessionism, although most of its critics did.<sup>30</sup>

Here then are a few contemporary interpretations which may illustrate possible directions in which God is leading us in our interpretation of Scripture today. One cannot always be certain what the timely word of the Lord is, but these are surely the kind of issues on which growth is taking place currently in our hearing of God’s Word.

## Conclusion

When involved in mission as it always ought to be, the Christian community needs to be able to understand its message in fresh contexts, not in ways that go *beyond* biblical revelation, but in ways that penetrate the biblical revelation more profoundly. It is not so much new information that we look for as it is a fresh understanding of God’s Word in our new circumstances. The biblical text is quantitatively complete (that is, not requiring additions), but it can always be more deeply pondered and grasped in fuller ways. The Spirit is always able to cause what has been written to be revealed in a new light. Of course, there are always errors to

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<sup>30</sup>See R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1996), and Bruce D. Marshall, “Christ and the Cultures: the Jewish People and Christian Theology,” in Colin E. Gunton, editor, *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 81-100.

overcome in interpretation and always new directions to be attempted for the sake of effective mission. Although the faith is delivered once and for all time, the church has not grasped its significance completely—nor will she until the end of time. We are on an interpretive road, not yet at the end of the journey, and we pray to the Lord for an ever more fruitful discernment of God's meaning for us and our times.

To use the language of theological hermeneutics, I am saying that it is fruitful in terms of fresh insight to correlate Holy Scripture with contextual factors so long as care is taken to avoid letting the context determine and not merely condition the theological reflection. Scripture should be brought into conversation with all aspects of the global situation, but in such a way that the Bible is accorded priority over contextual factors. The hermeneutical task is not a matter of reducing the meaning of Scripture to what readers want to hear, but is an exercise in discerning what the Word of the Lord is for this time and place. Bloesch's distinction between "correlation" and "confrontation" is important. He is very sensitive to the fact that the gospel often finds itself in conflict with culture and at variance with worldly wisdom. Thus, for example, it would not be possible to accept an inspirational Christology or a gay theology just because of the pressures of pluralism and gender in the culture that is calling for it. The need for watchfulness and prayer in discerning the mind of Christ and the future meaning of biblical texts is very great.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Donald G. Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit: Authority and Method in Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1992), chap. 9.

# THE TRINITARIAN GRAMMAR OF THE LITURGY AND THE LITURGICAL PRACTICE OF THE SELF

by

**E. Byron Anderson**

In John Wesley's understanding of the particular and instituted means of grace we find an emphasis on forms of meaningful action that are constitutive of and normative for the Christian life. In our own day of diverse spiritualities, practices, and speculations, we are invited to consider again what it means to speak about sacramental action as "means of grace" and as practices that form Christian persons. As we do so, we must keep in mind Wesley's own reservations about the sacramental life, shaped in part by the anti-Catholic polemic of his day: the sacraments neither function *ex opere operato* without our participation nor is our participation a form of works righteousness.

My intent here is to explore the following assertion: sacramental liturgical practices, primarily eucharistic practice, are means of meaningful, constitutive, and normative action by which the church and Christian people give expression to who it and they are and by which church and persons "practice" themselves as Christian in a Trinitarian mode. My exploration falls into three parts. In the first, I attempt to situate the proposal in the context of recent discussions of Wesley's theology and work, with particular reference to the prayer forms Wesley had in hand or edited. In the second, I give attention to several contemporary theologies of the Trinity that focus on the Trinity as a pattern of the relatedness of God *ad intra* and *ad extra*. Finally, I use these two frameworks to explore two contemporary Methodist eucharistic prayers as forms of meaningful action in which we "practice ourselves" in a Trinitarian mode.

## A Wesleyan Starting Point

The Wesleys' *Hymns on the Trinity* and *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* have received significant attention as expressions of their Trinitarian and eucharistic theology.<sup>1</sup> The various writers remind us that the Wesleys expected their hymns to be read in private devotion and sung in corporate worship. In this way, the hymns taught and formed the Methodist societies through particular understandings of Christian faith and doctrine. These writers also remind us that the hymns and hymnals provide the most systematic working out of the Wesleys' theology. I do not intend to repeat their work here. My concern is with the tradition of prayer the Wesleys inherited and shaped. Are there seeds of their Trinitarian theology in the liturgical texts that shaped them and which they used throughout their lives as Anglican priests?

In asking this question, I am suggesting that John and Charles brought to Methodist doxological practice and theology what they themselves practiced doxologically. Two examples will suffice. The first, a eucharistic preface for the Feast of Trinity, comes from John's edition of the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* for the North American Methodists:

It is very meet, right, and our bounden duty, that we should at all times, and in all places give thanks unto thee, O Lord, Holy Father, Almighty, Everlasting God. Who art one God, one Lord; not one only person, but three persons, in one substance. For that which we believe of the glory of the Father, the same we believe of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, without difference or inequality.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See J. Ernest Rattenbury, *The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley* (London: Epworth Press, 1948, reprinted and revised, Cleveland, OH: OSL Publications, 1995); Kathryn Nichols, "Charles Wesley's Eucharistic Hymns: Their Relationship to the Book of Common Prayer," *The Hymn* 39.2 (April 1988):13-21; Teresa Berger, *Doxology in Hymns?* (Nashville: Abingdon/Kingswood, 1994); Barry E. Bryant, "Trinity and Hymnody: The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Hymns of Charles Wesley," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 25 (Fall 1990): 64-73; David Tripp, "Methodism's Trinitarian Hymnody: A Sampling, 1780 and 1989, and Some Questions," *Quarterly Review* 14.4 (1994): 359-385; Geoffrey Wainwright, "Why Wesley was a Trinitarian," *Drew Gateway*, 59.2 (1990): 26-43; and Wilma J. Quantrille, *The Triune God in the Hymns of Charles Wesley*, Ph. D. dissertation, Drew University, 1989 (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1993).

<sup>2</sup>*John Wesley's Prayer Book: The Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America*, introduction, notes, and commentary by James F. White (Cleveland, OH: OSL Publications, 1991), 135.

This eucharistic liturgy serves as an *inclusio* for the Wesleys' Trinitarian theology, received by them in their own Anglican formation and commended by them to the new church. As with the creed and articles of religion, it summarizes the doxological and doctrinal language for the Trinity that was read and heard in John's letters and sermons and sung in Charles' hymns over the preceding fifty years. It also summarizes the Trinitarian faith contained in the (abridged) Articles of Religion that John included in *The Sunday Service*. It states in doxological form the "fact" of the Trinity that John believed and beyond which he would not speculate.<sup>3</sup> We might argue that his repeated experience with the language of *person* and *substance* as found in this prayer permitted nothing "to constrain him" from using it in preaching, conversation, and reflection.<sup>4</sup>

The second example is an excerpt from the prayer for Sunday morning as found in "A Collection of Forms of Prayer," first printed in 1733 and continuing in print into the early nineteenth century. Here Wesley provides a non-eucharistic prayer that finds its most worthy parallel in the eucharistic prefaces of the Eastern churches.<sup>5</sup> Again, it is an explicit practice of Trinitarian doxology. I quote only part:

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<sup>3</sup>See "Letter to a Member of the Society," August 3, 1771, in John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 12, ed. Thomas Jackson, (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1871), 293; and "On the Trinity," Sermon 55, in John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 2, ed. Albert Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 376-377. In light of recent eucharistic reforms, it is interesting to note that with the exception of the doxology in the post-communion prayer the Holy Spirit is not otherwise mentioned in the eucharistic prayer of the *Sunday Service*. Aside from this preface, the only other place the Trinity is explicitly named is in the *Glory to God in the highest*, recited by the congregation following the post-communion prayer.

<sup>4</sup>*On the Trinity*, 378.

<sup>5</sup>It is unfortunate that, as Wesley's first publication, a critical edition of these prayers is not yet available. John makes one reference to these prayers outside of the 1775 preface printed in *Works*, XIV, 270-271. This comes in the context of a letter of May 14, 1765, tracing the development of his understanding of perfection. There he indicates that the prayers were printed for the use of his pupils (*Ibid.*, 213.). The preface of 1775 provides a helpful summary of the spirituality formed in and by these prayers: "to comprise in the course of petitions for the week the whole scheme of our Christian duty" (*Ibid.*, 270). This scheme is further described under five headings: (1) the renouncing ourselves, (2) devoting ourselves to God, (3) self-denial, (4) mortification—dying to the world and the things of the world, and (5) Christ living in me. As this last stage is representative of fulfilling the law, Wesley suggests a sixth stage, the step into glory (*Ibid.*, 271-272).

Glory be to thee, O most adorable Father, who, after thou hadst finished the work of creation, enteredst into thy eternal rest. Glory be to thee, O holy Jesus, who having through the eternal Spirit, offered thyself a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice [here echoing the “offertory prayer” of the *Book of Common Prayer*] for the sins of the whole world, didst rise again the third day from the dead, and hadst all power given to thee both in heaven and on earth. Glory be to thee, O blessed Spirit, who proceeding from the Father and the Son, didst come down in fiery tongues on the Apostles on the first day of the week, and didst enable them to preach the glad tidings of salvation to a sinful world, and hast ever since been moving on the faces of men’s souls, as thou didst once on the face of the great deep, bringing them out of that dark chaos in which they were involved. Glory be to thee, O holy, undivided Trinity, for jointly concurring in the great work of our redemption, and restoring us again to the glorious liberty of the sons of God. Glory be to thee, who, in compassion to human weakness, hast appointed a solemn day for the remembrance of thy inestimable benefits.<sup>6</sup>

As text and practice commended to the Methodists throughout John’s life, this, too, seems to provide a Trinitarian *inclusio* around his theological work. On the theological level, as Geoffrey Wainwright reminds us more broadly of Wesley’s Trinitarian theology, this prayer is an example of Trinitarian doxology grounded in the soteriological work of the Trinity.<sup>7</sup> A “Father-Creator, Spirit-Sanctifier” division of labor was unthinkable and unprayerable for Wesley. As represented here, the work of creation is the work of Father and Spirit; the work of redemption the work of the undivided Trinity.

These examples point us to John’s argument in his sermon “On the Trinity” that the doctrine of the Trinity is something that is more to be practiced than to be understood. As Thomas Oden summarizes, “The manner in which God is three in one can be left to honest, humble adoration and celebration as a mystery of faith.”<sup>8</sup> Here we echo Aidan Kavanagh’s suggestion that the liturgy is a way in which the church trans-

<sup>6</sup>Jackson, *Works*, XI: 203.

<sup>7</sup>Wainwright, *op. cit.*, 26, 33, 35.

<sup>8</sup>*John Wesley’s Scriptural Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 47.

acts or works out its “faith in God under the condition of God’s real presence in both church and world.”<sup>9</sup> Such practices of humble adoration and celebration lead us precisely where speculation will not, to the lived understanding of the Triune faith. These two examples, while expressions of Wesley’s Trinitarian faith, are offered to the Methodist societies and church as a means by which they may be formed in this faith and by which they may “practice” themselves as “Christian” in a Trinitarian mode.

Henry Knight’s and Randy Maddox’s reading of Wesley’s understanding of the “means of grace” seems to support such an understanding of liturgical practice as I am proposing. Knight claims first that “grace, for Wesley, is relational: grace both enables and invites us to participate in an ongoing relationship with God.”<sup>10</sup> Second, “there is a pattern of means of grace which is essential to the maintenance and growth of that relationship.”<sup>11</sup> Third, for Wesley “the means of grace form an interrelated context within which the Christian life is lived and through which relationships with God and one’s neighbor are maintained.”<sup>12</sup> Further, “the means of grace provide the context within which an ongoing relationship with God is sustained over time, and the Christian life is correspondingly enabled to grow in love.”<sup>13</sup> In these, Knight suggests the constituting nature of sacramental practices: they invite, enable, and maintain patterns of relatedness to God and to neighbor. Such practices are normative, not only because they are essential to the constituting work, but also because they provide the “normal” context in which Christian life is lived.<sup>14</sup>

In Maddox’s work, three statements are important here. First, Maddox suggests that Wesley’s understanding of the work of sanctification undertaken in and by the power of the Holy Spirit “was a process of character formation that is made possible by a restored participation of fallen humanity in the Divine life and power.”<sup>15</sup> Second, he suggests that Wesley

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<sup>9</sup>*On Liturgical Theology* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Co., 1984), 8.

<sup>10</sup>Henry H. Knight, III, *The Practice of the Presence of God* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1992), 8.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>14</sup>This has consequences for the shape of our liturgical and sacramental practice, especially for eucharistic praying. I return to this in the final section of this paper.

<sup>15</sup>*Responsible Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon, Kingswood Books, 1994), 122.

“took for granted a virtue psychology that emphasizes the role of habituated affections in motivating and guiding authentic human actions.”<sup>16</sup> Finally, Maddox argues that, for Wesley, “proper worship helps structure the formation of Christian character, while openness to the Spirit’s witness provides access to the empowerment for this formation.”<sup>17</sup> The first statement points us toward Wesley’s theological anthropology. The restoration of humanity to the image of God in which it was created is a restoration of humanity in the image and holiness of the Trinity.<sup>18</sup> The second and third point to the role of regular and repeated practice of the means of grace in the formation of Christian persons.

What do these statements signal for a discussion about liturgical practice? First, our participation in the means of grace, the practices of liturgy and sacrament, names and shapes a Trinitarian context and pattern of living. This is particularly true in the prayer texts that accompany and interpret these practices. Faith is enacted as doxology, not merely assented to. Second, this Trinitarian context and pattern requires the development and sustaining of relationships between persons and God as well as persons and communities that are dynamic rather than static ways of being in the world. It is in such relationships that we grow in love of God and neighbor and are restored to the likeness of God. This understanding of sacramental practice permits an understanding of the Christian life as a pattern or complex of patterns ever forming, transforming, and emerging through regular participation in the “means of grace.”

### Recent Trinitarian Theologies

Recent theologies of the Trinity, notably those of Catherine LaCugna, Leonardo Boff, and Jürgen Moltmann, attempt to reclaim the practical import of the Trinity for the shape of the Christian life. Each of these theologians echoes the speculative limitations offered by John Wesley—that we can know of the Three-One God only what God’s practice with humanity has revealed. They attempt, with some success, to avoid talking about the mystery of God in Godself except as Godself is made known in God’s practice in history. As with Wesley, their discussion of the Trinity focuses on soteriology and doxology.

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 132.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 140.

<sup>18</sup>See Bryant’s discussion of this in regard to the hymns (*op. cit.*, 68-69).

These three theologians suggest that the intersubjective relatedness of the Triune God offers a model for the relatedness of the human person in community and a vision of humanity restored to the image and likeness of God. In this, they echo John Wesley's understanding of Christian perfection. Together they argue that humanity is created in the image of God (not vice versa) and that humanity can and does know God through God's action in our history and our history of relationship with God. God's history with us reveals (1) a pattern of relationship that corresponds to the internal relationship of the three-personed God, Father, Son, and Spirit, and (2) that this pattern of relationship is normative for the pattern of human relationships and being.

In their attempts to work out a practical theology of the Trinity, LaCugna, Moltmann, and Boff share three points. They argue, first, that language about the Trinity is inherently and primarily doxological. Second, a reading of the history of God with us permits an explicit social-relational doctrine of the Trinity. Third, the theological concept of *perichoresis* provides a schema by which we may name a form of relatedness that affirms unity-in-diversity and diversity-in-unity. As Moltmann writes, this results in a "social doctrine of the Trinity, according to which God is a community of Father, Son, and Spirit, whose unity is constituted by mutual indwelling and reciprocal interpenetration."<sup>19</sup> From these common components, the three point toward a common goal: a correlation between the divine society of the Trinity and human society.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), viii. Boff similarly writes, "The Trinity. . . is the revelation of God as God is, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in eternal correlation, interpenetration, love, and communion, which make them one sole God." He adds his own emphasis, however: "The fact that God is triune means unity in diversity" (Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*, trans. Paul Burns, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988, 3).

<sup>20</sup>Ted Peters, in *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), however, argues that Boff is unable to go as far as Moltmann in establishing this correlation. Peters writes:

Although Boff wants to work with a correlation between a divine society and a human society on a nonhierarchical basis, the divine society of which he speaks is in fact a monarchy; and because this monarchy is shrouded in eternal mystery apart from the time in which we live, no genuine correlation with human society can be made (Peters, 114).

Peters bases this argument on a reading of Boff that assumes that God as Father stands independent of creation, a point that Boff takes pains to argue against. See Boff, 14-16 and 169 to the contrary.

**1. Language about the Trinity is Doxological.** As we have seen in our Wesleyan examples and would find in the remainder of the Wesleyan corpus, when speculative theology is set aside the primary means for expressing Trinitarian theology is in doxological practice. For Moltmann, the praise and worship of the church is the situation in Christian life for the assertion of the Trinity. More than this, he argues that praise and worship, doxology, is required to release “the experience of salvation for a full experience of that salvation.”<sup>21</sup> Through the doxological rule of prayer the church gives expression to its “experience of God in the apprehension of Christ and in the fellowship of the Spirit.” In other words, “[t]heological talk about God stems from doxological talk to God, and remains talk before God.”<sup>22</sup> Such, I think, can clearly be said of the Wesleyan examples provided earlier. Doxology *is* theology, even if not all theology is doxology.<sup>23</sup> By this I mean that liturgical practices are inherently theological practices and, as such, are practices of theological, social, and personal formation. Yet, even as doxological practice is theological practice, it gives rise to further critical theological reflection. This is the move toward a practical liturgical theology such as I am attempting here.

LaCugna, like Moltmann, argues specifically for “theology in the mode of doxology” as the most appropriate form of language with which to speak about the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>24</sup> For her, doxology is itself a

<sup>21</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity*, 152.

<sup>22</sup>Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 73. And, Moltmann would add, “doxological terms remain inescapably bound to the experience of salvation and do not go speculatively beyond it. They remain related to the experience of salvation precisely because they are directed towards the God himself whose salvation and love has been experienced” (*Trinity*, 153). Boff is not satisfied with the doxological binding of the doctrine of the Trinity, arguing that this refusal to go beyond scripture and liturgical tradition “is hardly theology; it has more to do with exegesis and spirituality” (Boff, 114). This comment betrays an assumption on his part that theology is somehow other than prayer, exegesis, and spirituality.

<sup>23</sup>Moltmann seems more willing than Boff to assent to the statement “Doxology is theology.” Boff writes: “First we profess faith in Father, Son and Holy Spirit in prayer and praise (doxology). Then we reflect on how the divine Three are one single God in perichoretic communion between themselves (theology)” (Boff, 232). Boff seems to argue that the language of prayer, liturgy, and human experience is an unreflective, perhaps even naïve form that requires theological comment and elaboration (*ibid.*, 155-156).

<sup>24</sup>Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: Trinity and the Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 320.

mode of response to the Christian experience of encounter with the self-giving love of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit.<sup>25</sup> As a mode of response to or in saving faith, LaCugna's maxim becomes "soteriology culminates in doxology," a maxim Charles Wesley captured when he concluded "Love divine, all loves excelling" with the words "lost in wonder, love, and praise." We see, hear, and recount God's works of salvation, "pray the name of God given to us" in God's history with us, and "enter into relationship" with this "God who names Godself."<sup>26</sup> LaCugna reminds us that "[d]oxological affirmations are . . . not primarily definitions or descriptions. They are performative and ascriptive, lines of thought, speech and action which, as they are offered, open up into the living reality of God himself."<sup>27</sup> As we shall see below, the Trinitarian eucharistic prayer puts into play not only a theology of the triune God but a way of being in relationship to that God in prayer and praise. "Union with God and communion with each other are actualized through doxology."<sup>28</sup> That is, doxology puts into play a Trinitarian grammar that is as much about us as it is about God. Trinitarian doxological practice is a means by which we perform Trinitarian theology and are formed in Trinitarian relatedness.

## 2. The History of God with Us Reveals a Social-Relational God.

As already stated, Moltmann, Boff, and LaCugna argue that the history of God with us as a history of the persons of God reveals a social-relational doctrine of the Trinity. Both Moltmann and Boff work with modern understandings of person as subject and center of action. Moltmann, however, moves quickly from "person as subject" to a discussion of the particular character of the relationships between the persons of the Trinity. He argues that the historical event of Jesus Christ, the incarnate person of God with us, is constitutive for the divine life of the Trinity as a whole. The narrative of this person Jesus is the narrative by the New Testament "of the relationships of the Father, Son, and the Spirit, which are relationships of fellowship and open to the world."<sup>29</sup> For Moltmann, therefore, a

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 324.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 335.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 336. Her statement is, I think, an accurate description of what the Wesleys accomplish in the *Hymns to the Trinity*.

<sup>28</sup>LaCugna, 345.

<sup>29</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity*, 64.

theology of the Trinity is less about the distinctive work of the individual persons of the Trinity than about the character of the relationship between those persons.<sup>30</sup>

The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are by no means merely distinguished from one another by their character as Persons; they are just as much united with one another and in one another, since personal character and social character are only two aspects of the same thing. The concept of person must therefore in itself contain the concept of unitedness or at-oneness, just as, conversely, the concept of God's at-oneness must in itself contain the concept of the three Persons. This means that the concept of God's unity cannot in the Trinitarian sense be fitted into the homogeneity of the one divine substance, or into the identity of the absolute subject either; and least of all into one of the three Persons of the Trinity. It must be perceived in the *perichoresis* of the divine Persons.<sup>31</sup>

The apparent concern for the "unitedness" or "at-oneness" within the person of God may raise cautions for postmodern eyes and ears, but Moltmann anticipates such response. On the one hand, he calls our attention to the social-relational history of each particular person of the Trinity as definitive for the "personal" history of each person. On the other hand, by focusing on the intertwining of the personal and social, he calls our attention to the image of diversity present in the unity of the Triune God. It is this intertwining of personal as social-relational that points to the perichoretic nature of the persons of the Trinity. That is, we cannot talk about the character or person of God in Godself without talking about the interrelationship of the three persons of God and the character of their relationship to one another. For Moltmann, this relatedness is constitutive of the persons of God.

Boff, perhaps more strongly than Moltmann, begins from the distinct subjectivity of each of the persons of God in order to describe what can and cannot be revealed about God. To this end, he describes three meanings of "person." The person is, first, "an existing subject . . . distinct from

<sup>30</sup>This is made clear, I think, in the shape of Moltmann's most recent systematic project, which begins with a discussion of Trinitarian relationship and then moves to a discussion, in separate volumes, of each of the persons of the Trinity.

<sup>31</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity*, 150.

others.” The distinctiveness of the person is necessary for relationship; without it there is only a blurring of identities, symbiosis, or dissolution of person as subject. This distinctiveness “emphasizes what cannot enter into relationship, being the condition that makes relationship possible.”<sup>32</sup>

Second, from this position of distinctiveness the subject participates in a “relational ordering of one [subject] to another.”<sup>33</sup> Boff writes, “each divine Person is a center of interiority and freedom, whose . . . (nature) consists in being always in relation to the Other persons.”<sup>34</sup> Finally, in this relational ordering, the person can further be described as a being-for, a knot of relationships: “All three Persons affirm themselves as an ‘I’, not in order to close in on themselves, but in order to be able to give themselves to the other two.”<sup>35</sup> Here, more so than in Moltmann, Boff’s social agenda becomes clear. The relationship of the persons—in this case, the persons of God—is not only a relationship *with* the other, but a relationship *for* the other person. This relationship *with* and *for* the other creates both dialogue and communion, the unity of person and other.<sup>36</sup> For Boff this relational ordering provides a critical theological principle for the relationship between Christianity and politics, between the law of prayer and the law of living:

A Christianity too much focused on the Father without communion with the Son or interiorization of the Spirit can give rise to an oppressive image of God as terrifying mystery, whose designs seem unforeseeable and absolutely hidden. A Christianity fixated on the Son without reference to the Father and union with the Spirit can lead to self-sufficiency and authoritarianism in its leaders and pastors. Finally, a Christianity excessively based on the Spirit without links to the Son and his ultimate reference to the Father can favor anarchism and lack of concern.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Boff, 88.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 89. In this and the following, Boff most clearly articulates the language of the modern autonomous subject while, at that same time, articulating a corrective to that view. Even as he argues for the preservation of the self as a “center of interiority and freedom,” this center has an otherward focus, the being-for, the giving of the self to and for others.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 116, 5.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 15.

Perhaps this is only a way of arguing that the church requires the Trinity and a theology of the Trinity in its fullness as the critical principle in its life as church. But this critique provides Boff's best support in his resistance to the idea that doxology is theology. The implicit, and often explicit, unitarianism of what passes as Christian doxology, is inadequate theologically as well as doxologically. As John Wesley argued in his sermon on the Trinity, "the knowledge of the Three-One God is interwoven with all true Christian faith, with all vital religion."<sup>38</sup>

Unlike Moltmann and Boff, who begin with the individual person in order to move toward an understanding of relationship, LaCugna begins her discussion of the Trinity with the question of relationship. "The heart of the doctrine of the Trinity lies here. The definition of divine person as a relation of origin means that to be a person is to be defined by where a person comes from; what a person is in itself or by itself cannot be determined."<sup>39</sup> At the heart of her discussion lies an understanding of Trinitarian theology as a theology of relationship, a theology that affirms the "essence" of God as "relational, other-ward, that God exists as diverse persons united in a communion of freedom, love and knowledge."<sup>40</sup>

LaCugna develops this relational theology by way of a conversation with the theological work of John Zizioulas, where she focuses on his understanding of personhood as "being as relation," and the philosophical psychology of John Macmurray, where she emphasizes his understanding of persons as *agents* in relationship.<sup>41</sup> Her reading of Zizioulas enables her to claim that what God is in Godself, an identity that remains mysterious and unknowable, is constituted by relationship: the internal relationships between Father, Son, and Spirit, and the external relationships between these persons of God and creation. Because humanity is created in the image of God, we, too, are constituted by relationship, especially our relationship to God. Our identity, like God's, is mysterious and not fully knowable. Nevertheless, we know ourselves and are known, as God is known, by and in relationship.

Her reading of Macmurray permits a claim that the relationship of community is a constitutive context for our identity as persons. Community, therefore, "is the context in which true personhood emerges and apart from which persons do not exist at all."<sup>42</sup> LaCugna argues that we can understand God as person (or as three persons) only by situating God

<sup>38</sup>*On the Trinity*, in Outler, *Sermons*, Vol. 2, 85.

<sup>39</sup>Boff, 69.

<sup>40</sup>LaCugna, 243.

<sup>41</sup>See John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993); John Macmurray, *The Self as Agent* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957) and *Persons in Relation* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961).

as an agent in community or in a communion of persons. From this, she rejects any understanding of person as introspective, self-reflective, autonomous or self-sufficient and extrapolates a definition of person as a “heterocentric, inclusive, free, relational agent.”

LaCugna’s goal throughout is to challenge us to think about the persons of the Triune God as not “in” God but in God’s relationship with and for the “others” of Godself, the world, and all of humanity, and to discover in these relationships the character of our own lives. Like Moltmann and Boff, she concludes that God’s identity as a personal agent, in communion with Godself and creation as revealed in the history of God-with-us, requires a Trinitarian theology that is social-relational. When applied to our understanding of the human person, and in contrast to Augustine who continues to shape much thinking about the person *ad intra* as intellect, will, and spirit, LaCugna argues for an understanding of the person *ad extra*, in relationship.

**3. The Perichoretic God affirming unity-in-diversity and diversity-in-unity:** Through this social-relational reading of the Trinity, Moltmann, Boff, and LaCugna retrieve the concept of *perichoresis* as a theological and psychological framework for speaking about the inter-relationship of the persons of the Trinity.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>LaCugna, 259. Elizabeth Johnson similarly argues that “the Trinity provides a symbolic picture of totally shared life at the heart of the universe. It subverts duality into multiplicity. Mutual relationship of different equals appears as the ultimate paradigm of personal and social life. The Trinity as pure relationality, moreover, epitomizes the connectedness of all that exists in the universe” (*She Who Is*, New York: Crossroad, 1993, 222).

<sup>43</sup>The history of this term is not always clear. However, its earliest use was in reference to the intertwining of the human and divine natures in the person of Jesus Christ. Only later, in the work of John Damascene in the ninth century, is it used to refer to the (internal) inter-relationship of the persons of the Trinity. Boff offers two definitions or descriptions of *perichoresis*: The first suggests a static state in which one being is contained within another, such as the indwelling of God and Spirit in Christ. The second suggests a more dynamic state of interpenetration or interweaving of one person in and with others, indicating an active reciprocity between persons. An example of this active reciprocity: on the one hand God acts in (or through) the Spirit and Mary in the incarnation of Jesus; on the other hand, God acts in and through Christ in the giving of the Spirit upon the church after the resurrection (in John) or at Pentecost (in Luke-Acts). While Moltmann, Boff, and LaCugna all summarize the discussions about *perichoresis*, a more thorough review is provided in Verna Harrison, “Perichoresis in the Greek Fathers,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* (1991): 53–65. She traces its roots in the Christological work of Gregory Nazianzen to its adoption by Maximus Confessor and, finally, to its standardization in Trinitarian discussion in the work of John Damascene.

For Boff, this perichoretic relationship is constitutive of the eternal and infinite communion of the persons of the Trinity. It is only in this interpenetration of the persons that we can speak about the unity of the one God.<sup>44</sup> As was said of their relationality, so we can say of the Trinitarian perichoresis: it is of the essence of God as it is revealed in the history of God with us. Even as God is related, intertwined, and interpenetrating within Godself, so this “union-communion-perichoresis opens outwards: it invites human beings and the whole universe to insert themselves in the divine life,” offering “a response to the great quest for participation, equality and communion that fires the understanding of the oppressed.”<sup>45</sup> In this way, the Trinity models the reciprocal participation of persons in community without requiring that diversity be sacrificed for such participation.

Moltmann uses the image of openness within the divine perichoresis to suggest the inter-related agency of the persons of the Trinity: “The trinitarian Persons do not merely exist and love in one another; they also bring one another mutually to manifestation in the divine glory.”<sup>46</sup> Within the Trinity, this suggests an understanding of the agency of each person of the Trinity as an agency directed toward the other rather than the self. As Boff indicates, this suggests an openness toward and action on behalf of the Other as that Other is represented within God by the three Persons and by the created Other presented in the human person. This openness suggests to Moltmann a correspondence of surrender and giving, care and relatedness between each of the divine persons of the Trinity.

Like Boff’s suggestion that the perichoretic relationship within the Trinity responds to the quest for “participation, equality and communion,” Moltmann argues that this perichoretic unity “corresponds to a human fellowship of people without privilege and without subordinances” and “to the experience of the community of Christ, the community which the Spirit unites through respect, affection, and love.”<sup>47</sup> As in Boff, this perichoretic unity provides Moltmann a means by which not only to preserve unity in the midst of diversity, but also to preserve diversity in the struggle for unity. This perichoretic unity offers, then, a social-theological shape to

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<sup>44</sup>Boff, 49.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 6, 11.

<sup>46</sup>Moltmann, *Trinity*, 176.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 157-8.

the life of the church: “The true unity of the Church is an image of the perichoretic unity of the Trinity, so it can neither be a collective consciousness which represses the individuality of the persons, nor an individual consciousness which neglects what is in common.”<sup>48</sup>

Finally, as if to summarize what Moltmann and Boff have said about the perichoretic character of the Trinity as it points to the character of human being and community, LaCugna points to the way in which perichoresis expresses the idea that “the three divine persons mutually inhere in one another, draw life from one another, ‘are’ what they are by relation to one another.” She highlights the importance of understanding perichoresis as a “being-in-one-another” that results in “permeation without confusion” rather than a blurring of self and other or dissolution of self in the other.<sup>49</sup> Perichoresis points to a way of life in and with others that preserves distinctiveness without it becoming individualistic, autonomous, or isolated.

This seems an extended theoretical detour, so let me summarize these three themes this way: Trinitarian theology, as a practical theology, provides a grammar about God and person that is expressed and practiced doxologically in prayer, hymnody and sacrament. With this grammar we name God and ourselves in and by a history of relationship, or agency, with one another and especially as a history of God’s saving work in creation. With this grammar we define the fullness of our humanity, in relationship with God and one another.

### **The Trinitarian-Relational Grammar of Eucharistic Practice**

As Geoffrey Wainwright has argued, “the sacraments, in the plural, are signs to sharpen our vision of the divine presence in the world” and enable us “to shape our will and our action conformable with God’s in configuration with Christ.”<sup>50</sup> As such, it is possible to understand liturgical practice, and in particular eucharistic prayer and action, as a practice of a Trinitarian-relational grammar that shapes person and community.

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<sup>48</sup>Moltmann, *Spirit*, 224.

<sup>49</sup>LaCugna, 270-271.

<sup>50</sup>Wainwright, *Doxology*, 408.

Let us look, then, at two recent Methodist eucharistic texts as doxological modes for the practice and expression of this grammar.<sup>51</sup>

I begin with a disclaimer: the eucharistic texts themselves cannot tell us how often any particular church celebrates eucharist (a problem for many of our churches), whether people stand or sit for the prayer, or whether it is to be received sitting in the pew, kneeling at the altar rail, or standing in procession. They tell us neither of the character of the bread and wine (or grape juice), nor of the gestures that may or may not accompany the word actions of the text. They tell us neither of the nature of the preaching and praying that forms the context for the great thanksgiving, nor do they tell us about the people who are engaged in this performance. They tell us neither of the configuration of the building and the placement of the table, nor of the sights and smells present to the community. A fuller practical theology would require that we attend to such questions. Even so, while these prayer forms do not tell us many things, as prayer forms they do represent a grammar of prayer and faith. As texts, they represent normative theological statements by the church. As texts that Christians pray, sing, and perform, they represent normative doxological practices of the church. For now, we will have to be content with the intended faith grammar as presented rather than the grammar performed or practiced. Nevertheless, if they are received as the normal and, I would argue, normative way in which the church gives thanks, remembers, and enacts God's saving Word, they articulate in the content of the prayer who and whose we are even as they point to our future in and with God.

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<sup>51</sup>I am using the "normal" texts of the United Methodist and British Methodist churches as presented in "Word and Table I" in *The United Methodist Hymnal* (1989) and *The United Methodist Book of Worship* (1992) and "The Sunday Service" of *The Methodist Service Book* (1975). That these patterns are normative for the church seems a disputed point, especially in North America. On this, it is worth noting that the services of the church, as part of the *Hymnal* and *Book of Worship*, require authorization by the General Conference. Also, the ordinal of the North American church asks elders to receive the liturgies of the church. The preface to *The Methodist Service Book*, in a discussion of the relationship between free and fixed prayer in Methodist liturgical life, argues that the forms presented in the book "are not intended, any more than those in earlier books, to curb creative freedom, but rather to provide *norms* [my emphasis] for its guidance" (vii). A concise review of these issues, of the development and reform of these services, and of liturgical life throughout world Methodism is provided in Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, ed., *The Sunday Service of the Methodists: Twentieth-Century Worship in Worldwide Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon/Kingswood, 1996).

These texts reflect new self-understandings that perhaps would not have been possible prior to the ecumenical work that preceded them. Although the British Methodist text predates publication of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, both texts reflect the ecumenical consensus regarding the overall content and shape of the eucharistic prayer.<sup>52</sup> They reflect, also, the recovery of a more explicit Trinitarian pattern. Both texts include, in some order and fashion, thanksgiving, anamnesis, invocation of the Spirit, communion of the faithful, and the meal of the kingdom. When outlined, we find that the two prayers are identical in structure and orientation toward a Trinitarian pattern: (1) *sursum corda*, (2) thanksgiving to God, (3) Sanctus/Benedictus, (4) anamnesis/commemoration of Christ,<sup>53</sup> (5) institution narrative, (6) memorial and acclamation, (7) epiclesis/invocation of the Holy Spirit, and (8) Trinitarian doxology.

While similar in shape and theology, these texts also reveal subtle theological distinctions. The United Methodist prayer tends toward compartmentalizing the persons of the Trinity. For example, the preface focuses on God as Father and “creator of heaven and earth” and of humanity without naming the other persons of the Trinity. In doing so, it recounts God’s covenant faithfulness and redeeming work prior to the incarnation of the Son. In contrast, the preface in the British text names the whole of the Trinity, offering thanksgiving explicitly to the Father through Jesus Christ the Son, through whom the Holy Spirit is sent. In contrast to other recent eucharistic prayers, these prayers also tend to speak of God’s creating relationship to humanity to the neglect of the rest of creation.

As anamnesis and commemoration of Christ’s life, death and resurrection, the United Methodist prayer gives more attention to the emancipatory praxis of Christ, uniting it to the work of the Spirit that anoints Christ for this work and will be poured out upon us. It includes in this praxis the inauguration of the eschatological time. This attention to emancipatory praxis is distinctive among the recent generation of eucharistic prayers; it provides a doxological expression of the Wesleyan commit-

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<sup>52</sup>On this consensus, see *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), 10-17.

<sup>53</sup>I am aware that some would reserve the designation *anamnesis* to that portion of the prayer following the institution narrative which is concluded by the memorial acclamation. I am convinced, however, that items 4-6 constitute the fullness of the re-membling and re-presenting of Christ.

ment to personal and social holiness. As *anamnesis*, it operates here to “reappropriate Christ in the present so that we are caught up into his very being and are continuing the redemptive history of God-with-us. Thus, in our corporate memory, recited and proclaimed, we are given identity in Christ and a foretaste of the ultimate messianic banquet.”<sup>54</sup> The intent is to enable the Christian community to receive “a history more powerful than mere ‘remembered events’ and a future far greater than natural expectation” in order “to love, to serve, and to worship God ‘between the times’ of God’s redemptive acts in Christ and the coming in final victory of God in Christ at the end of history.”<sup>55</sup>

The anamnestic character of the British text is more concise. In creedal fashion the text remembers Christ as sharing our human nature, dying, being raised, and being taken up in glory. It focuses on the glorified Christ who continues to intercede on behalf of humanity. Narration of Christ’s relational praxis is limited to Christ’s continuing intercession for us, his gifting of the Holy Spirit, and the institution of the Supper.

As *anamnesis* gives way to oblation, both prayers describe the offering as a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving and an offering of ourselves. In the United Methodist prayer, the community offers itself in praise and thanksgiving, joined now with Christ’s offering for us. The British prayer describes two offerings, the first “our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving” and the second the offering of ourselves. In both prayers it is not bread and cup that are offered, but the human community, the church, as “a holy and living sacrifice.”<sup>56</sup> The language at this point in each prayer also reflects different attitudes about the character of the community. United Methodists seem more assertive with their offering: “and so, in remembrance . . . we offer ourselves . . . as a holy and living sacrifice.”

<sup>54</sup>*Companion to the Book of Services* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), 39.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 39-40.

<sup>56</sup>This raises a question about the nature of the gifts of bread and wine. Both liturgies provide for the bread and wine to be brought to the table with “the other gifts” of the community or for the bread and wine to be uncovered if already in place. With the former action, bread and wine are given dual meaning as the gifts of the people *and* the gifts of God. Such meaning is less clear in the latter action, where the already present gifts are uncovered or unveiled. The former suggests a divine-human cooperation in the gifts, perhaps a Wesleyan synergism. The already present gifts suggests a Wesleyan prevenient presence of God’s gifts and grace.

The British are more reticent, reflecting the mood if not the text of the prayer of humble access: “We ask you to accept our sacrifice” and “Accept us as we offer ourselves to be a living sacrifice. . . .”

Finally, as thanksgiving and anamnesis turn to *epiclesis* and intercession, we find several subtle contrasts. The British prayer seems to avoid referring the action of the Holy Spirit to the bread and wine. Rather, the Spirit’s action is focused on those who are to receive the bread and wine, that we “may share in the body and blood of Christ,” be made one body with him, and brought, with the whole of creation, into the heavenly kingdom. In the United Methodist prayer, the power of the Spirit is invoked on the gifts and the people with explicit missional intent: “that we may be for the world the body of Christ,” and that, by the power of the Spirit we may be made one not only with Christ but also with one another for the sake of ministry to the world.

The practical intent in both prayers is clearly to offer God thanks and praise, to commemorate the event of Jesus Christ, and to invoke the Holy Spirit in relationship to the primary symbols of bread and cup, all as a means of effecting the communion and community of the faithful. In spite of identical structures and much common language, I have emphasized the differences between these two prayers as a way to direct attention to the Trinitarian grammar they practice in doxology.

These contrasts and emphases provide the resources with which I now return to my question of the Trinitarian grammar of the liturgy as the doxological practice of the Christian self. Again, I offer a practical proviso: while the eucharistic prayer shapes the “source and summit” of the liturgy—the celebration of the eucharist—it is incomplete in itself. It requires the balance of Word read, proclaimed, and engaged, of prayers that gather up the joys and sorrows of the community, of song, gesture and dance, of silence and stillness interweaving with one another or starkly juxtaposed against the other.<sup>57</sup> This is itself a critical point for the grammar of the liturgy as a whole: each portion of the liturgy makes a

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<sup>57</sup>For a discussion of the character of juxtaposition exemplified by the liturgy, see Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993). Among the liturgical juxtapositions Lathrop describes are those of “our actions and symbols with biblical words, word and table, Sunday meeting and seven-day week, texts-with-preaching and thanksgiving-before-eating, holy people with “the one holy Lord,” praise and beseeching (see pages 11, 21, 52, 53). For Lathrop, it is in these chains of juxtaposition that meaning is created (65).

distinctive contribution to the performance of the whole. In some cases, these practices support, complement, and fill out what is more concisely expressed in doxological form in the eucharistic prayer. In other cases, these practices stand in strong, critical tension with the grammar of the eucharistic prayer.

### Concluding Observations

I have three concluding points. First, these prayers are marked by an eschatological expectation that names a horizon of meaning for particular Christian communities.<sup>58</sup> This horizon is defined by the pairings of memory and hope, history and future, creation and eschaton. These juxtapositions are most clearly imaged with language that speaks of the “already, but not yet” character of the eucharist in which we thank the Triune God for what has been accomplished and, proleptically, for what will yet be accomplished. We are present *now* at the Lord’s table; at the same time, we anticipate our presence at the table of the messianic banquet. We offer our thanksgiving this Lord’s Day in anticipation of our participation in the Day of the Lord.

The United Methodist prayer, in particular, ties our memory and history to events of failed love and unfaithfulness on the part of humanity. Hope and future are dependent on God’s steadfast love in spite of such failing, on God’s liberation of humanity from its captivity, and on the covenant God initiates. The events of creation, although limited in these prayers to creation of the human creature and Christ’s final victory, enclose the actions of liberation and covenant.

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<sup>58</sup>My intent here is a brief note, not exhaustive study. Geoffrey Wainwright’s *Eucharist and Eschatology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981) continues to provide the most comprehensive historical and theological review of this theme. One of the Wesleyan hymns on the Trinity provides an example of the linking of Trinity, eschatology and person. In Hymn 19 in the Wesley’s *Gloria Patri, etc., or Hymns to the Trinity* (London, 1746), especially stanzas 3-4 (st. 1 is addressed to the Father, st. 2 to the Son), we find the following:

O Spirit of Might, Of Joy, and of love,  
 Who guidest us right To mansions above,  
 Whose hallowing Graces for Heaven prepare:  
 We pay Thee our Praises ‘Till Glorified there.

There, there we shall see The Substance Divine,  
 And fashion’d like Thee Transcendently shine,  
 Thy Personal Essence So bold to explain,  
 And wrapt in thy Presence Eternally reign.

Second, these prayers provide an intersection of existential, transcendental, and political horizons and meanings. In eucharistic practice, the community of faith models and engages in emancipatory practice, rememorative creativity, and prescriptive achievement. As it does so, however, it doxologically names these activities as God's activity, in which the community now participates. More simply, it is the place where individual lives in all their brokenness meet the reality of the community, city, and nation yearning for their own perfection and where all of these encounter the limitations of their createdness and creatureliness in a holy transaction with God. As David Power helps us see, in the symbolic nature of the liturgy the "symbols dare to express a totality of meaning [which we may not grasp], to present to the human mind the ultimate and the transcendent. The imagination dares to speak beyond knowing. It presents the ultimate not as acquired but as desirable, not as attained but as attainable."<sup>59</sup> At the level of relationships between persons as well as those between persons and God, we are confronted with the historical character—the successes and failures—of those relationships. At the same time, we see or hope for relationships that are yet to be or are becoming.

The petitions to share in and be made one with the body of Christ for the world make this clear in both prayers. The United Methodist prayer expands the meaning of this transformation in its explicit work of anamnesis and proclamation. The time has come and now is when the poor hear the good news, captives are released, the blind are healed, and the oppressed set at liberty. Although the British prayer speaks more clearly of Christ's ongoing presence in glory, both prayers look toward Christ's final coming in glory, which remains on the distant horizon, around the bend, as it were. But in our doxological transaction the existential and political horizons are seen to intersect now, in the fact of the resurrection, in Christ's ability to "overcome every power that can hurt or divide us."

As a critical grammar of the self, these prayers are distinctive in the absence of the language of individualism and autonomy. Both prayers speak in the plural: Christ's historic activity is now occurring with *us*. *We* have turned away and our love failed, *we* are delivered from captivity, slavery and death, *we* are promised Christ's presence in Word and Spirit, *we* are made one body in Christ for the world. In this, both prayers reveal

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<sup>59</sup>David Power, *Unsearchable Riches: The Symbolic Nature of the Liturgy* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Co., 1984), 173.

a grammar of relatedness to persons and world that has political-ethical consequences, a relatedness of persons that exemplifies a relationship we might name as *lex orandi statuat lex vivendi*, the law of prayer establishes the law of living. This language also simultaneously subverts clerical attempts to usurp the eucharistic prayer as their private prayer and challenges the dominant individualistic piety found in many of our churches.

Finally, this horizon of meaning provides a vision of both the moral ideal and the ontological reality of human existence grounded in the as yet unfinished Trinitarian revelation of Godself. Each prayer, Trinitarian in shape and address, speaks of God's presence, agency, and relationship in history and creation, as well as of the expectation for relationship with God beyond history. The doxological work of the Christian community speaks of the pattern of God's self-communication, God's "practice," as displaying a "trinitarian logic; . . . a relational onto-logic that shows the very form and content of the divine life as triune."<sup>60</sup> Each prayer provides a grammar of thanksgiving to God, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit that names "who we are, whose we are, and where God is leading us." This refers to the inaugurated yet unfinished inbreaking of God's dominion into the world and our liminal status on the threshold of that inbreaking. It is the juxtaposition of the "not yet" with the "already" of Christ's presence at the banquet table and in the world. It is also the juxtaposition of our presence and anticipated presence at the Lord's table.

The reality of eucharistic practice is that all of this happens now as we are gathered about the Lord's table Sunday after Sunday. The ideal, the moral vision, is that while all of creation is invited to the feast, we are in ministry to the world until that is made to happen. Eucharistic practice, then, "sharpens our vision," "shapes our will and action," and forms us in the life of Christ. More than this, it provides the practice of seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, and smelling the divine presence. As such a tangible practice, it shapes our will and action, molds us into the image and likeness of Christ, and prepares us for the life of glory. These eucharistic prayers, as prayer texts, enable us to proclaim our faith. But as enacted

<sup>60</sup>Don Saliers, *Worship as Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 71.

and embodied prayer they are also the means by which we do that faith and the faith is done to us. In this, our praise of God is a practice of the Christian self. In this, Augustine was correct when he wrote, in paraphrase, “when you receive the eucharist, it is your self that you receive.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>Sermon 272 in Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 38 (1861), column 1247: “Would you understand the body of Christ? Hear the apostle say to the faithful: ‘You are the body and the members of Christ.’ If, then, you are Christ’s body and his members, it is your own mystery which you receive. It is to what you are that you reply Amen, and by replying subscribe. For you are told: ‘The body of Christ,’ and you reply, ‘Amen.’ Be a member of the body of Christ, and let your ‘Amen’ be true” [translation, Mary Collins, *Worship: Renewal to Practice* (Washington, D.C.: Pastoral Press, 1987), 291].

# **RESIDENT ALIENS AND THE EXERCISE OF POWER: TOWARD A WESLEYAN POSTMODERN EDUCATION**

by

**Dean G. Blevins**

How does a postmodern understanding of particularity impact the church's educational process, both in relation to Wesleyan communities and the broader society? How should Wesleyans educate in a postmodern world? Drawing into conversation a prominent school educator and a Christian pastoral theologian<sup>1</sup> is the present task. The goal is to reveal their insights and affinities which appear to have viable application for Wesleyan educators in a postmodern world.

We begin with a preliminary excursus to determine the nature of postmodern particularity and social theory. We then seek an understanding of what each of these theorists thinks postmodern education should look like within the larger society. A key question addressed is: What are their specific educational contributions to a Wesleyan educational approach that calls not only for the formation of Christians, but calls also for discernment against those who would abuse power in the church? Finally, I offer an articulation of John Wesley's understanding of the "means of grace" as a helpful means of holding together the central educational tasks for Christians.

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<sup>1</sup>John Westerhoff's self description in a seminar presentation at the Claremont School of Theology (designated as Claremont Presentation) on April 18, 1994.

## Understanding Postmodern Particularity and Social Theory

Postmodern particularity, simply stated, is the recognition that one universal theory or theology cannot be distilled and espoused in an increasingly pluralistic society.<sup>2</sup> The result is the recognition that all theory (or theology) is related to one's "particular" historical and social location. This recognition represents a foundational stance within the increasingly complex theoretical movements located under the "theme" of postmodernism.

Postmodernism, as a field of study, is complex, especially since many of the movements classified as postmodern have on occasion actually opposed such a classification.<sup>3</sup> Large categories have been employed to summarize the various philosophical and theological movements. These categories include specific thinkers and movements characterized as: deconstructive theory or theology, constructive theology (including

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<sup>2</sup>David Ray Griffin, "Introduction: Varieties of Postmodern Theology," in David Ray Griffin, William A. Beardslee, and Joe Holland, eds., *Varieties of Postmodern Theology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 2-4. Note: Griffin locates this understanding in "later modern theology" (2) but also notes it as a significant trait of Cornell West's theology (4)—which Griffin characterizes as one of the four movements or basic types within postmodern theology (3).

<sup>3</sup>William Placher ("Postmodern Theology," Donald Musser & Joseph Price, eds., *A New Handbook of Christian Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 373, notes that postmodern language emerges primarily from the disciplines of architecture and literature. The use of the term has caused great discomfort and concern. Linell E. Cady ("Resisting the Postmodern Turn: Theology and Contextualization," Sheila Greeve Devaney, ed., *Theology at the End of Modernity* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991, 81-98) raises serious questions as to whether all movements defined under this category are truly "postmodern" or merely conservative or premodern processes: "My sense is that many theologians are seizing upon the amorphous movement of postmodernism to legitimate their enterprise without adequately confronting the need for basic changes in the genre of theology" (81). The concern for the "premodern" being paraded in "postmodern" garb may be indicative of a deeper issue. Richard Kearney (*The Wake of Imagination: Toward a Postmodern Culture* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988], 20) notes "that one of the main traits of postmodernism is a suspicion of historical chronology," resulting in a preference for diverse styles rather than progressive movements so that "history as continuity becomes history as collage" (20). The result is that a modernist categorization ("post" modern "following" the modern movement) may be problematic in attempting to locate whether any theological or philosophical movement is "pre" versus "post" modern. The deeper question is whether certain philosophical and theological representations are clearly indicative of the emphases ascribed to postmodernism.

process philosophy and theology), and cultural-linguistic theology (including confessional and narrative approaches).<sup>4</sup> Some surveys of postmodern movements add communal praxis approaches that include liberative/cultural movements that at times actually critique other categories of postmodernism.<sup>5</sup> The result is that postmodernism can become vague nomenclature for a host of movements which share both familial and opposing positions. This is not surprising if, following Mark Lewis Taylor and Peter Hodgson, one recognizes that the internal dilemmas of postmodern thought are often problematic if all are pursued at the same time (acknowledging a sense of tradition, celebrating plurality, resisting domination, and maintaining an awareness of the threat to the environment).<sup>6</sup>

The language of particularity common to these postmodern categories resists any claim to a universal position on the nature of truth. The different postmodern theories often base their advocacy for particular perspectives on different grounds. Some theorists argue for particularity based on individual subjectivity; other theorists argue for particularity based on shared meanings within a specific social, ethnic, or religious group; still other theorists base their argument on the creativity of God or the novelty of creation. Since epistemological universals are no longer considered valid, or at least the possibility of these universals needs rethinking, the stage is set for conversation and dialogue among multiple epistemological perspectives.<sup>7</sup> This conversation leads postmodern thinkers from the different categories to engage in a dialogue with liberation theorists over the value of a postmodern perspective of particularity.

This desire for a liberation from ideological and/or political oppression invites these theorists to engage with particular forms of critical

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<sup>4</sup>Deconstructive and constructive theologies have also been labeled respectively as eliminative and revisionary theologies. See Griffin, 3; Peter Hodgson, *Winds of the Spirit: A Constructive Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 55; Terrence W. Tilley, *Postmodern Theologies: The Challenge of Religious Diversity* (Maryknoll: Orbis Press, 1995), vii-ix.

<sup>5</sup>Mark Kline Taylor, *Remembering Esperanza: A Cultural Political Theology for North American Praxis* (Maryknoll: Orbis Press, 1990), 23.

<sup>6</sup>Mark Kline Taylor, 23, and Hodgson, 66.

<sup>7</sup>Robert Hollinger, *Postmodernism and the Social Sciences* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1994), 169-177. Hollinger states: "Postmodernism invites us to rethink the notions of self, society, community, reason, values, and history that dominate modernity, and do so without nostalgia or regret and without utopian aspirations for what we create under conditions of postmodernity" (p. 170).

social theory (such as critical education and socialist feminism). Their desire is to secure a larger “public” space within society that is both open to multiple perspectives, yet critical of any perspective that might or actually does lead to intellectual or political domination.<sup>8</sup> These theorists not only celebrate particularity, but also seek to identify and respond to crises that threaten communities of particularity through ideological and/or political injustice and domination.<sup>9</sup> In summary, theorists working with concepts of postmodern particularity in dialogue with social theory understand that there are various individuals and communities that bring their epistemological distinctives to a larger “public” space (or society). This public space may be one of openness or domination. The challenge is to affirm particularity while resisting domination through the hegemony of any one ideology.

### **John Westerhoff’s Position Within Particularity**

Locating John Westerhoff against the larger horizon of postmodern thought and in dialogue with particularity is not simple. Westerhoff’s theological underpinnings are often elusive because of his journalistic writing style.<sup>10</sup> The reader is left to discern Westerhoff’s foundations primarily through inference or global references to whole texts within the material.<sup>11</sup> Theologically and educationally, Westerhoff can be charted through his shift from an eclectic progressive/liberative stance (with a strong dose of modernistic liberalism) to one of postmodern particularity

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<sup>8</sup>Kathleen Weiler, *Women Teaching for Change: Gender, Class and Power* (New York: Bergin & Garvey Pub.), 1-56. The term “critical” in current pedagogical and social language is understood primarily as a particular form of social theory. It is probably best represented by the neo-marxist “Frankfurt School”, including the work of Jurgen Habermas. For an overview, see Paul Lakeland, *Theology and Critical Theory* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 7-69.

<sup>9</sup>Chopp and Lewis Taylor, 5.

<sup>10</sup>Claremont Presentation, 4/18/95; Westerhoff referred to himself as a “journalist doing conceptual dialogues.”

<sup>11</sup>John Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1976), *Tomorrow’s Church: A Community of Change* (Waco, TX: Word Publishers, 1976), and *Living The Faith Community: The Church That Makes a Difference* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985). These are three of Westerhoff’s better known books which are not thoroughly documented, though in-text citations occur particularly in *Living the Faith Community* (14-25). The elusiveness of Westerhoff’s work is indicative of his own approach where he identifies his books as “art” which he writes in about three weeks and subsequently never re-reads after completion (Claremont Presentation, 4/18/95).

as understood under the narrative/cultural-linguistic approach.<sup>12</sup> Westerhoff has acknowledged his own location within the faith-community enculturation model of Christian Education. Westerhoff seeks to develop Christian Education practices that support an emphasis on the formation of Christians, but what remains is an understanding of the theological underpinnings of how and why such a model bears credibility in postmodern particularity.<sup>13</sup>

The shift from an earlier emphasis on direct liberative/social transformation to an indirect social stance based on communal transformation continues in Westerhoff's most recent co-edited work on the church and society, *Schooling Christians*.<sup>14</sup> In this work Westerhoff uses postliberal theologian George Lindbeck as both foil and support for his own catechetical formation model of religious education.<sup>15</sup> Clearly by this time the "Resident Alien" stance against the traditional understandings of "liberalism," including its hope of completely transforming contemporary society into an open and accepting community, is evident in Westerhoff's approach. This stance is indicated in the invitation to the conference from which the book surfaced.

For Christians, the integrity of the church assumes an alternative community alongside and within a society where intolerance and interference are accepted. Christian families need to be able to shape the convictions by which they are to live and by which they hope their children will live. Christian schools and other agencies of Christian education need to be able to do the same. Christian churches need to be able to stand outside the social order exposing whatever is false, dehumanizing, and contrary to

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<sup>12</sup>Dean Blevins, "Particularity, Community and Society: A Dialogue Between Formation and Border Crossings as Postmodern Education," *Religion & Society* 24:2 (Fall, 1997), 14-27. In this article I chart both Westerhoff's and Giroux ideological transitions to their current positions.

<sup>13</sup>Westerhoff, *Living the Faith Community*, 23.

<sup>14</sup>Stanley Hauerwas and John Westerhoff, eds., *Schooling Christians: "Holy Experiments" in American Education* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992).

<sup>15</sup>John Westerhoff, "Fashioning Christians in Our Day," *Schooling Christians*, 262, 268-269, 272. This is not the first sign of Lindbeck's influence. Lindbeck was also quoted by Westerhoff as a source for advocating formation as the key element of catechesis (which includes instruction and education) in a speech given by Westerhoff to the NAAPCE (North American Association of Professors of Christian Education) in October, 1991 ("The Making of Christian Through Formation," [typescript, 1991], 6). Within the speech the formational aspects of Westerhoff's model are developed in direct dialogue with Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic model of doctrine (typescript, 8).

gospel practices so as to engage in selective participation and to provide a sign of an alternative way of life.<sup>16</sup>

Westerhoff's own language also indicates his shift from earlier hopes of transforming society.<sup>17</sup> In *Tomorrow's Church*, written in 1976, Westerhoff clearly sees the necessity of engaging society through direct action for social change.<sup>18</sup> By the time of *Schooling Christians* Westerhoff nuances this action into providing an alternative, dialectical Christian model for the sake of promoting (if not salvaging) Christianity. Thus:

. . . any faithful catechetical endeavor necessitates an understanding of "church" as an ecology of intentional, interrelated, distinctively Christian institutions that provide an alternative to and are in creative tension with similar institutions within society—that is, families, congregations, and schools in which deliberate, systemic, and sustained efforts are made to fashion Christians.<sup>19</sup>

This model, while acknowledging the potential for change, limits the possibilities for a direct transformation or liberation of society in general. Indeed, this model sees the Christian church as one functioning on the margins of society, struggling to be faithful to its own identity before moving to social transformation (not by deliberate action, but by example).

In the cultural-linguistic approach, community is understood as the locus of particularity both in its own communal understanding (Lindbeck) and in its need for communal preservation and witness (Hauerwas and Willimon). Westerhoff provides this model with a powerful educational methodology for fashioning Christians through enculturation into the Christian life. Westerhoff's model calls for intentional assimilation into

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<sup>16</sup>Hauerwas and Westerhoff, "Introduction," *Schooling Christians*, viii. Westerhoff's approach is indicated in a later chapter, "Fashioning Christians in Our Day," 281. As indicated in the NAAPCE speech (typescript, 13), Westerhoff clearly indicates the influence of confessional thought in his use of "post-Constantinian" language and his understanding of the church as a community of "Resident Aliens," the bulwark image of Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon's *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989). In their book, Hauerwas and Willimon advocate a "confessing church" (46) as an alternative to traditional understandings of transforming society (43-48).

<sup>17</sup>Westerhoff, Claremont Presentation, 4/18/95; Westerhoff himself indicated that his own position has shifted from that stated in *Tomorrow's Church*.

<sup>18</sup>Westerhoff, *Tomorrow's Church*, 20.

<sup>19</sup>Westerhoff, "Fashioning Christians in Our Day," 263.

the Christian worldview via eight aspects of communal life: communal rites (repetitive, symbolic and social acts which express and manifest the community's sacred narrative along with its implied faith and life), church environment (including architectural space and artifacts), time (particularly the Christian calendar), communal life (polity, programs and economic life as well as support behaviors), discipline (structured practices within the community), social interaction (interpersonal relations and motivations), role models (exemplars and mentors), and language (which name and describe behavior).<sup>20</sup> Through the intentional employment of these aspects in distinctly Christian ways, Westerhoff believes we can induct children into a primary Christian community and culture which is the basic form of discipleship for Christians.<sup>21</sup>

One should note that Westerhoff has not totally abandoned the potential for social critique and transformation. His overall model of religious education, catechesis, embraces three large movements: instruction (acquiring knowledge and skills considered necessary and useful to Christian life), education (reflection on experience in light of Christian faith and life), and formation (experiencing or being enculturated into Christian faith and life).<sup>22</sup> Westerhoff also anticipates that a firm understanding of the Christian gospel will provide an impetus<sup>23</sup> for Christians to work for social change and to resist "turning the Gospel into an opiate of personal piety and ignoring its call to social liberation."<sup>24</sup>

Westerhoff has, however, chosen to champion one aspect of his triadic model, formation.<sup>25</sup> This formative emphasis is tied to an under-

<sup>20</sup>Westerhoff, "Fashioning Christians in Our Day," 272-278.

<sup>21</sup>Westerhoff, "Fashioning Christians in Our Day," 269-271.

<sup>22</sup>John Westerhoff, "Formation, Education and Instruction," *Religious Education* (Fall, 1987), 82:4, 578-591.

<sup>23</sup>Westerhoff, "Fashioning Christians in Our Day," 271: If a person desires to become a Christian, he or she needs to practice praying the Lord's Prayer, ministering to the poor and needy, and performing other acts basic to being Christian. He or she also needs to learn a story so that words and actions merge together, shaping the heart, mind, and soul of the apprentice.

<sup>24</sup>Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?*, 71.

<sup>25</sup>Westerhoff, "The Making of Christians Through Formation," 26-27. Westerhoff closes his speech to the NAAPCE:

"Some, such as Tom Groome in Christian Religious Education, believe that Christian education is the more important issue facing us today. James Michael Lee in his numerous works on instruction believes that it is instruction. Earlier I have established that all three are necessary and surely a case can be made for

standing of Christian particularity as a marginalized community in a conflictual liberal society that views religious pluralism as beneficial.<sup>26</sup> Westerhoff believes that Christians should view such objective pluralism as threatening.<sup>27</sup> Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic model interfaces with Westerhoff's formational emphasis. For instance:

From a cultural-linguistic perspective, religion is the idiom for dealing with whatever is most important and foundational. At the heart of culture is religion, and at the heart of religion are the perceptions that define its social construction of reality or its worldview or ethos. Because a cultural-linguistic understanding of doctrine stresses the means by which human thought and experiences are shaped, molded, and constituted by cultural and linguistic forms—participating in a community's rites and internalizing its sacred narrative for example—its emphasis is on intentional enculturation or formation.<sup>28</sup>

Westerhoff's concern leads him to call for parochial schools which, while culturally and ethnically diverse, are distinctively Christian in order to form children into Christians. Westerhoff states: "I am talking about a

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each of the three. Without proper instruction, Christian education is impossible. Without good education, faithful formation is impossible. Without formation, instruction makes little difference and education is inadequate for making Christians. Formation while necessary, but not sufficient, remains foundational. It is also the most complex, least understood, and most problematic of the three processes. However, it deserves and demands our attention for without it we will have no possibility of making Christians."

Westerhoff repeats this emphasis on formation as enculturation in "Fashioning Christians In Our Day," 266-271. He summarizes: "Formation then is fundamentally the practice and experience of Christian faith and life" (271).

<sup>26</sup>Hauerwas and Westerhoff, "Introduction," *Schooling Christians*: "One alternative understanding of society assumes distinctive, unique, identity-conscious, communities interacting with each other in ways that do not compromise their integrity, but make various and diverse contributions to our common life" (viii).

<sup>27</sup>Westerhoff, "Fashioning Christians in Our Day," writes: "At least from one Christian perspective, while the ideal of cultural, racial, and ethnic pluralism may be desirable, the ideal of religious pluralism must be questioned, for such a proposition is founded on the assumption that differences between religions are not a matter of truth, conviction, or commitment but solely a matter of opinion and private concern" (263). Westerhoff later advocates: "The church must become a more intentional faith community, must stop worrying about church growth, and must begin to shape its people to be Christian in an alien world" (281).

<sup>28</sup>Westerhoff, "Fashioning Christians in Our Day," 269. Emphasis added.

*Christian* school, a school that is intentional about every aspect of its life and the formation of Christians.”<sup>29</sup> Westerhoff’s vision is that this community, being particularly Christian, would serve as a confessional counter text to challenge contemporary society’s notion of minimizing or obliterating differences—which “has resulted in moral relativism and indifference, as well as social disease.”<sup>30</sup>

Westerhoff seems to have embraced postmodern particularity in understanding Christian congregations as communities of religious particularity that must engage with society as autonomous communities. He offers a powerful model of how the community must continue to be formed in a diverse society, but leaves open the nature of the engagement with other communities, other than calling for the church to provide an alternative worldview that challenges society at large. Understandably, Westerhoff may still see the Christian gospel as the subversive quality which will compel those who belong to the Christian community into acts of liberation and social justice.<sup>31</sup> Westerhoff, however, must also face the critique of those who see the confessional or postliberal movement as a retrenchment into a communal enclave that is much more reminiscent of an apologetic defense and retreat from society at large.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup>Westerhoff, “Fashioning Christians in Our Day,” 278.

<sup>30</sup>Hauerwas and Westerhoff, “Introduction,” *Schooling Christians*, viii-x.

<sup>31</sup>Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?*, 36-38, 48.

<sup>32</sup>Rowan D. Williams, “Postmodern Theology and the Judgment of the World,” Frederic Burnham, ed., *Postmodern Theology*, 101-111. Williams writes: Lindbeck “identifies with admirable precision the danger of reducing faith to a commodity marketed to atomistic selves in a hopelessly fragmented culture, and goes on to defend the idea that a unified future world rescued from the acids of modernity would be more likely to be fostered by ‘communal enclaves,’ concerned with socialization and mutual support rather than with ‘individual rights and entitlements,’ as opposed to religious traditions that eagerly abandon their distinctiveness in favor of a liberal syncretism. This may be so; but unless these ‘enclaves’ are also concerned quite explicitly with the problem of restoring an authentically public discourse in their cultural setting, they will simply collude with the dominant consumer pluralism and condemn themselves to be trivialized into stylistic preferences once more. The communal enclave, if it is not to be a ghetto, must make certain claims on the possibility of a global community, and act accordingly” (101). See also Wayne Proudfoot, “*Regulae fidei* and Regulative Idea: Two Contemporary Theological Strategies,” Sheila Greeve Devaney, ed., *Theology at the End of Modernity*, 99-113. Proudfoot challenges Lindbeck’s theology as being essentially apologetic with a desire to allow for “Christian claims of superiority and exclusiveness” (103). Proudfoot concludes: “The most common protective strategy in Protestant thought since Schleiermacher has been to

## Henry Giroux's Position Within Particularity

Henry Giroux might best be described as a critical pedagogue whose earlier works "include perspectives drawn from the Frankfurt School version of critical theory and ethnographic school studies grounded in a neo-Marxist perspective."<sup>33</sup> Giroux's work now draws from several self-descriptors, including radical education which situates the politics of schooling within the politics of the wider community.<sup>34</sup>

Giroux combines several elements from feminism, modernism, and postmodernism into a new pedagogical approach.<sup>35</sup> Postmodernism, as a specific movement, becomes for Giroux a somewhat limited dialogue partner (along with elements of modernism and feminism) with critical pedagogy.<sup>36</sup> What limits the postmodern movement for Giroux is his

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stress the autonomy of religious and theological language, to decouple it from nonreligious beliefs and practices, and to leave inquiry about the world to the sciences, broadly considered. That decoupling has permitted scientific inquiry to flourish without ecclesiastical interference and has served apologetic purposes in the short run. The cost, however, has been to remove theological reflection from the actual inquiries in which we continually engage, and to court the risk of irrelevance" (113).

<sup>33</sup>Henry Giroux, "Introduction and Overview to the Curriculum Field," Henry Giroux, Anthony Penna, and William Pinar, eds., *Curriculum and Instruction: Alternatives in Education* (Berkeley: McCutchan Publishing Corp., 1981), 7.

<sup>34</sup>Henry Giroux, *Ideology, Culture and the Process of Schooling* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), 80. Giroux echoes in part Westerhoff's muted enthusiasm for transforming society directly, but offers a cautious optimism in bringing transformation through change in the schooling process: "The most that can be expected of such reform is that it will contribute to changing the consciousness and drives the teachers and students who could then work to change society. The truth of radical pedagogy lies in its power to negate the power of those who define what is legitimate and real" (79).

<sup>35</sup>Henry Giroux, "Modernism, Postmodernism, and Feminism: Rethinking the Boundaries of Educational Discourse," Henry A. Giroux, ed., *Postmodernism, Feminism and Cultural Politics: Redrawing Educational Boundaries* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 1-59—also published as "Crossing the Boundaries of Educational Discourse: Modernism, Postmodernism, and Feminism," in *Border Crossings*, 39-88.

<sup>36</sup>Henry Giroux, "Postmodernism and the Discourse of Educational Criticism," Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux, eds., *Postmodern Education: Politics, Culture and Social Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 57-86. "What is at stake here is the recognition that postmodernism provides educators with a more complex and insightful view of the relationships of culture, power and knowledge. But for all of its theoretical and political virtues, postmodernism is inadequate to the task of rewriting the emancipatory possibilities of the language and practice of a revitalized democratic life" (81). See also "Border Pedagogy in the Age of Postmodernism," *Postmodern Education*, 116-118.

belief that some postmodern theories critique dominant culture but offer no understanding of how that culture is appropriated by groups or how the dominant culture may be overcome by those on the margins. Giroux is also concerned with the academic and formalized preoccupation of some postmodern theorists with linguistic structures rather than with the larger social world of activities and social relations. Giroux and others are suspicious of the emphasis some postmodern theorists give to the loss of subjectivity, just when marginalized groups are finally being empowered to speak and act as subjects rather than objects of domination.<sup>37</sup>

Giroux incorporates these several movements into his pedagogical theory, as well as another variation of the postmodern movement, post-colonialism, a liberative/cultural movement associated with African and African-American theorists such as Cornel West, bell hooks,<sup>38</sup> and Hommi Bhabha.<sup>39</sup> Giroux has now expanded on radical pedagogy to a position he terms a critical or border pedagogy as a form of cultural politics.<sup>40</sup> This shift includes a method of understanding cultural production for political means which has led Giroux into studies of popular culture and their pedagogical impact.

The resulting gestalt of postmodern, modern, feminist, postcolonial, and critical theories results in a “border pedagogy of postmodern resistance” designed to address the broader cultural and political considerations that are redefining the traditional views of community. Giroux provides several summaries of the basic tenets of this form of critical or border pedagogy.<sup>41</sup> In short, the notion of border pedagogy presupposes not merely an acknowledgment of the shifting borders that both under-

<sup>37</sup>Giroux, “Postmodernism and Educational Criticism,” 67-80.

<sup>38</sup>It is understood that it is this author’s preference to use lower case letters for her name.

<sup>39</sup>Giroux, *Border Crossings*, 19-38.

<sup>40</sup>Giroux is actually quite fluid in his use of the terms radical and critical as evidenced in *Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education* (New York: Routledge, 1992). In a 1989 interview published in the text, Giroux associates radical pedagogy with social theory and lists the following characteristics and assumptions: radical education is interdisciplinary in nature; it questions the fundamental categories of all disciplines; it has a public mission of making society more democratic; and it combines theory and praxis. But Giroux here also insists that the basic assumptions of radical education include *both* critique and possibility, as does critical education (10). The term “critical” also has several educational referents (*Border Crossings*, 10, 98-102, 161-179).

<sup>41</sup>See Giroux, *Border Crossings*, 28-36, 73-80, and 170-176.

mine and reterritorialize different configurations of power and knowledge; it also links the notion of pedagogy to a more substantive struggle for a democratic society.<sup>42</sup>

By bringing together modernity's emphasis on democracy and post-modernism's resistance to an ideological domination, "students must engage knowledge as border-crossers, as people moving in and out of borders constructed around coordinates of difference and power."<sup>43</sup> Giroux's border pedagogy includes the ability to enter into the world of those outside the traditional boundaries or borders of knowledge and power. Giroux's pedagogy also includes the ability to identify the cultural elements which establish and legitimize those boundaries while understanding that the boundaries may change or shift with the introduction of new cultural elements or new perspectives from those either inside or outside the boundaries of power. Students are always aware of issues of power and also that their participation in dominant power structures may change as new elements of difference are introduced.

The ability to understand and negotiate these borders is accomplished as students both affirm and critically explore their own constructed social identity and challenge their participation in or resistance to the dominant culture. Giroux is deeply cautious of a critical investigation that merely results in a simplistic dualism that reduces the complexities of culture and power to an "us" against "them" mentality.<sup>44</sup> Instead, Giroux hopes that through differences the students and teacher will construct a new way of understanding each other (a new language) out of their often oppositional viewpoints.<sup>45</sup> Giroux also anticipates that the students themselves will find how they mutually participate within the power structures of the society from their own point of particularity and difference. He argues:

Knowledge and power come together not merely to reaffirm difference but also to interrogate it, to open up broader theoretical considerations, to tease out its limitations, and to engage a vision of community in which student voices define

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<sup>42</sup>Giroux, "Border Pedagogy in the Age of Postmodernism," 118. See also Giroux, "Postmodernism as Border Pedagogy: Redefining the Boundaries of Race and Ethnicity," *Postmodernism, Feminism, and Cultural Politics*, 248-256.

<sup>43</sup>Giroux, "Border Pedagogy in the Age of Postmodernism," 119.

<sup>44</sup>Giroux, *Border Crossings*, 24.

<sup>45</sup>Giroux, *Border Crossings*, 21.

themselves in terms of their distinct social formations and their broader collective hopes.<sup>46</sup>

The goal is for students to understand and challenge their participation in or resistance to the dominant culture. Teachers become participants as well as facilitators, naming their own social location. For critical educators, says Giroux, “this entails speaking *to* important social, political, and cultural issues from a deep sense of the politics of their own location and the necessity to engage and often unlearn the habits of institutional (as well as forms of racial, gender, and class-specific) privilege that buttress their own power while sometimes preventing others from becoming questioning subjects.”<sup>47</sup> Ultimately Giroux hopes to overcome the potential of post-modern nihilism (particularity reduced to the absence of any common referent) through a redefinition of the importance of difference in democratic discourse. Giroux believes that this redefinition will be accomplished by bringing subordinate and privileged groups into an articulated commitment to a transformed democracy for the sake of human survival.<sup>48</sup>

## Dialogue

In one sense Westerhoff and Giroux offer complementary approaches to understanding particularity. More specifically, communities are identified as postmodern particularities against a wider social landscape and communities are also identified as the location where particularity is explored for the sake of practicing democratic discourse in society. Westerhoff is primarily concerned with promoting particularity internally through assimilating the individual, primarily through liturgy, into the worldview and ethos of a community grounded in the “sameness” of the gospel story.<sup>49</sup> Giroux is primarily concerned with promoting par-

<sup>46</sup>Giroux, “Border Pedagogy in the Age of Postmodernism,” 132.

<sup>47</sup>Giroux, *Border Crossings*, 35.

<sup>48</sup>Giroux, “Border Pedagogy in the Age of Postmodernism,” 133.

<sup>49</sup>Westerhoff, *Living the Faith Community*, 69-83. This does not imply that Westerhoff has a naive view of the church as a monolithic, unchanging community. The “sameness” of the congregation may indeed have to be re-articulated in each culture and historical location. Westerhoff writes: “A healthy church maintains a tension between the polarities of form and reform, pragmatism and vision” (76). Westerhoff, however, does believe in a commonness to all communities of faith, grounded primarily in the liturgical celebration of the church year as a re-telling of the gospel story. So, “sameness” might be understood as the story lived out through the liturgical life of the community as well as in parochial schools (“Fashioning Christians in Our Day,” 278-281). See also John Westerhoff and William Willimon, *Liturgy and Learning Through the Life Cycle* (Minneapolis: The Seabury Press, 1980), 53-72.

ticularity externally through a social discourse which names, explores, and celebrates “difference” in society. Both theorists trust that their model of pedagogy includes a subversive element that will help their postmodern communities (church or school) to challenge and overcome any hegemony of domination for the sake of social transformation. Westerhoff trusts in the subversive content of an authentic Christian message, while Giroux trusts in the subversive method of the dialogue of critique and possibility.

**1. When Resident Aliens speak to “Generic” Democratic Discourse.** Each of these two theorists offers critique as well as possibility to the other. Westerhoff indicates more fully just how particularity is fostered, and indeed must be fostered to offset the influence of the hegemonic dominant culture. Giroux is concerned that “raceless” notions of cultural representation are always and inevitably dominated by Eurocentric culture.<sup>50</sup> Westerhoff’s concern is that this dominant, liberal culture includes the diffusion of religious affiliation as well. In a sense Westerhoff says: “It is not enough to name and celebrate particularity; one must be willing to nurture such particularity lest it be subsumed.” Without adequate formation, Westerhoff is concerned that border crossing for some students may result in a world of meaninglessness and indecision where no particularity can be affirmed in the midst of the constantly shifting boundaries of knowledge and power (a concern that Giroux himself echoes concerning certain postmodern theories).

Westerhoff would also probably challenge Giroux’s understanding that every new paradigm has to create its own language in order to avoid legitimating existing power structures.<sup>51</sup> Westerhoff might assert instead that the very subversiveness of a particular language (as with the Christian gospel) might ultimately overcome its own domestication by a dominant culture, especially when that language is finally understood. Westerhoff would acknowledge that breaking down prescribed meanings in order to hear an authentic “gospel” might be a difficult task. He, however, would insist that the liturgical role of formation for crucial to disciplining oneself to authentically hear and understand this gospel.

**2. When Border Pedagogy Reveals Resident “Clones.”** Giroux, however, offers a methodology by which the validity of the enculturation

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<sup>50</sup>Giroux, *Border Crossings*, 138-139.

<sup>51</sup>Giroux, *Border Crossings*, 21.

might be challenged (and either critiqued or affirmed) in a larger democratic context. Communities then would not only engage in formation but also in discourse to check the validity of their narrative. Indeed, Giroux assumes that not all claims of all particular cultures or communities are equally valid. Thus:

Border pedagogy also stresses the necessity for providing students with the opportunity to engage critically the strengths and limitations of the cultural and social codes that define their own histories and narratives. Partiality becomes, in this case, the basis for recognizing the limits built into all discourses. At issue here is not merely the need for students to develop a healthy skepticism towards all discourse of authority, but also to recognize how authority and power can be transformed in the interest of creating a democratic society.<sup>52</sup>

This engagement of strengths and limitations includes the possibility that any community that perceives itself on the margins may in another configuration of power and difference be “remapped” so that it occupies the center of hegemonic control. Giroux might point to the reality that many congregations are affected by the “social worlds” introduced from society at large (including the dominant culture) which exert influence on the church.<sup>53</sup> A classic example for Giroux would be seeing the church as historically formed in a Eurocentric context, which influences many Protestant and Catholic congregations either explicitly or tacitly. In this case the church, rather than becoming a religious community of the margins, is seen as a center of racist logic.<sup>54</sup>

Giroux might also question how power would be employed in Westenhoff’s model. Giroux resons that, while the church’s leadership might understand itself as “on the margins,” it still exercises considerable power within its own community. Giroux might wonder if some persons advocating “Resident Alien” status might actually be more like “Resident Clones,” people who are using the rhetoric of formation as a means to seize power within the community.

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<sup>52</sup>Giroux, “Postmodernism as Border Pedagogy,” *Postmodernism, Feminism and Cultural Politics*, 248.

<sup>53</sup>Jackson W. Carroll, “The Congregation as Chameleon: How the Present Interprets the Past,” C. Ellis Nelson, ed., *Congregations: Their Power to Form and Transform* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 51-52.

<sup>54</sup>Giroux, *Border Crossings*, 113-115.

This would be particularly evident for those leaders who are claiming ritual mastery in some function of the church. Ritual, in this sense, would be broadly conceived. Catherine Bell has noted that a number of functions within any community can become rituals as they integrate action and cultural meaning for that community.<sup>55</sup> For a church then, rituals may be associated with liturgical forms, managerial styles, pedagogical preference or approaches to theology—any practice that the local church deems “meaningful” for its life. As rituals gain their own tradition, they also tend to stratify social roles, often creating one social class of ritual specialists who articulate and dictate the use of these rituals.<sup>56</sup> In this case ritual specialists might be those who claim expertise in a specific worship style, or management approach, or pedagogical practice that they claim is exclusively the “best” form for their community. Bell then notes that rituals may be used for empowering communities to help them resist those forces that threaten them from the broader society, or they may be used by ritual specialists to manipulate the very communities that originally created the rituals.<sup>57</sup>

Using this information, Giroux would caution faith communities to be wary of those leaders who call the church to a particular stance against society and then also claim to offer a particular set of identified practices that will guarantee that stance. Giroux would caution us to examine closely our “Resident Alien” leadership, usually understood as courageously facing the hostile forces outside the church, especially when they are “remapped” as ritual specialists within the church. In this circumstance our “Resident Aliens” may actually be “Resident Clones,” hoping to use their “specialty” to manipulate power within an unreflective community of faith.

**3. Clarity from the Conversation.** Westerhoff contends that authentic catechesis includes critical reflection, whether it is reflection on the possibility of becoming a racist church (indeed the gospel would demand it) or whether it is reflection on allowing any particular leadership to coerce the community. This understanding of catechesis as critical discernment, however, is not a large part of his current consideration beyond

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<sup>55</sup>Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford, 1992), 19-54.

<sup>56</sup>Bell, 118-142.

<sup>57</sup>Bell, 197-223.

the advocacy for racial and ethnic inclusiveness. Indeed, Westerhoff is not as vigorous in offering a critical self-reflective stance for those involved in shaping the formational process whereby educators and pastoral theologians would name their own social location and the potential of privilege that comes with it as they assume the roles of ritual specialists.

Giroux also believes that the shaping of identity is not just an enculturation into a particularity anchored in a particular history and social construction, but is also a part of a continual process of transformation and change.<sup>58</sup> In this sense Giroux challenges Westerhoff in how individuals might participate in the formative process and in the end change the overall understanding of the Christian faith for the current society. In this sense rituals and ritual meaning would be open to critical reflection and acceptance by the community. This challenge calls for Westerhoff to return to his earlier definition of enculturation which included the interaction of individuals within their community and to explore more deeply how this interactive process affects the very nature of that Christian community's ethos.<sup>59</sup> Giroux's model may even facilitate such understanding, providing that Giroux's overall guiding impulse, democratic discourse, can be understood and rearticulated within a Christian context. The strengths and limits of both theorists can be seen when they are analyzed together. Perhaps their greatest contribution to postmodern education occurs when they are held in a creative tension, stressing both the need for formation and discernment in the educational process.

Within a Wesleyan framework, where would such a conversation happen? Is it possible to maintain an implicit dialog within the ongoing practices of the Wesleyan tradition so that "Resident Aliens" and "Border Crossers" could hear the strengths and weaknesses of their perspectives? Is there an approach that embraces formation yet exposes "Resident Clones" within the normal practices of the congregation? I contend that

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<sup>58</sup>Giroux, *Border Crossings*, 172.

<sup>59</sup>Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?*, 80-88. Westerhoff does not see formation (or enculturation) as a blind indoctrination into the Christian life: "We cannot, as Christians, busy ourselves with deciding on the quality of another's life. We need to affirm the quality of all lives, and when we do, we shall begin to have an alternative understanding of educational method. Christian education needs to affirm the value of each life as equal before God. Our responsibility is to make our own life consistent with our calling and to share that life with others. We need to acknowledge not only the worth of others, but our need of their life and witness for our own growth in faith" (88).

John Wesley provides such a framework within his description of the Means of Grace. This framework, implemented as a form of Wesleyan Christian religious education and as a guide for all ministerial practice, provides the necessary avenue for this dialogue.

### **John Wesley and the Means of Grace**

When one turns to John Wesley's understanding of the means of grace, one discovers a number of similarities. The means of grace, when practiced in their fullest sense, possess the actions that are at once formative and yet open to ongoing discernment.<sup>60</sup> By "means of grace" I understand outward signs, words, or actions, ordained of God, and appointed for this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby God might convey preventing, justifying or sanctifying grace.<sup>61</sup> Such thinking was part of Wesley's dispute with certain Moravians at the Fetter Lane Society and his assertion of the value of participating with God's redemptive work.<sup>62</sup> While the means of grace themselves had no intrinsic worth, they were said to be channels by which the Holy Spirit works to communicate grace for the full work of salvation. Jesus Christ is the ground of this grace, particularly through the act of the atonement: "the merit is that of the Son."<sup>63</sup> The means, like grace, were available to all, even to those who did not yet experience what Wesley would call "salvation" (or the witness of the Spirit). As grace was a dynamic, so were the means of grace.

There were many different forms which Wesley categorized as either Instituted or Prudential means of grace. There were five means of grace, the Instituted means, that had been evident in the life of Jesus: The Lord's Supper, Prayer, Fasting, Scripture, and Christian Conference or conversa-

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<sup>60</sup>Dean Blevins, "Worship, Formation and Discernment," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 33:1 (Spring, 1998).

<sup>61</sup>John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed. (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1832, 1986), vol. 5, 187.

<sup>62</sup>Wesley, vol. 1, 282. A dispute rose with certain Moravian quietists who were part of the Fetter Lane society and were stressing that since salvation came by faith alone they were not "bound or obliged" to practice the ordinances of grace, including the Eucharist. Wesley, as noted in his journal from June 22 to July 20, 1740, opposed this viewpoint and ultimately he along with eighteen or nineteen others left the society.

<sup>63</sup>Henry H. Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: A Contemporary Understanding of John Wesley's Means of Grace* (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1987, Ann Arbor: UMI, 1987), 59.

tion.<sup>64</sup> These means form a constellation of practices that are interdependent yet individually important. These same practices, particularly in their corporate expressions, seemed to mirror the ongoing sacramental life of the church. The Prudential means of grace are contextual and tailored to individual needs and circumstances.<sup>65</sup> The Prudential means of grace span those activities found in Henry Knights' description of the instituted and the general means of grace.<sup>66</sup> They also included Christian social praxis.<sup>67</sup>

The Instituted means of grace are primarily those practices (public and private) that are formative in the Christian life. Wesley seemed to believe that we could faithfully practice these Instituted means with some anticipation of the activity of the Holy Spirit (though Wesley cautioned that the practices were not ends unto themselves). These practices find a correspondence in Westerhoff's understanding of formation since collectively they often embody the larger social practices of the faith community.

The Prudential means of grace, on the other hand, are activities and attitudes that often have to be discerned in the everyday life of believers. To practice the Prudential means is to participate in an ongoing process of trying to determine how such practices could truly be used of God, to see how grace is manifested in the practices. This exploration could contain elements of Henry Giroux's emphasis on Discernment, if understood both as a critical and constructive analysis. To participate in both Instituted and Prudential means of grace would then be to participate in activities that could closely mirror certain aspects of Westerhoff's emphasis on Formation and Giroux's emphasis on Discernment.

There may be at least one key difference in regard to Giroux's critical emphasis on the use of power. It has been argued that Wesley himself was a person given to autocratic leadership and a tight control of power.<sup>68</sup> Wesley's control, however, did not seem to sustain the Methodist societies.

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<sup>64</sup>Steve Harper, *The Devotional Life in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: The Upper Room, 1983), 19. Dean Blevins, "Means of Grace: Toward a Wesleyan Praxis of Spiritual Formation," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 32:1 (Spring, 1997).

<sup>65</sup>Ole E. Borgen, "John Wesley: Sacramental Theology, No Ends Without the Means," in *John Wesley: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed., John Stacey (London: Epworth Press, 1988), 105.

<sup>66</sup>Knight, 1-5.

<sup>67</sup>Harper, 64.

<sup>68</sup>Henry Abelove, *Evangelist of Desire* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 7-23, 40-48, 110-115.

One reason might be that Wesley's implicit ecclesiological passion overcame his explicit hierarchy. Wesley was devoutly connected to a particular Anglican polity and was rooted in a particular understanding of hierarchical power. He was, however also deeply interested in creating Christian community and in the spiritual transformation or reform of that community as well as the world at large. This passion for transformation probably deconstructed the very hierarchy of Wesley's ecclesial aristocracy.<sup>69</sup>

Perhaps this lack of autocratic dominance was also inherent when one practiced the full range of the means of grace. If discerning the Prudential means (and even the Instituted means) includes an ongoing question of how grace might be communicated by the Holy Spirit, then it is evident that critical questions should also be applied to these practices as well. These critical questions would raise the issue of how the same practices, Instituted or Prudential, might also be used to contradict God's gracious activity through the misuse of power. Indeed, the ongoing practice of discernment would refuse to allow even the Instituted means to become a hegemonic approach that tacitly elevated these practices beyond a faithful yet humble expectancy of the activity of the Holy Spirit. This watchful attitude would not only help to avoid a "works righteousness," something Wesley constantly opposed, but also to avoid using the Instituted means as a form of oppression. This same attitude would keep the practitioner from eliminating or excluding other practices from the potential of grace, including "Border Pedagogy."

## Conclusion

For Wesleyans, Westerhoff and Giroux portray a society at large as a public space in which the prior liberal ideological position can no longer be embraced. This position must be jettisoned because either of its relativization and marginalization of religious conviction (Westerhoff) or to its suppression of marginalized groups based on race, gender and ethnic diversity (Giroux). The public sphere must ultimately be transformed

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<sup>69</sup>Colin Williams, *John Wesley's Message for Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), 141-158, 207-242. Manfred Marquardt, *John Wesley's Social Ethics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 119-132. Williams' writing seems to focus more on Wesley's renewal of the individual from within the church, whereas Marquardt's description highlights Wesley's broader interest in the general society as well. These two works are representative of others that seek to articulate and balance Wesley's interest in transformation both within the church and outside it.

away from its current ethos, although both theorists are cautious in predicting to what extent their communities can enact this transformation.

Wesleyans embracing Westerhoff will advocate primarily a communal-formational model, where communities become locations which first nurture or form particularity in the form of Christian faith. These communities, then, may engage in transformation through shaping Christian character. Transformation comes through the specific witness of the community or of individuals shaped by the community, as these are projected outward in public discourse. Wesleyans who follow Giroux will operate primarily in an individual-dialectical model. Communities (including the church) become locations that practice naming and celebrating differences within their community, including social and ethnic positions, while naming and opposing the hegemonic influences of the dominant culture. Transformation comes through specific critical practices projected inwardly as the community becomes the training ground for democratic praxis.

Each theorist approaches postmodern particularity as a way either to nurture their community or to define an authentic, empowering democratic process that includes marginated groups. Westerhoff's methodology and his foundational motivation provide an excellent process of shaping communal identity, one which supports the view of many "Resident Aliens." Giroux is less precise on how the communal identities of those on the margins will remain established, and indeed celebrated. Regardless, Giroux trusts his methodology of cultural critique to transform society and protect even local communities from abusive forms of power. Churches who lean to Giroux will at least be sensitive to those outside their community and also will be cautious of those who might exploit the formational process.

For Wesleyans seeking an educational method for those living in the postmodern world, the theories of John Westerhoff and Henry Giroux provide an interesting tension between identity formation and the appropriate use of power. This tension of formation and discernment resonates with John Wesley's taxonomy within the means of grace. For those who seek to be authentically Wesleyan, there should always be a cautious balance between Resident Aliens and Border Crossing. We should be alert to establishing set practices for intentionally forming Christian identity, yet also seek to discern how these same practices might potentially become abusive when used to oppress the faithful or exclude others from the grace of God. If this is accomplished, then our educational practices might truly be "means of grace" in a postmodern world.

# JOHN WESLEY AND DEPRESSION IN AN AGE OF MELANCHOLY

by

Joe Gorman

We live in a day of unprecedented changes, pressures, choices, expectations, and demands. At the end of the nineteenth century, infectious diseases were the major cause of suffering while at the end of the 20th century it is stress-related illnesses that are wreaking havoc on American society. These factors along with the loss of our spiritual moorings have produced a lethal psychological environment, resulting in an epidemic of depression. As a culture we may very well have entered our own emotional "Great Depression."

Why has there been such a dramatic increase in the incidence of depression in this century?<sup>1</sup> While some forms of depression are clearly biological in nature, it seems that mere change in human biology alone is not enough to account for the epidemic proportions of depression in our culture. What has changed so dramatically in the past century is not human biology, but psychology, for our way of viewing and responding to the vicissitudes of life has fundamentally changed. Several trends in

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<sup>1</sup>John Wesley (1703-1791) claims that the reason for the increase in nervous disorders in his day was sleeping longer than was necessary! Writing in 1782 he avers: "Many inquiries have been made, why nervous disorders are so much more common among us than among our ancestors. Other causes may frequently concur; but the chief is we lie longer in bed." See Sermon 93, "On Redeeming the Time," *The Works of John Wesley*, 14 vols., Third Edition, Thomas Jackson, ed. (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872. Reprinted edition, Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1979), 7:70. Hereafter abbreviated as *Works* (Jackson).

American culture in the past eighty years have also left indelible marks on the American psyche: the loss of a sense of community, the loss of the solidity of the family, and the loss of faith in public institutions, such as church and government. The waning of these formerly solid establishments has left people few places to find meaning and orientation for their lives. Many have turned to self as an anchor for an empty soul. It is no surprise, then, the emotional crisis in which we find ourselves, for a self rooted in mere biology, situation, and chance is less than adequately armed to withstand the emotional and spiritual rigors of life.

What is becoming increasingly clear is that the tremendous increase in depressive disorders at the end of the twentieth century is not due to biological changes in human beings, but is largely psychological, sociological, and spiritual in nature. Help is needed in addressing constructively this non-biological arena.

### **Unhinged From Our Proper Center**

We seek here to discover in the life experience and teaching of John Wesley resources for preventing or constructively managing depression. In September, 1775, Wesley offered the following analysis of the emotional state of many in his day that is still as relevant as the day he wrote it: "We know there are such things as nervous disorders. But we know likewise, that what is commonly called *nervous lowness* is a secret reproof from God; a kind of consciousness that we are not in our place; that we are not as God would have us to be: *We are unhinged from our proper centre.*"<sup>2</sup> Wesley had tremendous pastoral, psychological, and theological insight into the complexity of depression. Even today depression is often misunderstood, but Wesley gives no indication that he questioned the validity of the emotions of depression. He speaks as one who had felt the helplessness and hopelessness of depression personally and pastorally. Anyone who has ever experienced depression will immediately recognize his description of the experience. Even though writing almost two hundred and fifty years ago, Wesley gives a compassionate and very articulate description of depression or what he calls "low-spiritedness":

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<sup>2</sup>Sermon 84, "The Important Question," *Works* (Jackson), 6:502. Emphasis added.

<sup>3</sup>"Thoughts on Nervous Disorders; Particularly that which is Usually Termed Lowness of Spirits," *Works* (Jackson), 11:516.

Does not this imply, that a kind of faintness, weariness, and listlessness affects the whole body, so that he is disinclined to any motion, and hardly cares to move hand or foot? But the mind seems chiefly to be affected, having lost its relish of everything, and being no longer capable of enjoying the things it once delighted in most. Nay, everything round about is not only flat and insipid, but dreary and uncomfortable. It is not strange if, to one in this state, life itself is become a burden; yea, so insupportable a burden, that many who have all this world can give, desperately rush into an unknown world, rather than bear it any longer.<sup>3</sup>

In his sermon “Heaviness Through Manifold Temptations,” Wesley lists several causes of “sorrow or heaviness in a true believer”: manifold temptations; all diseases of long continuance (by which he means either physical or nervous disorders); calamity and poverty; the death of a loved one; sorrow we may feel for those who are dead while they live; our great adversary who is always “walking about, seeking whom he may devour”; God’s withdrawing himself from the soul (with which he disagrees); and the knowledge of our sinfulness (but this need not occasion darkness of soul).<sup>4</sup> Other causes he lists in his “Thoughts On Nervous Disorders” include misuse of alcohol, excessive consumption of tea, lack of exercise, eating too much meat, too much sleep, and irregular passions (by which he seems to mean what in our day we might describe by talking about self-lies, negative self-talk, low-self esteem, or an emotional life that has run amuck).<sup>5</sup>

### **Did Wesley Suffer From Depression?**

Did John Wesley himself ever experience depression? In reading Wesley’s letters and journals we find very few self-revelations concerning his emotional state. In his “Introduction” to Wesley’s *Journal*, W. Reginald Ward states: “The *Journal* undoubtedly contains evidences for the man, but its evidences and, still more, its reticences make sense chiefly in the light of the common expectations of the writer and his original readers. Quarrying for Wesley in the *Journal* is a circuitous affair.”<sup>6</sup> As Ward

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<sup>4</sup>Sermon 47, “Heaviness Through Manifold Temptations,” *Works* (Jackson), 6:95-9.

<sup>5</sup>“Thoughts on Nervous Disorders,” *Works* (Jackson), 11:516-19.

<sup>6</sup>See *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, 35 volumes projected, Frank Baker, Editor-in-Chief (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984ff.), 18:1. Hereafter abbreviated as *Works*.

later states in his section on “The *Journal* and Wesley’s Frame of Mind”: “If Wesley’s inability to achieve a sense of history and of development gave his *Journal* a somewhat old-fashioned look and limited its capacity for self-revelation, he could not write a million words about his activities without revealing something of himself.”<sup>7</sup> In his introduction to Wesley’s *Letters*, Frank Baker points out that, while Wesley’s activities and thoughts for most of his eighty-seven years are meticulously documented through his diaries, journals, books, and articles, these same documents “only rarely . . . reveal what he felt.”<sup>8</sup> Wesley evidently believed that it was more important for people to be familiar with the good news of Jesus Christ rather than with his private emotional states. The careful reader of Wesley, however, as Baker notes, “is able to read between the lines and discover the private behind the public John Wesley.”<sup>9</sup>

Wesley often makes it sound as if he was never touched by what he refers to as “lowness of spirits.” Statements such as the following seem to be based more on hyperbole than reality, however: “Permit me to recite my own experience. . . . When I had lived a few years longer, being in the vigour of youth, a stranger to pain and sickness, and particularly to lowness of spirits; (which I do not remember to have felt one quarter of an hour ever since I was born).”<sup>10</sup> Similar to this statement are his remarks in a letter to Miss Elizabeth Ritchie, “I do not remember to have heard or read anything like my own experience. Almost ever since I can remember, I have been led in a peculiar way. I go on in an even line, being very little raised at one time, or depressed at another. . . . I see abundantly more than I feel.”<sup>11</sup> The traditional interpretation of Wesley’s emotional state is that he was an emotional Rock of Gibraltar, never experiencing “lowness of spirits” or suffering from flagging emotions. While Wesley’s self-analysis was certainly an accurate reflection of his usual emotional state, does it tell the whole story?

Miss Sophy’s rejection of Wesley as her suitor in Georgia gives us some strong clues that Wesley was not the emotionally unaffected person he is often perceived to be. His diary entry for the day he discovered Miss Sophy was to marry Mr. Williamson is enlightening (emphasis added):

<sup>7</sup>*Works*, 18:62.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 25:1.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup>Sermon 77, “Spiritual Worship,” *Works* (Jackson), 6:431.

<sup>11</sup>Letter to Miss Betsy Ritchie (February 24, 1786), *Works* (Jackson), 13:66.

4 Private prayer; prayers; diary. 4.45 Private prayer. 5 Meditated; Public Prayers. 6 Coffee, religious talk. 6.30 Clement. 7 Necessary talk (religious) with Mrs. Andrews. 7.45 With Mrs. Bush, necessary talk (religious). 8.30 Clement. 9.45 Logic. 10 Mrs. Causton's, necessary talk with her; *Miss Sophy to be married!* 11 *Amazed, in pain, prayed, meditated.* 12 At the lot, necessary talk (religious) with her; *I am quite distressed!* 1 Necessary talk (religious); *confounded!* 2 Took leave of her. 2.30 *At home, could not pray!* 3 *Tried to pray, lost, sunk!* 4 Bread; religious talk with Delamotte; *little better.* 5 Mr. Causton came, necessary talk, tea. 6 Kempis; Germans; *easier!* 7 Public prayers. 8 Miss Sophy, etc. 8.30 Necessary talk (religious) with her. 8.45 With Delamotte, prayers.

No such day since I first saw the sun!  
O deal tenderly with thy servant!  
let me not see such another!<sup>12</sup>

Like any young man his age, Wesley was devastated by the loss of Sophy's love and friendship and the life they might have spent together. His rejection by Sophy apparently left him emotionally devastated and depressed, as the following journal entry clearly indicates:

From the beginning of my life to this hour, I had not known one such as this. God let loose my inordinate affection upon me, and the poison thereof drank up my spirit. I was as stupid as if but half awake, and yet in the sharpest pain I ever felt. "To see her no more!" That thought was as the piercings of a sword. It was not to be borne—nor shaken off. I was weary of the world, of light, of life. Yet one way remained: to seek God, a very present help in time of trouble. And I did seek after God, but I found him not. I forsook him before; now he forsook me. I could not pray. Then indeed the snares of death were about me; the pains of hell overtook me. Yet I struggled for life, and though I had neither words nor thoughts, I lifted up my eyes to the Prince that is highly exalted. . . . And about four o'clock he so far took the cup from me that I drank so deeply of it no more.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>*Diary* (Wednesday, March 9, 1737), *Works*, 18:483. Emphasis added. For an account of Wesley's relationship with Miss Sophy, see Willie Snow Etheridge, *Strange Fires: The True Story of John Wesley's Love Affair in Georgia* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1971).

<sup>13</sup>*Journal* (March 9, 1737), *Works*, 18:486.

Wesley is to be commended for the way he abandoned himself to the mercy of God. Quite characteristically, he quickly stemmed the emotional flood that the news of Sophy's engagement to Mr. Williamson had loosed. Is it really possible that such a deep wellspring of grief could be so quickly shut off by "about four o'clock"? Or, is it more realistic to think that Wesley compressed into a single day the process of grief that took him several months, if not years, to overcome? Wesley had a way in his letters and journals of effecting instant solutions and making his life appear far less messy and loose-ended than it was.

Note, for instance, the way in which his Aldersgate experience has been traditionally interpreted.<sup>14</sup> As the story goes, it was at Aldersgate that Wesley's doubts, spiritual struggles, and anxieties suddenly ceased. What is much closer to the truth, however, is not that any of these completely desisted, but that they became less frequent and intense as time went on.<sup>15</sup> Wesley's journal entries after Aldersgate reveal a Wesley who had experienced an incredible spiritual awakening, but who was also still subject to times of profound doubt and self-flagellation. In a journal entry that was occasioned by Wesley's receiving a letter from Oxford, he was thrown "into much perplexity." The message of the letter he received was that doubt of any kind was incompatible with true faith, with the implication that "whoever at any time felt any doubt or fear was not *weak in faith*, but had *no faith* at all." After begging God to direct his mind to the Scriptures for an answer to his dilemma, he came upon some verses that reassured him that even in Scripture there were those who doubted, yet possessed faith, even if a very weak faith. He concludes his journal entry with these words: "After some hours spent in the Scripture and prayer I was much comforted. Yet I felt a kind of soreness in my heart, so that *I found my wound was not fully healed*. O God, save thou me, and all that are 'weak in the faith', from 'doubtful disputations.'" <sup>16</sup>

On January 4, 1739, some seven months after Aldersgate, Wesley uncharacteristically gave a vulnerable account of his spiritual state that

<sup>14</sup>Roberta Bondi's essay, "Aldersgate and Patterns of Methodist Spirituality," in *Aldersgate Reconsidered*, Randy L. Maddox ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 21-32, has been extremely helpful for me as I have reflected on the importance of Wesley's personal life of faith as a paradigm for the spiritual life.

<sup>15</sup>See Richard P. Heitzenrater's comments along these lines in *The Elusive Mr. Wesley: John Wesley His Own Biographer*, Volume One (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 198.

<sup>16</sup>*Journal* (June 6, 1738), *Works*, 18:254. Emphasis added.

eventually placed his spiritual struggles before the public eye when it later became a part of his published journal. The following words come from the pen of one who is in the midst of psychological and spiritual turmoil:

My friends affirm that I am mad, because I said I was not a Christian a year ago. *I affirm I am not a Christian now.* Indeed, what I might have been I know not, had I been faithful to the grace then given, when, expecting nothing less, I received such a sense of the forgiveness of sins as till then I never knew. But that *I am not a Christian at this day I as assuredly know as that Jesus is the Christ.* For a Christian has the fruits of the Spirit of Christ, which (to mention no more) are love, peace, joy. But these I have not. *I have not any love of God. I do not love either the Father or the Son . . . and I feel this moment I do not love God; which therefore I know because I feel it.* There is no word more proper, more clear, or more strong. . . . I desire the things of the world, some or other of them, and have done all my life. I have always placed some part of my happiness in some or other of the things that are seen. Particularly in meat and drink, and in the company of those I loved. For many years I have been, yea, and still am, hankering after happiness in loving and being loved by one or another [is it possible that he is still pining away after Miss Sophy?]. And in these I have from time to time taken more pleasure than in God. *Again, joy in the Holy Ghost I have not. I have now and then some starts of joy in God. But it is not that joy. For it is not abiding.* Neither is it greater than I have had on some worldly occasions. So that I can in no wise be said to “rejoice evermore,” much less to “rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” Yet again, I have not “the peace of God”; *that* peace peculiarly so called. The peace I have may be accounted for on natural principles. I have health, strength, friends, a competent fortune, and a composed, cheerful temper. Who would not have peace in such circumstances? . . . Though I have endured hardship, though I have in all things denied myself and taken up my cross, I am not a Christian. *My works are nothing, my sufferings are nothing; I have not the fruits of the Spirit of Christ. Though I have constantly used all the means of grace for twenty years, I am not a Christian.*<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Cited in Heitzenrater, 102-3. Emphasis added.

It is also important that we understand that even the older Wesley still had his battles with discouragement, doubt, and despair. The following letter was written to his brother Charles during a period when, as Richard Heitzenrater notes, “the Methodist movement was experiencing a great deal of upheaval and tension”:

[I do not love God. I never did]. Therefore [I never] believed in the Christian sense of the word. Therefore [I am only an] honest heathen, a proselyte of the Temple, one of the [God-fearers]. And yet to be so employed of God! and so hedged in that I can neither get forward nor backward! Surely there never was such an instance before, from the beginning of the world! If I [ever have had] *that faith*, it would not be so strange. But [I never had any] other [evidence] of the eternal or invisible world than [I have] now; and that is [none at all], unless such as faintly shines from reason’s glimmering ray. [I have no] direct witness, I do not say that [I am a child of God], but of anything invisible or eternal.<sup>18</sup>

How very uncharacteristic of Wesley to describe himself as so deeply helpless and hopeless!

While Wesley is a model for our own spirituality, his spirituality is not nearly as simplistic, serene, or trouble free as we have often been led to believe. For those within the Wesleyan tradition suffering from depression, it is important for their recovery to know that this amazing man of faith was not immune from bouts of melancholy. As it is revealed that even a man of the stature of John Wesley occasionally experienced the soul pain of despair, those in the black hole of depression can be encouraged by the fact that they are not alone in their distress. Just as Wesley found the spiritual resources to liberate him from the grip of emotional chaos, they too can appropriate the same spiritual resources in their own lives.

He struggled with doubts, fears, anxiety, and despair just as we do. Far from his life being one unbroken chain of successes and spiritual victories, he failed, he hurt, he questioned. Wesley’s life shows us that the spiritual life is not static or simplistic, but dynamic and complex. If we believe that we must always be striving for a faith free from ambiguities and a life without struggles, we will be consistently plagued by feelings of failure and despair.

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<sup>18</sup>Letter to Charles Wesley (June 27, 1766), cited in *Ibid.*, 198-9.

## Wesley's Pastoral Response to the Depressed

While Wesley did not often bare his soul for public observation, he was nevertheless a very compassionate pastoral counselor to those in spiritual, emotional, and physical distress. It is unlikely that Wesley could have offered such articulate compassion to his counselees without first having his own heart tenderized through similar trials. In his counsel he encouraged his counselees to apply all the resources of God and the medical insights of the day to their illness. In a letter to Miss March, he allowed that our bodies often have a direct influence on our emotional states:

As long as we dwell in a house of clay, it is liable to affect the mind; sometimes by dulling or darkening the understanding, and sometimes more directly by damping and depressing the soul, and sinking it into distress and heaviness. In this state, doubt or fear, of one kind or another will naturally arise. And the prince of this world, who well knows whereof we are made, will not fail to improve the occasion, in order to disturb, though he cannot pollute, the heart which God hath cleansed from all unrighteousness.<sup>19</sup>

Wesley was very concerned about the whole person. The following excerpt from a letter to Miss Hetty Roe, better known as Hester Ann Rogers, expresses this holistic concern: “Do you feel no intermission of your happiness in God? Do you never find any lowness of spirits? Does time never hang heavy on your hands? How is your health? You see how inquisitive I am, because *everything relating to you nearly concerns me.*”<sup>20</sup> Many times those laboring under the burden of emotional strain feel undue guilt concerning many things, both real and imagined. But Wesley, the gentle and empathetic counselor, offers these tender words to Miss Ritchie: “Sometimes, indeed, the feeble body sinks under you; but when you do all you can, you do enough.”<sup>21</sup>

The spiritual life is simply harder for some people than it is for others, for there are those who are sweeter by nature than others are by grace. This is not to excuse any of us from pressing on to perfection, but it is to

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<sup>19</sup>Letter to Miss March (July 13, 1771), *Works* (Jackson), 12:292.

<sup>20</sup>Letter to Miss Hetty A. Roe (September 16, 1776), *Works* (Jackson), 13:78. Emphasis added.

<sup>21</sup>Letter to Miss Betsy Ritchie (August 19, 1784), *Works* (Jackson), 13:64-5.

recognize that grace works through nature, never apart from it. Wesley himself was very aware of this as his letter to Miss March reveals: “You have a delicate part to act with regard to P—. There are so many great defects in her natural temper, that a great deal of grace will be required to make her altogether a Christian; neither will grace shine in her as it would in others. You have need carefully to encourage what is of God in her, and tenderly to reprove what is of nature.”<sup>22</sup> Wesley fully acknowledges that nature<sup>23</sup> can and does to some extent limit what grace can do in a person’s life. As Wesley himself admits, “faith does not overturn the course of nature: Natural causes still produce natural effects. Faith no more hinders the *sinking of the Spirits* (as it is called) in a hysteric illness than the rising of the pulse in a fever.”<sup>24</sup>

Wesley is not saying that we abandon the sick person to the disease, but that the body exerts a power of its own, even over the Spirit of God. In this case prayer is called for as well as doing whatever can be done to make the nature of the person more receptive to the empowering and healing grace of God. We must not deny the power of God’s sanctifying grace to redeem fallen humanity or heal human infirmities. Nature for Wesley is never mere nature.<sup>25</sup> Even the nature of the unregenerate is graced. The nature of the sanctified is also a graced nature, but with this difference: it is a nature infused with all the liberating and healing energies of the God-head. In the sanctified believer, there is a synergetic interchange between grace and nature. Put in an Eastern Orthodox fashion, the sanctified believer is “a participant in the divine, a partaker of the energies of God.”<sup>26</sup> For this reason Wesley was convinced that there is in God a

<sup>22</sup>Letter to Miss March (July 13, 1771), *Works* (Jackson), 12:292.

<sup>23</sup>Here I understand Wesley to speak of nature in relation to the materiality of human existence. Humans are embodied spiritual beings who dwell in houses of clay that, while often broken and cracked, show forth the glory of God in flesh and blood (see 2 Corinthians 4:7).

<sup>24</sup>Sermon 47, “Heaviness Through Manifold Temptations,” *Works* (Jackson), 6:95-6.

<sup>25</sup>See Wesley’s sermon, “On Working Out Our Own Salvation,” in *Works* (Jackson), 6:512: “. . . there is no man that is in a state of mere nature; there is no man, unless he has quenched the Spirit, that is wholly void of the grace of God. No man living is entirely destitute of what is vulgarly called *natural conscience*. But this is not natural: It is more properly termed *preventing grace*.”

<sup>26</sup>See Bishop Chrysostomos of Oreoi, “Towards a Spiritual Psychology: The Synthesis of the Desert Fathers,” *Pastoral Psychology* 37:4 (Summer 1989), 257.

source of spiritual energy available to our material existence from which human beings can draw for spiritual sustenance and physical health.<sup>27</sup> Even though a person may possess a particularly obstinate nature, even this nature, when consistently nurtured by the love of God and drawing on the infinite resources of the Holy Spirit's quickening presence, will be infused with divinely empowered possibilities. The optimism of grace rather than the pessimism of nature has the last word for Wesley.

### **Wesley's Remedies for "Lowness of Spirits"**

Over 250 years ago John Wesley realized that physical health or disease can directly influence spiritual well-being and spiritual vitality can influence physical and mental wellness. In Wesley's *Primitive Physic*, a collection of home remedies for various illnesses, he made accessible to the poor the most effective, low cost home remedies of his day. In the preface to *Primitive Physic*, he makes clear that God's original plan for creation did not include disease or "bodily disorder." When sin entered the world it brought with it the "seeds of weakness and pain, of sickness and death."<sup>28</sup> God did not abandon his beloved sons and daughters to the disease of sin, but has given the means "to soften the evils of life, and prevent in part the sickness and pain to which we are continually exposed."<sup>29</sup>

The particular genius I see in Wesley's *Primitive Physic* is his recognition of the need for both prevention *and* cure. In our day, even with the health revolution we have experienced in our nation the past several years, we are still largely focused on cure rather than prevention. This is the same whether talking about physical health or emotional well-being. Wesley has much to teach us at this point, for he believed that the glue that holds together mind, soul, body, and spirit is the love of God. Wesley refers to the cultivation of the love of God within the soul as "the sovereign remedy of all miseries, so in particular it effectually prevents all the bodily disorders the passions introduce, by keeping the passions themselves within due bounds. And by the unspeakable joy, and perfect calm,

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<sup>27</sup>Randy Maddox asserts that Wesley was convinced "that some degree of physical recovery is available even in this life—if we will allow it to begin." See Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 147.

<sup>28</sup>John Wesley, *Primitive Physic: Or, An Easy and Natural Method of Curing Most Diseases*, as in *Works* (Jackson), 14:308.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*

serenity, and tranquility it gives the mind, it becomes the most powerful of all the means of health and long life.”<sup>30</sup>

What practices did Wesley advocate for what he called “cures” or “remedies” for lowness of spirits? What prescriptions or preventative actions might he prescribe for those in our churches today who are imprisoned in black holes of anxiety and depression from which they despair of ever escaping? In his “Thoughts on Nervous Disorders,” Wesley lists several remedies for lowness of spirits. He is confident that these remedies will effect “a most certain cure, if you are willing to pay the price of it.”<sup>31</sup> The price to which he refers is that the cause of lowness of spirits must be removed before the effects can be mitigated. While many of the sacrifices Wesley claimed must be made in order to “conquer” lowness of spirits make sense to us, others are puzzling. In his *Primitive Physic* Wesley includes prayer and nurturing the love of God within the soul as two crucial components in physical and emotional well-being.<sup>32</sup> Vigorous exercise, healthy eating habits, abstinence from alcohol, and emotional self-discipline are obvious, but limiting tea consumption and getting by on minimal sleep make less sense.<sup>33</sup>

Working from an understanding of the means of grace<sup>34</sup> as those practices, habits, relationships, or experiences through which the empowering, sanctifying, and healing grace of God is mediated to human beings,<sup>35</sup>

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 316.

<sup>31</sup>John Wesley, “Thoughts on Nervous Disorders,” *Works* (Jackson), 11:519.

<sup>32</sup>*Primitive Physic*, as in *Works* (Jackson), 14:314, 316.

<sup>33</sup>John Wesley, “Thoughts on Nervous Disorders,” *Works* (Jackson), 11:519-20.

<sup>34</sup>See Henry H. Knight III’s work on Wesley’s understanding of the means of grace, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1992).

<sup>35</sup>I am working under the same assumption as Randy Maddox who claims that Wesley does not limit the means of grace to a certain number. See Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 195. While Wesley did not limit the means of grace to a certain number of practices, he does list the “chief of these means” as prayer, searching the scriptures, and receiving the Lord’s Supper. As he says of these, “we believe [these] to be ordained of God as the ordinary channels of conveying his grace to the souls of men.” See Sermon 16, “The Means of Grace,” *Works*, 1:381.

I propose the following practices<sup>36</sup> as essential ingredients in prescribing a Wesleyan pastoral response to depression: prayer; searching the Scriptures; exercise; sleep; and antidepressant medication. These practices are means of grace, for they are therapeutic channels of healing for the appropriation of the enlivening, sanctifying, and healing grace of God. Such spiritual disciplines nurture the life and love of God in the human soul. As means of grace they are ways for the depressed person to discover the depth and power of the presence of God. Spiritual disciplines in no way earn merit or favor with God,<sup>37</sup> but are an indispensable aid to opening our lives up to the activity of God in such a way that our lives are so caught up with the abundance of the divine life that the love, joy, peace, faith, and hope that would make us rock solid no matter what the circumstances takes possession of our lives.<sup>38</sup>

While Wesley understood that there are infirmities or different natures that are more susceptible to emotional strain than others, he also points out that the depression of some, if not many, may be due more to spiritual anemia than physical infirmity or peculiarity of nature. In a letter to Dr. Rutherford in 1768, Wesley admits that it is possible to be both Christian and depressed, but with a caveat: “Possibly some may be in the favour of God, and yet go mourning all the day long. But I believe this is usually owing either to disorder of body or ignorance of the gospel promises.”<sup>39</sup> It is important, then, for those who suffer from lowness of spirits to seek to be as open to God’s gospel promises as possible by availing themselves of the means of grace. At the same time, there may be more to

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<sup>36</sup>I have included some of Wesley’s “remedies” and “cures” and excluded others. For space reasons, I have not included all the practices that I believe are helpful to recovering from depression. I have limited my remarks to those practices that Wesley specifically mentions, with the exception of my addition of antidepressant medication. If I were to offer a more inclusive list, I would also include the following (not listed in any particular order): personal self-care; solitude and silence; praying the psalms; fasting; participation in a church community; involvement in loving, nonjudgmental, safe relationships; developing holy hobbies and divine diversions; reframing failure theologically; redefining success biblically and personally; partaking of the sacraments; and engaging in physical labor.

<sup>37</sup>Sermon 16, “The Means of Grace,” *Works*, 1:382, 390, 396.

<sup>38</sup>This sentence is my re-wording of a statement made by Dallas Willard, “The Spirit of the Disciplines,” Tape 2, *The Sower’s Yield Tape Ministry* (818-363-8203), n.d.

<sup>39</sup>Letter to Dr. Rutherford (March 28, 1768), Telford, *Letters*, 5:358.

depression than simply trying to trust God more, for physical infirmity is frequently a very real component in depression.

As the love of God is cultivated through the various means of grace, we build into our character holy tempers that God will graciously use over time to drive out or at least limit the influence of the “irregular passions” of anger, worldly sorrow, destructive fear, and lowness of spirits.<sup>40</sup> As holy tempers are cultivated in the soul and an abiding disposition of holiness, exhibited by the fruit of the Spirit, begins to reign in the life of the believer, irregular passions will no longer be able to dominate the person previously afflicted by nervous disorders. I do not believe that Wesley spiritualizes depression to the point that he claimed that in all cases where the life and love of God are consistently nurtured depression will completely disappear, but I do believe he taught that through availing ourselves of the healing and sanctifying grace of God, and by seeking appropriate medical help, the effects of depression can be ameliorated to at least some extent in this life.

Some psychological illnesses are so deeply rooted in genetics, life-long emotional abuse and illness, and other physical infirmities, however, that only a limited relief of the pains experienced in this life can be hoped for. As evidence for this claim, note Wesley’s following letter to Miss Betsy Ritchie: “Since I saw her, I have had the pleasure of receiving two letters from —; and I am more and more convinced, that she has sustained no real loss from her late trials. Indeed the greatness of them proved the greatness of her grace; otherwise, she must have utterly fainted. *But I am afraid the poor tenement of clay has received such a shock as will not easily be repaired.* The wonderful behaviour of Mrs. — was more than it was well able to bear. But the comfort is, He with whom we have to do is the Physician.”<sup>41</sup>

Even the apostle Paul was not immune from physical affliction. He prayed three times for God to remove his thorn in the flesh, but each time he prayed, he heard God say to him, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:8-10, NIV). Wesley seems to have adopted this same approach with at least one severe and chronic case of lowness of spirits. As he records in his journal:

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<sup>40</sup>“Thoughts on Nervous Disorders,” *Works* (Jackson), 11:519-20.

<sup>41</sup>Letter to Miss Betsy Ritchie (October 6, 1778), *Works* (Jackson), 13:60. Emphasis added.

About two o'clock, *Friday*, 12, I preached in the preaching-house yard, at Trowbridge, where, notwithstanding the harvest, we had an unusually large congregation, who listened with deep attention; in the evening at Bradford, to as many as the House would contain. But I did not find good Mrs. Ballard there. After long struggling with a deep nervous disorder, which for a time depressed the mind as well as the body, the cloud removed; her load fell off, and her spirit joyfully returned to God.<sup>42</sup>

He clearly acknowledges here that some will not gain relief from their emotional burden until death.

In presenting the practices of prayer, searching the Scriptures, exercise, sleep, and the taking of antidepressant medication as channels of God's healing grace, we must keep in mind that not everyone will be healed to the same extent or even in this life. Spiritual disciplines will assist us in working out the grace God works in us, but they are not infallible prescriptions for emotional healing. I can attest personally to having tried each of these practices when I was severely and chronically depressed several years ago. While these (and other spiritual disciplines) greatly assisted me in regaining my emotional and spiritual health, I readily acknowledge along with Wesley that none of these "remedies" will work equally well in "all times and places." Wesley's experience taught him over the years that "the medicine which cures one man will not always cure another of the same distemper. Nor will it cure the same man at all times."<sup>43</sup> It is for this reason that Wesley is careful not to promise that his *Primitive Physic* carried medical infallibility. As evidence of this, Wesley included his own "experimental *imprimatur*" in the *Primitive Physic*, marking those remedies he had personally tried with the word "Tried," those he preferred to the rest with an asterisk, and to those remedies he deemed certain cures he placed an "I" for infallible.<sup>44</sup>

So far we have looked at Wesley's emotional life and his pastoral response to those suffering from depression. It is my intention now to develop a Wesleyan prescription for depression by pointing the way to a spirituality adequate path to the prevention or management of depression. Let us look at several practices prescribed by Wesley whereby God may

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<sup>42</sup>*Journal* (September 12, 1788), *Works* (Jackson), 4:437.

<sup>43</sup>*Primitive Physic*, as in *Works* (Jackson), 14:313.

<sup>44</sup>See *Primitive Physic*, as in *Works* (Jackson), 14:313 and Heitzenrater, 137.

restore emotional and physical well-being to our lives.

**1. Prayer.** Prayer has long been understood by Christians to unleash the power of God to heal human infirmities in ways not available when prayer is absent. In the first century, James counsels prayer for the healing of sickness: “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed” (James 5:16). The fourth century desert father, Nilus, advises prayer specifically for depression: “‘Prayer is a remedy against grief and depression.’” Wesley referred to prayer as “that medicine of medicines.”<sup>46</sup> He even specifically prescribed prayer as a spiritual antidepressant for depression or what he referred to as “lowness of spirits”: “Above all, add to the rest (for it is not labour lost) that old unfashionable medicine, prayer. And have faith in God, who ‘killeth and maketh alive; who bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up.’”<sup>47</sup>

Wesley says that when we pray, we are not simply availing ourselves of the resources of mere nature, but of the empowering, healing, and sanctifying grace of God. Prayer makes available to us the pharmacy of heaven as God infuses our weary and infirm nature with the medicine of heaven.<sup>48</sup> Prayer is as important to the spirit as breathing is to the body. Just as when we have been exerting ourselves physically we breathe hard and need only to stop our exertion and take a couple of deep breaths in order to breathe normally again, so when we are under stress or feeling depressed we need to take a couple of deep spiritual breaths by praying. As we breathe a prayer to God, the Holy Spirit breathes God’s enlivening presence into our souls:

[The life of God in the soul of the believer] immediately and necessarily implies the continual inspiration of God’s Holy Spirit: God’s breathing into the soul, and the soul’s breathing back what it first receives from God; a continual action of God upon the soul, the re-action of the soul upon God; an unceas-

<sup>45</sup>Nilus, 3, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, revised edition, trans. Benedicta Ward (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1984), 153.

<sup>46</sup>John Wesley, *Advice With Respect to Health*, Preface, §9, *Works* (Jackson), 14:258.

<sup>47</sup>*Primitive Physic*, as in *Works* (Jackson), 14:314.

<sup>48</sup>For two of the many instances where Wesley reports direct answers to prayer for his own healing, see *Journal* (Nov. 12, 1746), *Works*, 20:145; *Journal* (Sept. 16-Oct. 3, 1756), *Works*, 21:78.

ing presence of God, the loving, pardoning God, manifested to the heart, and perceived by faith; and an unceasing return of love, praise, and prayer, offering up all the thoughts of our hearts, all the words of our tongues, all the works of our hands, all our body, soul, and spirit, to be an holy sacrifice, acceptable unto God in Christ Jesus. And hence we may . . . infer the absolute necessity of this re-action of the soul (whatsoever it be called) in order to the continuance of the divine life therein.<sup>49</sup>

Through prayer God's gracious presence is mediated to us and the Holy Spirit invigorates our tired body and weary emotions—that is, so long as we quit contributing to our own stress and weariness by continuing in the actions and thoughts that depressed us in the first place. If we do not change our habits, we will inevitably become depressed again. As Wesley said, "Till the passion which caused the disease is calmed, medicine is applied in vain."<sup>50</sup> As we learn to open ourselves up to God in prayer, God is able to enter the deeply wounded places of our lives and apply the healing balm of the gracious divine presence.

One of the greatest gifts Wesley gives to those in the throes of depression is the optimism of grace rather than the pessimism of nature. This wonderful insight is nowhere more obvious than in the practice of prayer. Wesley claimed that cooperating with and nurturing the grace of God in our lives through prayer will progressively transform and heal our sin-ravaged souls to the point that "Then shall there be no more complaining of lowness of spirits! But 'the peace of God, which passeth all understanding,' shall keep thy heart and mind in Christ Jesus!"<sup>51</sup> I believe Wesley has claimed too much at this point, however.<sup>52</sup> Optimism of grace is essential, but it is also critical to acknowledge that God is never the sole cause of any event.<sup>53</sup> There are many factors that shape human emotional

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<sup>49</sup>Sermon 19, "The Great Privilege of Those that are Born of God," *Works*, 1:442.

<sup>50</sup>*Primitive Physic*, as in *Works* (Jackson), 14:314.

<sup>51</sup>"Thoughts on Nervous Disorders," *Works* (Jackson), 11:520.

<sup>52</sup>In another place he is much more cautious than he is here about the prospects of physical healing in this life. See Sermon 62, "The End of Christ's Coming," §III.1-4, *Works*, 2:482.

<sup>53</sup>See Bruce G. Epperly, "To Pray or Not to Pray: Reflections on the Intersection of Prayer and Medicine," *Journal of Religion and Health* 34:2 (Summer 1995), 144-146.

health at a given time: spiritual, physical, genetic, emotional, social, historical, and political. One or more of this web of elements may be a factor in whether or not a person is healed of emotional or physical disease.<sup>54</sup> We must, therefore, be realistic about what we expect from prayer and medication.

Rather than undercutting the efficacy of prayer or God's ability to heal, this understanding of God's grace stresses the cooperant rather than the unilateral nature of grace. In prayer a divine-human synergy unfolds as we become channels of God's sanctifying and healing grace in the lives of those for whom we pray as well as when we pray for ourselves. Prayer significantly contributes to physical and emotional well-being, but not absolutely so, for as Bruce G. Epperly wisely and realistically notes:

there is no linear cause and effect relationship between prayer and results. Our prayers enter and shape the environment. But, even though they assist God, they are, like the divine prayer itself, not the only factor in a particular environment. Factors of age, the social understanding of disease, the progression of illness, the will to live, and personal spirituality, may be as influential in the health of another person as our prayers or even God's. Jesus himself connected his ability to heal with the faith of those who came to him. Unanswered prayer arises out of the same matrix from which answered prayer emerges. But, the relative weight of the various, interconnecting events involved always affects the results.<sup>55</sup>

The paradox of Christian prayer for healing is that we must neither expect too much nor too little.

**2. Searching the Scriptures.** A second means of grace for emotional healing is what Wesley calls "searching the Scriptures (which implies reading, hearing, and meditating thereon)."<sup>56</sup> Since much depression is caused by the mind being obsessed with unhealthy thoughts, the Scriptures

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<sup>54</sup>For an excellent discussion regarding the deification of the body that occurs when the divine nature and human flesh are conjoined in salvation, see Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, new edition (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 232-38. It is Ware's contention that both body and soul are deified ("transfigured and sanctified") at the same time. The full deification of the body, however, must wait until the life to come.

<sup>55</sup>Epperly, "To Pray or Not to Pray," 146.

<sup>56</sup>Sermon 16, "The Means of Grace," *Works*, 1:381.

play a pivotal role in reprogramming faulty mental software. The mind is like software that directs the soul on how to think, believe, feel, perceive, and act.<sup>57</sup> In turn the soul is like computer hardware that runs an individual human life, keeping the body's involuntary and voluntary nervous systems working properly.<sup>58</sup> The wonderful thing about the soul is that it can be restructured and it is primarily restructured by thoughts.

Our thoughts directly impact the body, and sometimes leave a permanent physiological imprint, for better or for worse. Thoughts can invigorate or enervate, sustain or weaken biology. Our thoughts interact with several bodily glands, the most important being the brain. The brain is a chemical factory and its production of chemicals, especially serotonin, norepinephrine, and dopamine, in the case of depression, is influenced by thoughts. As we allow "the word of Christ to dwell in [us] richly," (Colossians 3:16) and meditate on the law of the Lord day and night (Psalm 1:2), we begin to think godly thoughts, feel godly feelings, and act in godly ways. If, however, our mind is mired in negative, self-absorbed and self-deprecating thoughts, soul damage and even death can result (Romans 8:6).

Fixating on criticism, disappointment, loss, and failure can be devastating emotionally. Obsessing with certain negative thoughts can lead to such a downward spiral of depressed feelings that the brain's production and absorption of neurochemicals is affected. If we are to enjoy emotional health and experience the love and joy of the Holy Spirit, we must regularly direct our minds to the reality of the Kingdom of God: "If anyone is to love God and have his or her life filled with that love, God in his glorious reality must be brought before the mind and kept there in such a way that the mind takes root and stays fixed there."<sup>59</sup> Just as a computer programmer is responsible for putting in the work to create a new program, so we are responsible

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<sup>57</sup>Many of these insights about the inter-relationship between the mind and the body come from Dallas Willard, "The Spirit of the Disciplines," Tape 1, *The Sower's Yield Tape Ministry* (818-363-8203), n.d.

<sup>58</sup>Dallas Willard refers to the soul as "that component of the total person which coordinates all of the capacities and dimensions of the human being and leads to their interactive development to form an individual life." See Dallas Willard, "Spiritual Disciplines, Spiritual Formation, and the Restoration of the Soul," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 26:1 (1998), 103.

<sup>59</sup>Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life With God* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 324.

to partner with God in reprogramming our thoughts, the results of which will radiate throughout our entire person, including the body.<sup>60</sup>

Certain depressed thoughts may run unescorted through the mind: "I'm depressed. I can't do anything right. I'm a failure. Nothing I do makes any difference." The primary way to reprogram the mind is through memorizing Scripture, which trains the mind to think about life circumstances in light of God's truth. As the truth of God's word interacts with the mind and spirit, grace is accessed for the damaged parts of the body, leading to the sanctification of the whole person (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24). Meditation upon Scripture will slowly, but surely, nourish the soul and stimulate the body. In turn, the mind will develop new beliefs and, instead of growing weary and feeling depressed, the body and emotions will begin to experience a surge of energy and joy. As we cooperate with God in changing our thoughts, the soul is restructured, leading to changes in feeling, perceiving, and acting. Far from being at the mercy of our environment, Scripture memorization and its accompanying transformation of mind demonstrates that it is possible to insulate ourselves from the insidious effects of stress (Romans 12:2).

Just as studies with rats have shown how psychotherapy can mimic medication by restoring brain chemistry to healthy functioning, so can Scripture memorization and the rest of the spiritual disciplines have a similar effect on brain chemistry.<sup>61</sup> If psychotherapy can mimic medication by altering neurochemical levels, what are we to say about the role of the Spirit of God and spiritual disciplines in effecting changes in brain chemistry and healing damaged neural networks? A healthy spirituality may not completely repair psychological trauma, but it can renew and move toward restoration in a way not available through psychotherapy or antidepressant medication alone. If the practice of searching the Scriptures is consistently maintained, it will affect the brain's production and absorption of neurochemicals, enabling one to be filled with "righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17, NIV). Such a transformation of mind and body is nothing less than a restoration and reformation of the soul.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>See Dallas Willard, "Spiritual Disciplines, Spiritual Formation, and the Restoration of the Soul," 108-109.

<sup>61</sup>Peter D. Kramer, *Listening to Prozac: A Psychiatrist Explores the Antidepressant Drugs and the Remaking of the Self* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 286.

<sup>62</sup>Willard, "Spiritual Disciplines, Spiritual Formation, and the Restoration of the Soul," 108-109.

**3. Exercise.** Spiritual prescriptions alone, however, do not always provide healing sufficient for depression-ravaged emotions. Just as searching the Scriptures reprogram the soul through transforming the way we think, so also do bodily actions exert a peculiar influence of their own on psychological and spiritual health. Wesley was wise to realize this necessity of involving the body in the emotional healing process through exercise. In his thoughts regarding “lowness of spirits” he was clear about the role of exercise in helping the body rebuild its natural resources and in turn influence the health of the entire person. As he says,

exercise quickens the motion of the lungs, and enables them to collect from the air a due quantity of fire. . . . If this is duly diffused through the whole body, we are lively and vigorous; if it is not, (which without exercise it cannot be), we soon grow faint and languid. And if other disorders do not ensue, those termed nervous surely will, with that whole train of symptoms which are usually comprised in what is termed *lowness of spirits*.<sup>63</sup>

Wesley recommends an hour’s exercise sometime between breakfast and dinner. And, if you can make the time, he says, take another hour before dinner or before bed. He is very serious about this: “Let nothing hinder you. Your life is at stake. Make everything yield to this.”<sup>64</sup> Exercise can be a very helpful antidote to depression.

**4. Sleep.** Too many people try to practice Abba Arsenius’s advice that “one hour’s sleep is enough for a monk if he is a good fighter.”<sup>65</sup> In fact, this attitude of the less sleep the better has continued to our present day. People like to brag to each other about how little sleep we are able to get by on. Even Wesley, as insightful as he was about the causes and cures of low-spiritedness, did not understand how essential sleep is to emotional recovery. Rather than seeing the lack of sleep as a major factor in the onset of depression, he saw too much sleep as an explanation for many people’s “weak nerves”: “By *soaking* (as it is emphatically called) so long between warm sheets, the flesh is, as it were, parboiled, and becomes soft and flabby. The nerves, in the mean time, are quite unstrung, and all the

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<sup>63</sup>“Thoughts on Nervous Disorders,” *Works* (Jackson), 11:517.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup>Arsenius 15, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 11.

<sup>66</sup>Sermon 43, “On Redeeming the Time,” *Works* (Jackson), 7:70.

train of melancholy symptoms, faintness, tremors, lowness of spirits, (so called,) come on, till life itself is a burden.”<sup>66</sup> The most sleep Wesley would grant to a healthy person was between six and seven hours. He did allow that women generally require about an hour more sleep a day than men.<sup>67</sup> For an unhealthy person he would grant up to eight hours. Wesley quotes an old rule from his day:

Six hours for sleep the human frame requires;  
Hard students may to seven incline;  
To eight, the men whom toil or traveling tires;  
But lazy knaves will all have nine.<sup>68</sup>

To Wesley’s credit, however, he did recognize that getting less than six hours of sleep a night for a prolonged period of time will eventually cause health problems.<sup>69</sup>

Hardly any of us in our day suffer from too much sleep. In fact, ninety-nine percent of us suffer from too little sleep! Due to excessive adrenaline arousal that makes us feel energetic even when physically exhausted, many of us do not realize that we suffer from too little sleep until physical or emotional crisis strikes. The sleep deprivation of our nation currently costs our country billions of dollars in accidents on the job and on our streets. While Wesley says, “I cannot therefore but account this, the lying too long in bed, the grand cause of our nervous disorders,”<sup>70</sup> current research has shown that if we were able to get more sleep, many of the emotional disorders of our day would greatly diminish. Arch Hart estimates that, for optimum rest and stress-disease prevention, the average adult needs between eight and ten hours a sleep every night.<sup>71</sup> Some may only need eight hours a night, but others may need as much as eleven hours of sleep each night. Sleeping more is not just being lazy, but is actually essential to living a healthy and balanced life, physically, spiritually, and emotionally.

**5. Antidepressant Medication.** Great strides in antidepressant medication have occurred only within the past forty years. For many early

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 68-9.

<sup>68</sup>“Thoughts on Nervous Disorders,” *Works* (Jackson), 11:518.

<sup>69</sup>Sermon 43, “On Redeeming the Time,” *Works* (Jackson), 7:68.

<sup>70</sup>“Thoughts on Nervous Disorders,” *Works* (Jackson), 11:519.

<sup>71</sup>Archibald D. Hart, *The Hidden Link Between Adrenalin and Stress* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1991), 134.

medications the side-effects were worse than the disease itself. Beginning with the introduction of Prozac into the pharmaceutical market in December of 1987, the last twelve years have witnessed a proliferation of effective antidepressant medication with minimal side-effects. Even though writing almost 250 years ago, many of Wesley's observations regarding the practice of medicine in his day are crucial to understanding the relationship between spirituality and psychology in our own. While antidepressant medication was not available in Wesley's day, he was not adverse to recommending medicines then available.<sup>72</sup> He believed that physicians often prevented people from receiving the medical help they needed by charging exorbitant prices for their services as well as by making their writings so technical that the ordinary person could not understand them. Physicians also made medicines so complicated that it was nearly impossible for the lay person to know which particular compound actually effected a cure.

From his own observations over the course of twenty years, Wesley was convinced that in the majority of cases "*regular physicians do exceeding little good*"!<sup>73</sup> Since he believed that many physicians had taken advantage of poor people by confusing their patients for personal financial gain and control, it is no surprise that he was often suspicious of the synthetic medicines ("chymicals") beginning to be promoted by the medical establishment of his day. Wesley believed that simple medicines derived from the "herb of the field" were the most desirable. If simple and natural means work in most cases, why try another more complicated and expensive means that may not be effective or available to most people? It is hard to argue with such down-to-earth, utterly practical logic.

Wesley often urged people to engage in regular exercise, proper diet, and prayer before resorting to medication ("physic").<sup>74</sup> He claimed that to persevere in a "plain diet" and rigorous daily exercise "is often more than half the cure" in seeking to overcome a given ailment.<sup>75</sup> It is important to understand that Wesley understood prayer not in opposition to medical treatment, but in support of it, for there are clearly serious, life-threatening ailments for which Wesley counseled urgent professional medical

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<sup>72</sup>See *Primitive Physic*, as in *Works* (Jackson), 14:307-13; *Journal* (Sept. 16, 1756), *Works*, 21:78.

<sup>73</sup>Letter to "John Smith" (March 25, 1747), §11, *Works*, 26:235.

<sup>74</sup>See Letter to Alexander Knox (Oct. 26, 1778), *Letters* (Telford), 6:328; and Letter to Lady Maxwell (July 5, 1765), *Letters* (Telford), 4:309.

<sup>75</sup>*Primitive Physic*, as in *Works* (Jackson), 14:314.

assistance.<sup>76</sup> He believed that prayer and medical treatments cooperate rather than compete with each other, for he understood medicine to be a gift from a gracious God.<sup>77</sup> Even though suspicious of the politics of the medical community of his day, Wesley's openness to medical help, especially in very complex cases, can be seen in his comments from the end of the *Primitive Physic*: "In uncommon or complicated diseases, where life is more immediately in danger, I again advise every man without delay to apply to a physician that fears God."<sup>78</sup>

Given Wesley's keen intuition into the intimate relationship between biology and spirituality, it seems that if we were to "use all the means which reason and experience dictate,"<sup>79</sup> he would allow for antidepressant medication to be prescribed for those tormented by chronic depression in the same way he would recommend blood pressure medication be given to those with high blood pressure. He would probably recommend those experiencing high blood pressure to try to bring their blood pressure under control through proper diet and regular exercise before undergoing a regimen of medication. More than likely he also would counsel those suffering from depression to explore similar means before commencing a program of antidepressant medication.<sup>80</sup>

The current practice of many health plans of dispensing antidepressant medication without long term counseling is disturbing. The patient who does not learn what caused depression in the first place is far more likely to fall back into depression after going off the medication than if coping techniques for preventing the future onset of depression have been learned. Wesley's comments are apropos here: "Till the passion which caused the disease is calmed, medicine is applied in vain."<sup>81</sup> In today's

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<sup>76</sup>See *Advice with Respect to Health*, Preface, *Works* (Jackson), 14:258.

<sup>77</sup>*Primitive Physic*, §3, *Works* (Jackson), 14:308.

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*, Postscript, §5, *Works* (Jackson), 14:317.

<sup>79</sup>*Advice with Respect to Health*, Preface, *Works* (Jackson), 14:258.

<sup>80</sup>For a contemporary dissenting voice regarding the often blind acceptance of the necessity of antidepressant medication in American culture, see Greg Critser, "Oh, How Happy We Will Be: Pills, Paradise, and the Profits of Drug Companies," *Harper's Magazine*, June 1996, 39-49. Critser argues that the health-care system is "devoted less to the art of medicine and more to the delivery of pills." Many of the statistics promoting the effectiveness of antidepressant medication come from the pharmaceutical companies directly profiting from the use of their drugs. The politics of medicine has not changed significantly from Wesley's day!

<sup>81</sup>*Primitive Physic*, as in *Works* (Jackson), 14:316.

health care environment, depressives are frequently prescribed pills that make them feel better, but leave untouched the psychological and spiritual roots of their depression. Wesley observed happening in his day what still occurs too often in our own:

Reflecting today on the case of a poor woman who had a continual pain in her stomach, I could not but remark the inexcusable negligence of most physicians in cases of this nature. They prescribe drug upon drug, without knowing a jot of the matter concerning the root of the disorder. And without knowing this they cannot cure, though they can murder the patient. Whence came this woman's pain? (Which she would never have told, had she never been questioned about it.) From fretting for the death of her son. And what availed medicines while that fretting continued? Why then do not all physicians consider *how far bodily disorders are caused and influenced by the mind*? And in those cases which are utterly out of their sphere, call in the assistance of a minister—as ministers, when they find *the mind disordered by the body*, call in the assistance of a physician? But why are these cases out of their sphere? Because they know not God. It follows, no man can be a thorough physician without being an experienced Christian.<sup>82</sup>

People would be much better off if there were an acknowledgment on the part of the medical and psychological communities that some, if not many, of the physical and emotional disorders experienced by their patients have spiritual rather than merely biological or psychological causes and, in turn, referred their patients accordingly.

There are several people with whom I am familiar who are presently taking prescribed antidepressant medication without concurrent counseling. I am concerned about what will happen to them once they go off their medication, especially since approximately fifty percent of those who have been deeply depressed will become severely depressed again.<sup>83</sup> One of the reasons this statistic is so high is that people simply do not learn from their depression. This is not the whole story, of course, but the wisdom of Abba Poemen is much needed as well in our day. He cautions: “Not understanding what has happened prevents us from going on to

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<sup>82</sup>*Journal* (May 12, 1759), *Works*, 21:191. Emphasis added.

<sup>83</sup>Martin Seligman, *Learned Optimism* (New York: Pocket Books, 1990), 65.

something better.”<sup>84</sup> Learning from depression is absolutely essential. Too often medication simply masks the symptoms of depression and does not lead the depressed person to search for the roots of depression. Medication helps restore the biology of the brain to health, but if there is not a concomitant change in mind-set and spiritual outlook, it is all too likely that depression will return.

### Conclusion

The Holy Spirit is pervasive in human life for Wesley, influencing spirituality, psychology, and biology. While spirituality and psychology are distinct from each other, they are certainly not unrelated, for sanctification not only has to do with the growth of the heart toward Christlikeness, but also with the healing of the human self. The apostle Paul speaks of this dynamic interrelationship between spirituality, psychology, and biology when he writes to the church at Thessalonica: “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it” (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24). Wesley believed that the whole person is under the influence of grace, for God is concerned not just with our spiritual well-being, but with our entire life—mind, soul, and body.

I believe Wesley would encourage those mired in the despair of depression to view their soul-pain as an opportunity to progress in their sanctification through the means of grace, for emotional recovery is a cooperative effort between divine grace and human response. Wesley would not be adverse to those uncommonly burdened by the psychological and physiological weight of depression seeking medical help in the form of appropriately prescribed and monitored antidepressant medication. At the same time, he would challenge us to benefit from whatever natural and spiritual means to healing are available, such as diet, exercise, and observance of the many means of grace. Finally, a Wesleyan prescription for depression will acknowledge that emotional healing is an interactive process made possible by the sanctifying, therapeutic grace of God, enhanced by human effort through the practice of spiritual disciplines, healthy habits of mind and body, and meaningful relationships, but limited by genetic inheritance, physical injury, and emotional, cultural, social, historical, or political factors. While complete healing may not be possible in this life, at least a modicum of healing will occur in every person’s life if that person cooperates with the healing grace of God.

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<sup>84</sup>Poemen 200, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 194.

# **AN EVANGELICAL PASTORATE: THE UNRESOLVED DILEMMA IN WESLEYAN CONCEPTS OF MINISTRY AND CHURCH GROWTH**

by

**Charles H. Goodwin**

It was William Shrewsbury who used the phrase “An Evangelical Pastorate” to describe the nature of the Methodist ministry. After twenty-one years on the mission field he returned to England in 1836 to serve on the Bradford East Circuit.<sup>1</sup> In 1839 he published “An Essay on the Scriptural Character of the Wesleyan-Methodist Economy” in which he wrote: “the Wesleyan Ministry is very much of a mixed kind, for in it there is a blending of the duties of an evangelist with the office of a pastor so that it may perhaps be not inappropriately denominated a Evangelical Pastorate.”<sup>2</sup> This description is an accurate summary of John Wesley’s revised version of his twelfth rule for a Helper (made in 1780), which closed with the admonition: “It is not your business to preach so many times, and to take care merely of this or that society, but to save as many souls as you can: to bring as many sinners as you possibly can to repentance: and with all your power, to build them up in that holiness without

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<sup>1</sup>W. R. Ward, *Early Victorian Methodism: The Correspondence of Jabez Bunting 1830-1858* (1976) fn.4, 137.

<sup>2</sup>W. J. Shrewsbury, *An Essay on the Scriptural Character of the Wesleyan—Methodist Economy* (1839), 205.

which they cannot see the Lord. And remember, a Methodist Preacher is to mind every point, great and small, in the Methodist Discipline.”<sup>3</sup>

The dilemma in this concept of Methodist ministry and church growth is how to unite effectively in one ministry the twofold task of being an evangelist committed to soul-awakening and soul-saving in the convicting and converting of sinners and of being a pastor committed to soul-making and soul-restoring in the sanctifying and reclaiming of Methodist members. William Shrewsbury looked at this problem in the light of his experience as a former missionary. He had returned to England from traveling the extensive circuits of the West Indies and South Africa to find smaller, well-staffed English circuits where the need to spend weeks traveling away from home was reduced to a minimum. Even before Shrewsbury had left for the mission field, Jabez Bunting had contentedly informed Robert Newton in 1807 that on the Sheffield Circuit he was “almost entirely at home” with the need to “sleep out only two nights in eight weeks.”<sup>4</sup> Shrewsbury came to the conclusion that an original emphasis on the itinerant, pioneer, evangelistic character of the ministry had changed. The dramatic growth of Methodism had resulted in the emphasis on the more settled pastoral character of the ministry. He said: “In the beginning it was principally of a missionary character . . . unavoidably resulting from the success of ministerial labour. . . . The Preachers in the United Kingdom of Great Britain may now be pre-eminently called Pastors.”<sup>5</sup>

The intent here is to explore the tensions between those who wanted to preserve Methodism as “a great agency for the converting of the souls of men” and those who wanted to make Methodism into a church seeking not only the salvation of its individual members, but also providing a more comprehensive range of religious services to the nation. One tension was expressed by William Bramwell in 1795 when he wrote this impassioned plea to the Superintendent Ministers of every circuit:

I have long been penetrated with the liveliest sorrow at perceiving an evident decline of that burning zeal, that active vital

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<sup>3</sup>John Vickers, editor, *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, Volume 4 (1988), 11.

<sup>4</sup>T. P. Bunting, *The Life of Jabez Bunting D.D.*, ed. G. Stringer-Rowe (1887), 275.

<sup>5</sup>Shrewsbury, *The Scriptural Character of the Wesleyan—Methodist Economy*, 205-206.

holiness, that lamenting love, which first actuated the first Methodist preachers: and which enabled them to victoriously triumph over every obstacle. Having their hearts filled with a sense of the important undertaking, the fire burning in their own hearts and swallowed up by love for souls that were bought by the Redeemer's blood, they seemed to lose no moment in disputing about external forms; they deprecated every strife but the noble strife of excelling each other in enlarging the Redeemer's kingdom. Alas! my brethren. We have entered into their labours, but have we retained their spirit? . . . Brethren! Brethren! is it not time that something be done to reform ourselves? Have we not for years been labouring for forced unity and external peace, debating on forms and shadows, and thereby departing from our old centre?<sup>6</sup>

This tension between evangelist and pastor, between expansion and consolidation, was not a problem peculiar to Methodism. According to Richard Holloway, the church in general has a "permanent impulse to self-destruction caused by an attempt to resolve an unresolvable tension: the tension between worship and mission, the enjoyment of God and the service of man; a tension so old in religion between priest and prophet."<sup>7</sup> The dilemma within Methodism, however, had its own peculiar character because of John Wesley's ambivalent concept of the nature of the Methodist ministry. The rest of this paper will be devoted to examining the influence of this factor on the tensions within the Methodist ministry between popular revivalists like William Bramwell and champions of steady growth like Thomas Taylor.

### **An Extraordinary Call**

On the 21st of June, 1739, John Wesley wrote to his brother Charles from Bristol informing him of his consciousness of having received an "extraordinary call" over-riding the "ordinary call" authorized by the church: "I have both an ordinary call and an extraordinary," he wrote. "My ordinary call is my ordination by the Bishop: "take thou authority to preach the word of God." My extraordinary call is witnessed by the works God doeth by my ministry, which prove that he is with me of a truth in this exercise of my office. . . . God bears witness in an extraordinary man-

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<sup>6</sup>C. W. Andrews, *William Bramwell: Revivalist* (1909), 27-28.

<sup>7</sup>Richard Holloway, *Let God Arise* (1972), 3.

ner that my thus exercising my ordinary call is well pleasing in his sight.”<sup>8</sup> Maxim Piette interpreted this to mean that John Wesley felt called to be an itinerant field-preacher awakening the Nation to its need for spiritual revival,<sup>9</sup> for Wesley had gone to Bristol in with the conviction that on his return from Georgia God had providentially made him independent of the normal parochial ministry in order to set him free to regard the world as his parish: “thus far I mean, that in whatever part of it I am, I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty, to declare unto all that are willing to hear, the glad tidings of salvation.”<sup>10</sup>

This call to be an itinerant gospel preacher on a national scale was in keeping with Wesley’s Oxford ordination which had conferred on him the right to preach anywhere without restriction: “For I was not appointed to any congregation at all, but was ordained as a member of the College of Divines “which, according to our statutes, was founded to overturn all heresies and to defend the catholic faith.”<sup>11</sup> The Bishop who ordained him had also reassured him that at his ordination he had not undertaken “the care of any parish, provided you can, as a clergyman, better serve God, and His church in your present or in some other station.”<sup>12</sup> Wesley, therefore, did not go to Georgia to escape from an English curacy;<sup>13</sup> nor did he delay in seeking a living on his return from Georgia because, as J. H. Overton thought, his “painful experience in Georgia as a parochial clergyman” combined with his experience at Epworth “to make him hold so cheaply as he did the experience of parochial work.”<sup>14</sup>

Wesley’s behaviour between his return from Georgia and the first period of the revival at Bristol was the outworking of his obedience to the inner meaning of his ordination and the providential leading of God. The principle is made clear by the way in which Wesley’s account of the first

<sup>8</sup>John Telford, ed., *Letters of John Wesley*, Volume 1 (1931, reprint 1960), 322.

<sup>9</sup>Maxim Piette, *John Wesley in the Evolution of Protestantism* (1938), 350.

<sup>10</sup>This letter was once thought to have been written to James Hervey on 20th March, 1739, but with the discovery of that letter “The date and recipient of this letter are not known.” W. R. Ward & R. P. Heitzenrater, eds., *Works of John Wesley*, Volume 19 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 66.

<sup>11</sup>W. S. Gunter, *The Limits of Love Divine* (Kingswood 1989), 142.

<sup>12</sup>A. B. Lawson, *John Wesley and The Christian Ministry* (1963), 11.

<sup>13</sup>Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People* (1989), 247.

<sup>14</sup>J. H. Overton, *The Evangelical Revival of the Eighteenth Century* (1886),

ten weeks of the revival at Bristol is placed between the letter already quoted and the letter written to his father in December, 1735, giving his reasons for rejecting his father's request to succeed him in the living at Epworth. The general aim of both letters is to demonstrate that Wesley's behaviour between December, 1735, and June, 1739, had been guided by this consistent principle: "A desire to be a Christian; and a conviction that wherever I judge I can best answer this end, hither it is my duty to go."<sup>15</sup> At Bristol Wesley discovered it was his duty to preach the gospel "in every place where [he] saw an open door, where sinners had ears to hear."<sup>16</sup>

Wesley did more than just preach the gospel. As Howard Snyder says: "He concentrated not on the efforts leading up to the decision but on the time after the decision." He "organised to beat the devil," not to make converts but "to turn converts into saints."<sup>17</sup> He created his own nationwide "parish" of awakened and converted sinners so that he came to view his extraordinary call as a call to exercise an extraordinary pastoral ministry on a nationwide scale designed to inspire the regular parochial clergy into performing their proper duty of saving souls through the proper exercise of a full pastoral ministry, which included converting as well as edifying the people in their pastoral charge. Not surprisingly, his fellow priests were unwilling to be inspired by Wesley's example. Instead of welcoming John and Charles with open arms, "the greater part spoke . . . as if the devil, not God, had sent them. Some repelled them from the Lord's table; others stirred up the people against them, representing them, even in their public discourses, as fellows not fit to live: papists, heretics, traitors, conspirators against their King and country."<sup>18</sup> In 1745, accordingly, he could address his fellow Anglican clerics in these terms:

Here are seven thousand persons (perhaps somewhat more) of whom I take care, watching over their souls as he that must give account. In order hereto it lies upon me (so I judge) at peril of my own salvation, to know not only their names but their outward and inward states, their difficulties and dangers; otherwise how can I know either how to guide them aright, or

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<sup>15</sup>Telford, *Letters*, Volume 1, 189.

<sup>16</sup>A. C. Outler, ed., *Works*, Volume 4 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), 78.

<sup>17</sup>Howard Snyder, *The Radical Wesley and Patterns for Church Renewal* (1980), 2.

to commend them to God in prayer? Now if I am willing to make them over to you, will you watch over them in the same manner? Will you take the same care . . . of each soul as I have hitherto done? Not such *curam animarum* [the cure of souls] as you have taken these ten years in your own parish. Poor empty name! Has not your parish been in fact as much a sinecure to you as your prebend?<sup>19</sup>

### An Extraordinary Ministry

The failure of the Anglican clergy to support Wesley's mission meant that he had to enlist the aid of lay preachers. To begin with they were "Helpers" whose duty was to edify and supervise the societies while the ordained preachers were away on their rounds of field preaching. The Conference of 1744 defined their office as: "In the absence of the Minister to feed and guide, to teach and govern the flock." This involved spending time partly in "visiting the flock from house to house (the sick in particular)" and partly "in such a course of Reading, meditation and Prayer, as we advise from time to time."<sup>20</sup> At the Conference of 1745 the Helpers were admitted into the evangelistic task of saving souls, which was given priority over the edifying task of caring for souls. Rule eleven now read: "You have nothing to do but to save souls. Therefore spend and be spent in this work. And go always, not only to those who want you but to those who want [need] you most."<sup>21</sup> The following Conference of 1746 formally endorsed their admission into Wesley's sense of an extraordinary parochial ministry. When it was asked: "In what sense are we and our helpers to be considered?" the answer given was: "Perhaps as extraordinary messengers designed of God to provoke others to jealousy [i.e., zealous emulation]."<sup>22</sup> The rapid growth of Methodism with the consequent formation of vast circuits led to Wesley appointing some of his Helpers as "Assistants" to superintend the circuits. Their position was confirmed at the Conference of 1749 when their office and its duties were defined. So far Wesley had confined to himself the right to admit and to expel members. The Helpers merely had the right: "To put the disorderly back on

<sup>18</sup>G. R. Cragg, ed., *Works*, Volume 11 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), 299.

<sup>19</sup>Gragg, 302.

<sup>20</sup>Vickers, *History of The Methodist Church*, Volume 4, 70.

<sup>21</sup>Vickers, 118.

<sup>22</sup>Vickers, 184.

trial, and to receive on trial for the Bands or Societies.” Now they had the authority “To deliver new tickets” and “To take in or put out of the society.”<sup>23</sup>

Charles Wesley never came to terms with this elevation in the status of the lay preachers since men of inferior social standing and inadequate education had been raised above their station in life, and given aspirations towards a ministerial status that would lead to demands to be ordained as Nonconformist ministers with full rights to administer the sacraments. When Jeremiah Brettell was appointed to the Bristol Circuit in 1785 he was deeply hurt by Charles Wesley’s repeated exhortations to the members of the Society to remain loyal to the Church of England on the deaths of himself and his brother, for “the Methodist Preachers would divide; some would go into the church, and others settle as Dissenting Ministers.”<sup>24</sup> Charles’ worst fears had been aroused in 1754 when John had allowed the Preachers to register themselves as dissenting ministers in situations of dire emergency and again in 1760 when some of the more able and intelligent Preachers had begun to administer the sacrament in defiance of his brother’s wishes. This latter act of disobedience led John, at the Conference of 1760, to refute the claim that the call to preach conferred the right to administer the sacraments, refuse the calls of the Preachers for ordination, oppose the licensing of Preachers and the registering of preaching houses as dissenters, and to threaten to instantly renounce all those Preachers who continued to argue with him.<sup>25</sup>

Charles, however, continued to regard the use of lay preachers as full-time preachers of the gospel as partial separation from the church.<sup>26</sup> He would have preferred the most able ones to be ordained into the Church of England, and the remainder to be sent back to working at their trades in order to support themselves while spending their spare time being local preachers among the Methodist Societies.<sup>27</sup> As far as Charles was concerned, the extraordinary call was no more or less than a call to preach the gospel in every place where he and John saw an opportunity:

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<sup>23</sup>J. S. Simon, *The Advance of Methodism* (1927), 13.

<sup>24</sup>*Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1830, 722.

<sup>25</sup>Gunter, *Love Divine*, 178-179. Gunter relies on Howell Harris’ account of the Conference since there are no extant Wesleyan records.

<sup>26</sup>Frank Baker, *Charles Wesley as Revealed by His Letters* (1948), 95.

<sup>27</sup>Baker, 84-85.

When first sent forth to minister the word,  
Say, did we preach ourselves, or Christ the Lord?  
Was it our aim disciples to collect,  
To raise a party, or to found a sect?<sup>28</sup>

John complicated the issue by adopting his brother's interpretation toward the end of his life. In a sermon in 1790, he affirmed that "the first principle of Methodism" had always been "wholly and solely to preach the Gospel."<sup>29</sup> As loyal members of the Church of England, he and Charles had used their preaching to persuade sinners to leave their sins—not their existing churches. The Methodist Society was designed to cater to the spiritual needs of all those (irrespective of their religious opinions) who possessed "a real desire to flee from the wrath to come," and who expressed their fear of God by living a holy life. The deviations from the standard practices of the Church—field preaching, extempore prayer, and the holding of annual Conferences at which the preachers were given their stations for the coming year—had been forced on him by the pragmatic considerations of his mission, and by his duty to allow nothing to frustrate his prophetic mission to save souls. It had never been his intention to create a separate religious movement: "But all this is not separating from the Church. So far from it that whenever I have the opportunity I attend the Church service myself, and advise all our societies so to do."<sup>30</sup> William Myles, therefore, was being formally correct, and in line with Wesley's final mind on the matter, when he interpreted the extraordinary call of the early Methodist preachers to mean no more than that young, uneducated men "intended for trade with no thought of preaching till they knew the Lord" demonstrated their fitness for the office of a preacher by the conversion of souls under their preaching.<sup>31</sup>

Despite all his protestations to the contrary, Wesley had created a separate religious movement, one shaped in the image of the primitive, apostolic church which had so captured his imagination in his days at Oxford and earned for him the nickname "Primitive Christianity."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Baker, 94.

<sup>29</sup>C. A. Outler, ed., *Works*, Volume 4 (Abingdon, 1987), 80.

<sup>30</sup>C. A. Outler, 81.

<sup>31</sup>William Myles, *A Chronological History of the People Called Methodists* (4th edition, 1813), 94.

<sup>32</sup>J. Walsh, "John Wesley and the Community of Goods," in *Protestant Evangelicalism: Britain, Ireland, Germany* (c1750-1950, 1990), 29.

Albert Outler is right to say of John Wesley that “despite his gifts as leader and organiser, it was his impression that he had never planned the Methodist Revival. He had instead been gathered up into it and swept along by what seemed to him the clear leadings of divine providence.”<sup>33</sup> Wesley himself informed Vincent Perronet that there had been “no previous design or plan at all; but everything arose just as the occasion offered.”<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, what Wesley did was to adopt for Methodist use a succession of practices which reflected those of the primitive church—field preaching, class-meetings, class tickets, love feasts, watch night services, and especially the connexional principle of itinerating preachers linking together independent societies under the supervision of John Wesley as their “Father in the Gospel”—which reflected the organization of the Pauline churches of the New Testament. Consciously or unconsciously, Wesley was expressing through his organization of Methodism a barely acknowledged dissatisfaction with the corruption of the established church, a corruption which he traced back to the reign of Constantine the Great who imposed an unscriptural system of government on the church<sup>35</sup> and corrupted the ministry and spiritual life of the church with “a flood of wealth and power.” Further corruption of the church took place during the Reformation of the sixteenth century when the national churches were established as mere political institutions.<sup>36</sup> One sign of this was the assertion of the divine right of episcopacy “about the middle of Queen Elizabeth’s reign,” for in the primitive church “bishops and presbyters [were of] the same order, and consequently [had] the same right to ordain.”<sup>37</sup> Wesley’s concepts of the established church in the light of the primitive church suggest that he had serious misgivings about the spiritual status of

<sup>33</sup>A. C. Outler, ed., *Works*, Volume 1 (Abingdon, 1984), 5.

<sup>34</sup>Telford, *Letters*, Volume 2, 292.

<sup>35</sup>A. C. Outler, ed., *Works*, Volume 4 (Abingdon, 1987), 77. In this sermon preached in 1790 Wesley claimed that the greed for wealth and power led to the unification in one person of the quite distinct offices of prophet and priest. This further complication of the dilemma can be discounted since it was not taken seriously even by Wesley himself, for when Henry Moore, after reading the sermon, ventured to disagree with him on the point that the New Testament did not support his claim that the right to administer the sacrament was confined to the pastor alone, Wesley looked earnestly at him for some time, made no reply, and soon introduced another subject, which led Moore to conclude that “he saw that his love to the Church . . . had, in this instance, led him a little too far” (Outler, 73).

<sup>36</sup>J. S. Simo, *The Advance of Methodism*, 37-38.

<sup>37</sup>A. B. Lawson, *John Wesley and The Christian Ministry*, 10.

the national Church, and about the spiritual validity of his episcopal ordination granted by an agent of a church corrupted by wealth and politics. What Wesley learned at Bristol was that only God's Holy Spirit could call, consecrate, and empower a man to preach the Gospel Word capable of saving sinners from Hell—"None but God can give men authority to preach his word."<sup>38</sup>

It is possible, therefore, to see Wesley's extraordinary call at Bristol as an apostolic call direct from God intended to call the national church back to its primitive purity by forming within its midst a movement of apostolic Christianity. Maxim Piette would regard such an interpretation as "a serious error of perspective" for "Would it not be paradoxical to say that the major part of the great reformers of the Christian portion of mankind have become reformers practically without even suspecting it?"<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, Reginald Kissack quotes letters to Lady Cox, Thomas Church, and John Smith to illustrate Wesley's "denials of Apostolic destiny to the outside world."<sup>40</sup> John Fletcher, however, saw through the evasions and ambivalences of Wesley's mind to read his heart correctly when he proposed a plan in 1775 for forming Methodism into the "Methodist Church of England" with the aim of serving God according to the purity of the Gospel, and the original design of the Church of England.<sup>41</sup> Such an unacknowledged ambition also serves to explain Wesley's refusal of requests to disband Methodist societies in the parishes of Evangelical clergymen, and to write that he would sooner separate from the Church than stop using lay preachers.<sup>42</sup>

### The Unresolved Conflict

The year in which the North American colonies rose in rebellion against the British crown was not the best time for even considering such a radical plan as that proposed by Fletcher; but Wesley had created an ever-expanding religious movement which created a conflict of priorities between the evangelistic and the pastoral tasks of the Preachers, a conflict

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<sup>38</sup>Lawson, 82.

<sup>39</sup>Piette, *John Wesley in the Evolution of Protestantism*, 323.

<sup>40</sup>R. Kissack, *Church or No Church? The Development of the Concept of the Church in British Methodism* (1964), 65. Also see *Letters*, Volume 1, 234; *Letters*, Volume 2, 97, 137, 206 & 245.

<sup>41</sup>Henry Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (1989) 466-477.

<sup>42</sup>Gunter, *Love Divine*, 163.

which Wesley was unable to resolve in his own mind. In 1780 he produced this muddled revision of the twelfth rule of a Helper: "It is not your business to preach so many times, and to take care merely of this or that Society, but to save as many souls as you can: to bring as many sinners as you possibly can to repentance. . . ." If Wesley had stopped at this point, there would have been some justification for the view of the nineteenth-century reformers that the Preacher was "a speaking brother, and nothing else; an individual maintained to preach and pray for the solace and instruction of believers, and the awakening of sinners."<sup>43</sup> Wesley, however, reverts to the pastoral duty of sanctifying the justified and reclaiming the backsliders which he had lost sight of, and which was the essential end of all Methodist Discipline, so he continues with the reminder: "and with all your power, to build them up in that holiness without which they cannot see the Lord. And remember, a Methodist Preacher is to mind every point, great and small, in the Methodist Discipline."<sup>44</sup> At the heart of this Discipline was the authority to promote and preserve the purity of the Methodist Society through the admission and the expulsion of members as Wesley made clear in 1745 when he wrote: "Indeed, if by 'order' were meant true Christian discipline whereby all the living members of Christ are knit together in one, and all that is putrid and dead immediately cut off from the body; this order I reverence, for it is of God."<sup>45</sup> John C. Bowmer has good grounds for saying that "the form of discipline" may not have had the phrase "the pastoral office" written into it, but it did contain "a concept of the Ministerial office which goes back to Wesley's 'Rules of a Helper,' or even further back to the ideal Anglican cure."<sup>46</sup>

Many of the Preachers were incapable of being no more than "speaking brothers." Thomas Butts confided to his diary on the 10th of December, 1752, that "the want of study ruins half our preachers. . . . The want of this makes their discourses so jejeune, trite & sapless; the same dull round notwithstanding the many different texts they speak from. . . . I think Mr. Wesley is highly to blame, in taking so many raw young fellows from their trades to a work they are as utterly unqualified for. . . ."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>John Kent, *Holding The Fort* (1978), 57.

<sup>44</sup>Simon, *The Advance of Methodism*, 253-254.

<sup>45</sup>F. C. Gill, *Selected Letters of John Wesley* (1956), 142.

<sup>46</sup>J. C. Bowmer, *Pastor and People* (1975), 57.

<sup>47</sup>Vickers, 115.

Henry Moore said: "Some of our very useful men in that day were men of very little talent. There was Tommy Mitchell with his checked handkerchief, which a man nowadays would hardly pick out of the kennel, always wiping his face with one hand and scratching his head with the other"<sup>48</sup> Another rough and ready preacher, according to Moore, was Andrew Blair: "A friend once took a child to hear him, and the boy afterwards said, on being asked, that he did not like the preacher at all—he cursed and swore so!"<sup>49</sup> These men, despite their uncouth ways, were effective soul-winners and acceptable to their own class. Mitchell was dubbed "the poor man's preacher" and said of his own first attempt at preaching: "Some of them heard with pain, as my gifts were very small, and advised me to speak no more in public. But one young woman was convinced of her lost condition, and never rested till she found redemption."<sup>50</sup> There were others just as limited who spoke without conviction—"like mice in cheese" in Moore's phrase. Such men tended to take refuge within the system. On Saturday the 17th of July, 1762, Wesley "went to poor dead Portarlington. And no wonder it should be so, while the preachers coop themselves up in a room with twenty or thirty hearers." Wesley's immediate reaction was to go "straight to the marketplace" where "abundantly more than the room could contain were present at five in the morning."<sup>51</sup>

By the mid-eighties even some of the older, more experienced Preachers were settling down into keeping their circuits. The diary of a man like George Story, together with a surviving plan from the Salisbury Circuit for 1784-1785, shows how the Preachers were settled into urban semi-mobility for "with rare exceptions the three itinerants seem to have confined their attention on Sunday to the three societies at Salisbury, Portsmouth and Newport."<sup>52</sup> Such tendencies provoked Wesley's famous outburst to Alexander Mather in 1777 in which he declared that the danger of ruin to Methodism lay in the fallen state of many of the preachers: "They are not alive to God. They are soft, enervated, fearful of shame, toil, hardship. They have not the spirit which God gave to Thomas Lee at Pateley Bridge and to you at Boston. Give me one hundred preachers who

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<sup>48</sup> *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1893, 607.

<sup>49</sup> *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1893, 515.

<sup>50</sup> *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1893, 512.

<sup>51</sup> Thomas Jackson, editor, *Works of John Wesley*, Volume 3 (1866), 96.

<sup>52</sup> John Vickers, *Methodism and Society in Central Southern England, 1740-1857* (Southampton University, Ph.D. thesis 1987), 97.

fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen, such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven upon earth.”<sup>53</sup> One such preacher was Thomas Taylor. He was a Yorkshireman by birth. Orphaned at an early age, he was an unruly and reckless child. As a youth he preferred to earn his living by gambling rather than by continuing his apprenticeship as a clothier. At the age of seventeen he was awakened to his need for salvation by hearing George Whitefield preach. His reformation was encouraged by a local Methodist layman in whose house public meetings were held every Sunday evening. Taylor was received as a travelling preacher in 1761. He endured the apostolic labours and sufferings common to the early Methodist Preachers in opening up regions like South Wales and Lowland Scotland.<sup>54</sup> In the mid-1770s he was settling down into what was to become for later generations the routine pattern of circuit life:

The time before breakfast is wholly devoted to my Hebrew Bible, comparing the original text with the Latin and English translations. . . . After breakfast I write, or read in some Latin author, till it is time to take horse. If I do ride, I visit the sick, and others, till dinner. After dinner I generally read . . . till five; and then spend some time with my Greek testament, and considering the subject I shall preach from that evening. After preaching, and the society meeting, I spend the little remains of the evening in friendly conversation with such as happen to be present till I retire.<sup>55</sup>

Such a routine enabled Taylor to put the affairs of the Wednesbury Circuit in order in 1777, and to promote a revival. On arriving in the Circuit he had found

the house bare of furniture, the Circuit poor, and trade bad; so that it was hard to put things in order. However, I set about it, and got my design completed in that respect. But still, the great business gave me much uneasiness; the societies were dull, and the congregations miserably small. However, when the new year came in, God revived His work. The preaching abroad, in the latter end of the summer, had excited many to

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<sup>53</sup>Gill, *Selected Letters*, 175.

<sup>54</sup>Thomas Jackson, editor, *The Lives of The Early Methodist Preachers*, Volume 5 (1871), 1-37.

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

come and hear. . . . I think near two hundred were this year added to the societies.<sup>56</sup>

The principles underlying the practice of Taylor's ministry were made known to his colleague Robert Miller when both were traveling the Bolton Circuit in 1793. When Miller expressed his crushing disappointment with the spiritual deadness and small size of the Society at Bury, Taylor replied: "I have known Bury in a much worse state than it is at present; and if we wish to see a revival, we must attend to a few particulars." They included:

We must keep the life of God in our souls; and redeem all the time we can from sleep, idle visits, and trifling conversation; and must give ourselves to reading, meditation, and prayer, so that we need not always be telling the people the same old dry tale.

We must insist on the people's experiencing and practising the truths which we teach, and enforce what we say by the denunciation in God's word.

At the Society meetings, we must not only advise the people to attend their classes, but to be diligent in their business, practise economy in their families, be punctual to their engagements, and attend to every branch of domestic and relative duties.

We must put from the Society all those who will not attend their classes when they have opportunity, and exclude immoral members, after a trial; insist upon members shewing their tickets at the Society-meetings and love-feasts; and not admit any without a note or ticket.

We must likewise divide the principal towns into districts, and visit all the members, whether rich or poor, at their own houses, as often as we can, and exhort them to go forward.

We must neither covet the smiles, nor fear the frowns of men, either in or out of office; but faithfully do the work of ministers of Jesus Christ; and at the same time be prepared to suffer, and to expect our motives, preaching, and actions, to be misconstrued by many, and ourselves represented as tyrannical hypocrites. And lastly, we must stand to our duty, like the

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<sup>56</sup>Jackson, 48.

beaten anvil to the stroke, and leave our characters and labours in the hands of the Lord.<sup>57</sup>

### **The Attempt to Resolve the Dilemma in 1820**

Thomas Taylor's noble concept of the preacher's office is for an urban, pastoral ministry, not an itinerant evangelistic ministry. The final decade of the eighteenth century was to see a growing division between men like Taylor, who favored steady growth promoted by a pastoral ministry based on respectable, wealthy urban chapels, and revivalists like William Bramwell who remained committed to the traditional evangelistic ministry itinerating around large circuits, embracing small cottage-based rural societies and larger urban, chapel-based societies. To an ardent young revivalist like James Everett the choice was simple: "It is possible to go round the circuit in the regular and quiet discharge of duty, without a burning desire for the salvation of souls, without which the genuine spirit of the Christian ministry evaporates. Nothing short of the life of God in my soul will preserve alive the flame of zeal on behalf of others; and nothing short of seeing others saved can satisfy me."<sup>58</sup>

There were those who felt that their gift lay in the pastoral oversight of the flock, drawing a distinction between the general ability of preachers to nurture the existing memberships and the specialized ability of a gifted few to effect conversions. When Jabez Bunting wrote to his former Superintendent minister in 1799 bemoaning the lack of converts at Oldham under his preaching, Mr. Barber replied from Rotherham: "We are sometimes ready to think no good is doing unless sinners are awakened and converted to God; but this is an error. For good is done when the weak are strengthened, the tempted succoured, the wavering confirmed, and the children of God fed with food convenient for them. And this, perhaps, is of as much, if not of more importance than the awakening of sinners. At the same time remember that some men are particularly called to this work; and you may be of that number."<sup>59</sup>

Bunting was not one of their number. He had a distaste for what he called "the rant and extravagance of what is called Revivalism." The fact that six of the seventeen Luddites hanged at York in 1813 were the sons of Methodists confirmed him in his belief that "the progress of Method-

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<sup>57</sup>*Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1801, 197.

<sup>58</sup>Richard Chew, *James Everett: A Biography* (1875), 64.

<sup>59</sup>Bunting, *Life of Jabez Bunting*, 97.

ism in the West Riding of Yorkshire has been more swift than solid; more extensive than deep, more in the increase of numbers, than in diffusion of that kind of piety which shines as brightly and operates as visibly at home as in the prayer meeting and the crowded love feast.”<sup>60</sup> Bunting outlined the kind of ministry that would promote the kind of piety he admired and recorded his thoughts in some notes on the work of the ministry drawn up in 1807:

Leaders; temporal concerns placed a good deal under their influence.

People; visits to persons excluded; regular visitations; renewal of tickets.

Entire dedication to the ministry. Opening new classes. Meeting of societies.

Visiting the sick. Prayer-meetings. Be at the head of everything.<sup>61</sup>

Here was a man who had put his emphasis on working within the system, and seeking steady growth through the system.

In retrospect, it was the preachers like Everett, who restricted the work of the minister to the one task of “saving souls,” that had a very restricted, unsatisfactory view of the role of the ministry. Methodism had become, to quote Abel Stevens, “a great organic system, a Church, consolidated at home and constantly extending abroad . . . settled in its policy, thoroughly organised in its financial and missionary operations . . . a grand aggregate result of the marvellous events and heroic labours which have hitherto crowded its history.”<sup>62</sup> The Methodist administration had to come to terms with a changing social context featuring demographic changes, urbanization, the problem of maintaining social order in towns, increasing competition from the Church of England, and the need to give the Methodist laity a greater share of involvement in the financial management and support of the Church.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>Quoted by W. R. Ward, *Faith and Faction* (1993), 273.

<sup>61</sup>Bunting, *Life of Jabez Bunting*, 237.

<sup>62</sup>Abel Stevens, *The History of the Religious Movement of the Eighteenth Century Called Methodism*, Volume 3 (edited W. Willey, 1868), 183-184.

<sup>63</sup>Adapting comments originally applied to the Church of England by K. A. Thompson, *Bureaucracy and Church Reform* (1970), xiv.

Methodism was fortunate to find in the person of Jabez Bunting an administrator capable of dealing with the complexity, scale, and rationality required to manage the hugely expanded connexion. It was due to Bunting that one in every four vacancies in the Legal Hundred was filled by young preachers who had travelled fourteen years; that an equal number of laymen and ministers sat in Connexional Committees; that the President of Conference called together influential laypersons before the opening of the Conference to discuss critical items on the agenda; that laypersons were admitted into district meetings; and it was through the wise administration of Bunting that “the various connexional funds were placed on a permanent basis.”<sup>64</sup>

These administrative changes required the minister to become a professional administrator as well as a revivalist. The great achievement of Jabez Bunting was to establish an uneasy consensus of opinion regarding the combination in one ministry of the tasks of being an evangelist and pastor. On the part of the revivalists there was the acceptance of their need to exercise a professional administration of the business affairs of the Connexion from the Conference downwards. When Thomas Collins was appointed to the St. Alban circuit in 1845, he wrote: “When, as a visitor, I go out to a place, I have only salvation work to do, but a Superintendent going the round of his Circuit, specially if the Circuit be in difficulties, cannot act as a mere evangelist: foundations have to be examined, institutions kept in order, and finances looked after. Nevertheless, as opportunity serves, I try as hard as ever for the conversion of souls.”<sup>65</sup> T. P. Bunting, with the aim of warning against valuing the ability of the administrator over that of the evangelist, could say of his father and Robert Lomas that, although both were “conversant with, and interested in questions of Connexional finance,” they held the two concerns together, with competence in financial matters held subordinate to competence in spiritual ones: “Peculiar aptness for inferior duties will not supply the lack of proper qualifications for the higher—strictly speaking, indeed, the sole work of the ministry.”<sup>66</sup> Both groups were agreed that revival, whatever its form, and however it was achieved, was, to quote Thomas Collins, “Godly labour, followed by gracious success.”

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<sup>64</sup>Maldwyn Edwards, *Methodism and England 1850-1932* (1944), 10-11.

<sup>65</sup>Samuel Coley, *Life of the Rev. Thomas Collins* (1863), 248.

<sup>66</sup>Bunting, *Life of Jabez Bunting*, 333.

Jabez Bunting achieved this consensus at the Liverpool Conference when the first reported decrease in the number of members (some 4,688) since the statistics had been officially registered filled the preachers with guilt. The penitent preachers consecrated themselves and their families afresh to God in order to:

Preach the vital doctrines of the Gospel;

Give themselves exclusively to the work of saving souls;

Consider themselves called to be Home Missionaries charged with the task of extending and enlarging—as well as keeping—the circuits to which they were appointed by using the time-honoured methods of out-of-doors preaching, prayer-meetings, watch-night services, band-meetings, and days of solemn fasting and prayer.<sup>67</sup>

These resolutions were enshrined in the famous Liverpool Minutes which were written by Jabez Bunting as the President of the Conference: “Since they set forth the ideal of a Methodist preacher’s life and work, for very many years it was the custom to read them through at the first Preachers’ Meeting in every Circuit and at every May Synod in its Pastoral Session. It is interesting to see that the ideal is rather that of a pastor of the flock of Christ than that of a wandering evangelist.”<sup>68</sup> The solution, therefore, was a compromise in favor of the pastoral element over the evangelistic element in Wesleyan concepts of ministry and church growth, and at best was an uneasy alliance between the two parties.

### **The Collapse of the Concept**

The principle of every circuit minister being a home missionary was undermined by the growth of Methodism. By 1873 Methodist chapels could be found in five out of every nine places in England and Wales. In 1885 there were 2,500 Methodist chapels in Southern England, of which 1,500 were the only Nonconformist building in the place.<sup>69</sup> The need to build new chapels and to enlarge old ones threw greater administrative

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<sup>67</sup>Stevens, *History of Methodism*, Volume 3, 187.

<sup>68</sup>A. W. Harrison, et al., *The Methodist Church: Its Origin, Divisions, and Reunion* (1932), 64.

<sup>69</sup>Davies, George & Rupp, *History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, Volume 3 (1982), 126.

burdens on the preachers, especially the superintendents. When Joseph Dixon was endorsed by his circuit's quarterly meeting in 1863 as a candidate for the ministry, a senior local preacher laid his hand on his shoulder and said, "Now you have nothing to do all your life but to save souls." But Joseph Dixon was to find out that: "It is the extras of a minister's life that are burdensome and give so much cause for anxiety. The management of a large circuit is in itself a business, making great demands upon a minister's time and strength, and requiring much business aptitude. When to this is added the work of extension, the securing of new sites, the erection of new chapels, and the raising of money for the same, it involves a great strain upon a minister's physical and mental power."<sup>70</sup> In the Conference ordination charge of 1879, Dr. J. H. Rigg told the ordinands that "evangelists are necessary to complete our ministerial provision and equipment, acting now as Home Missionary ministers and District Missionaries."<sup>71</sup>

The growing demand on the time and energy of ministers to promote chapel building, care for the existing membership, and administer circuit affairs was compounded by the report on the Census of Religion published in 1854. It showed that "a fearfully large proportion of the English people habitually neglect the public services of religion."<sup>72</sup> This news stirred up Wesleyan concern for the evangelization of the working classes. The Conference of 1854 reaffirmed the need for "reviving and sustaining the Home Missionary spirit of Methodism."<sup>73</sup> The Chapel Department was given a full-time secretary in 1854, and in 1856 the Contingent Fund used for helping circuits which could not afford to pay and house a minister was reconstituted as The Home Mission and Contingent Fund "for the support and spread of the Gospel in Great Britain and Ireland." The evangelical mission was seen inevitably in terms of finance for chapel-building and, to a lesser extent, the support and housing of ministers. Priorities were given to relieving debts incurred on existing chapels, to building new chapels in areas where Methodists had migrated in large numbers, and in supporting and reinforcing those mainly rural areas in need of more ministers.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>Joseph Dixon, *A Preacher's Half Century* (1917), 150-151.

<sup>71</sup>Henry Smart, *Thomas Cook's Early Ministry* (1893), 75.

<sup>72</sup>George Sails, *At the Centre: The Story of Methodism's Central Missions* (1970), 1.

<sup>73</sup>Davies, George & Rupp, *History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, Volume 2 (1978), 124.

<sup>74</sup>Davies, George & Rupp, 128.

In 1858 it was found necessary to appoint seven men as Home Mission ministers to work in circuits where the work was declining. This was to be done under the supervision of the Superintendent minister, and under the overriding supervision of the Home Missions Chapel and Committee: "they were to support the local circuit's needs without being bound to normal circuit work; indeed they were explicitly to refrain from taking part in routine pastoral work."<sup>75</sup> Some of them, like John Colwell at Mossley, had remarkable success. Methodism was established in the Lyne Valley in the 1770s, but was severely disrupted in 1797 by the secession of the great majority of members to the New Connexion. The original Wesleyan society had died out by 1810 and, when revived in 1826 through the building of a small, shabby school-chapel, it could summon up no more than three or four people and a mouse who lived in the wain-scotting. It was made a Home Mission in 1863 but did not prosper until the arrival of the second Home Missionary in 1865: "his three-year ministry completely transformed the situation. He visited from house to house, held cottage meetings, began regular services in the Mechanic Institute in addition to those at the chapel until in March 1866, Colwell was able to report 173 members compared with 30 before the mission began."<sup>76</sup>

The number of Home Missionaries increased from 16 in 1860 to 44 in 1862 when it was decided to use them to establish new causes in neglected areas. The strategy adopted was that described by Samuel Coley: "Evangelistic success is best achieved by frequent creation of new centres. As populations gather and grow, there should be fresh sanctuaries for them, and fresh heralds of the Gospel among them. Without these advances of the boundary the Church can neither utilize nor keep the stirring life which past labour has begotten."<sup>77</sup> One such mission in the form of a school-chapel was established in the populous neighborhood of Carter's Green, West Bromwich in 1863. There were 917 families numbering 3,863 people, of which 517 families comprising some 2,068 people "frankly acknowledge they never attend either church or chapel." Joseph Higham, the missionary, provided three weekly services with sermons, held three class-meetings and two prayer meetings. Congregations

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<sup>75</sup>Davies, George & Rupp, *History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, Volume 3, 126.

<sup>76</sup>E. A. Rose, *The Methodist Church in Mossley, 1788-1988* (1988), 15.

<sup>77</sup>Coley, *Life of the Rev. Thomas Collins*, 29.

numbered 36 at the weeknight services, 50 at the Sunday morning service, and 200 at the Sunday evening service. In the nine months the chapel had been open the quarterly collections showed a steady increase.<sup>78</sup>

Men like Colwell and Higham depended heavily on lay helpers. At Oldham Street, Manchester, "A band of fourteen earnest workers have been organized for house-to-house visitation."<sup>79</sup> The missionary at Spenny-moor, County Durham, reported: "During the past quarter I have been aided in the work of cottage-services by 52 Local preachers and others; and 48 such services have been held, and with encouraging results." The number of Home Missionaries was 71 in 1869. Two years later the Conference sanctioned the use of paid lay agents, both male and female. In 1874 Edward Smith became the first District Evangelist to be appointed, and in 1882 Thomas Cook was the first Connexional evangelist to be appointed. There were seventeen district evangelists in 1887 and two further connexional ones, Thomas Waugh in 1883 and Edward Davidson in 1886.<sup>80</sup>

The use of specialist Home Missionaries to extend circuits demonstrates the extent of the collapsing of the concept of the average Wesleyan Methodist Preacher exercising an evangelistic pastorate through which he extended as well as kept his circuit. Despite the commendably aggressive activity of the Home Missionaries, there were signs of a clear decline in effectiveness within the inner cities where the migration of the middle classes to the suburbs had led to the decline of the once great and powerful inner city chapels. In 1863 the grand Pitt Street chapel, the mother chapel of Methodism in Liverpool, the scene of many wonderful gatherings of Methodists, within whose walls its greatest preachers had exercised their ministry and many of its best and influential families had worshipped, was now "deserted save for a small number of tradesmen and poor people."<sup>81</sup> The usual strategy of using Home Missionaries to concentrate their efforts either on reviving particular societies so that they could retake their place as self-supporting causes within their parent circuits, or to open up new causes and support them until they were self-sufficient enough to be incorporated into a circuit, was inadequate for the evange-

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<sup>78</sup>*Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* (1864), 945.

<sup>79</sup>*Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* (1864), 658-659.

<sup>80</sup>R. B. Walker, "The Growth of Wesleyan Methodism in Victorian England and Wales," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Volume XXIV (1973), 273.

<sup>81</sup>Dixon, *A Preacher's Half Century*, 122.

lism of the declining inner city chapels. The itinerant principle made it impossible for the missionaries to develop the long-term pastoral relationship required for working among “the godless population” to be found “in the darkest, the most profligate, the most abandoned neighbourhoods” of the large and densely populated towns in the manufacturing districts.

The solution, suggested by “Onesimus” writing from Scotland in 1849, was to use the missionaries as “destined to become ministers. They must begin in the open-air and pray to God to provide suitable accommodation in order to establish that pastoral identification with the people possible only to long term resident parish clergy. This requires the exercise of Methodist elasticity in modifying the itinerant principle . . . for carrying out a home mission in the great towns . . . we must have a greater concentration of a minister’s energies than is possible on a plan of equal interchange.”<sup>82</sup> It was fitting that the proposal came from Scotland for Peter M’Owan had been appointed as a missionary to Dunfermline for three months (March—May, 1820) to revive the work there, only to have his appointment extended to two and a half years during which he preached three times every Sunday in the Dunfermline pulpit for forty weeks in the year!<sup>83</sup>

The attitude of Methodism towards the modification of the itinerant principle was tested at the Manchester Conference of 1859 when the decision of the Hinde Street Circuit to plan Morley Punshon to preach at the Bayswater Chapel every Sunday without having first sought the prior consent of Conference for this modification of the itinerant principle was debated. It was decided that Conference should not interfere with “the elasticity of Methodism, with its power of adapting to local circumstances.”<sup>84</sup> This decision seems to have paved the way for making the city centre chapels into mission centres. In 1861 the London (Twelfth) Bow and Victoria Docks Circuit entirely supported by Home Mission funds was created in East London. Two ministers were appointed to begin the work of establishing Methodism in the area from scratch for “there was not a Leader, a Steward, a Trustee, nor the smallest fragment of organized Methodism of any kind.” In 1863 a “school-chapel was built at Bow, and

<sup>82</sup>*Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1849, 75-76.

<sup>83</sup>John M’Owan, *A Man of God: A Memoir of Rev. Peter M’Owan* (1873), 32.

<sup>84</sup>F. W. Macdonald, *The Life of William Morley Punshon* (1887), 149-150.

a chapel was built in 1865.”<sup>85</sup> In 1875 Charles Garrett was sent to Pitt Street, Liverpool, to make it into a mission centre. In addition to the normal activities used by Home Missionaries like house to house visitation, open air services, cottage meetings and tract distribution, he held midnight services for prostitutes and opened a Cocoa Room as an alternative to the Working Mens’ Clubs.

From the viewpoint of one set of statistics the tremendous evangelistic efforts made by Wesleyan Methodism were a success. The catastrophic membership losses of the schism of 1851-1854 had been made good by 1876, and attendance at Wesleyan churches had increased—in some cases dramatically—in towns where the population was rising rapidly. R. B. Walker provides a table of such increases for nine towns between 1851 and 1881.<sup>86</sup> A closer look at Leicester, however, reveals a decline in effectiveness. Between 1851 and 1881 the Wesleyans built four new churches to add to the two already existing to provide 4,015 seats—and in 1881 only a third of these were being filled. This was on a par with the performance of the other nonconformist churches in Leicester, but not as good as that of the Anglicans who “built proportionately more places of worship. . .and enjoyed more success than dissent in filling seats . . . particularly the new ones built in predominantly new working-class areas . . . most notably [those with] Tractarian ministers who proved highly successful in attracting large working-class congregations.”<sup>87</sup>

The success of such an unlikely type of Anglican priest filled with envy those normal Wesleyan circuit ministers who were becoming frustrated with their inability to exercise any kind of effective, concentrated pulpit or pastoral work because of the size of their circuits and the three-year itinerant principle. One of them complained bitterly: “What satisfaction can a pastor find in his work when he cannot meet the same congregation more than once a month, or only once in six weeks, or perhaps, more seldom than that at times? What fruit can be expected in a pastorate where the flock is scattered over a space which the minister must fail to command, whatever ingenuity of plan or measure of diligence he may attempt? What can such pastors know of their people? And, even were

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<sup>85</sup>Sails, *At The Centre*, 7.

<sup>86</sup>Walker, “The Growth of Wesleyan Methodism in Victorian England and Wales,” 273.

<sup>87</sup>Bill Lancaster, *Radicalism, Co-operation, and Socialism: Leicester Working Class Politics 1860-1906* (1987), 65.

they to know them, what opportunity would they have of adapting and properly regulating their ministrations?" To make matters worse, the fragmentary, dispersed character of the minister's preaching and pastoral visiting merely served to encourage the preference of Methodist people for a great variety of preachers—"Their religious life appears to be sustained by a weekly variation of stimulants, rather than by seasonable, well-proportioned and nourishing supplies of spiritual food."<sup>88</sup> The privilege of exercising such a concentrated ministry was to be confined to those Home Missionaries of the "Forward Movement" that was to be a central feature of the closing decades of the nineteenth century.

### **The Evangelistic Pastorate of the Central Hall Missioner**

The impetus towards breaking down the barriers between Methodism and the working classes in the larger towns and cities was provided by the publication of "The Bitter Cry of Outcast London" in 1883. It was written by three Congregational ministers and was a report of the work being done by the mission halls built "in several of the lowest and most needy districts of the metropolis." Hugh Price Hughes acknowledged his debt to this publication by saying that it "awoke the metropolitan Churches as the scepticism of David Hume 'interrupted the dogmatic slumber' of Immanuel Kant. We realised that we were partly responsible for the existing sin and misery of London, and that we must do our share in the great work which demands the united devotion of all the Churches."<sup>89</sup>

R. S. Inglis identifies four problems which the decline of the city centre chapels set for Wesleyan Methodism's mission to the poor:

- What to do with the "deserted" city centre chapels?
- How to finance work amongst the poor in the city centre?
- How to persuade the working class to attend worship?
- Who was to provide the poor of the city centre with leadership and role models in Christian living?<sup>90</sup>

The response of Methodism in the light of "The Bitter Cry" was swift. The Wesleyan Conference of 1884 appointed a committee to consider a

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<sup>88</sup>*Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1863, 179-180.

<sup>89</sup>D. P. Hughes, *The Life of Hugh Price Hughes* (1904), 190.

<sup>90</sup>R. S. Inglis, *Churches and The Working Class in Victorian England* (1963), 63.

scheme to relieve the spiritual destitution of London by means of a London Wesleyan Mission directed especially to Central London. Hugh Price Hughes used his newspaper, *The Methodist Times*, to support the venture by rekindling the historic Wesleyan sense of mission to the poor. In March, 1885, he wrote: "Methodism has reached the parting of the ways. We must either go back to the obscurity of a class religion, and the impotence of a moribund sect; or we must go forward into the blessed opportunities and far reaching beneficence of a national religion, which preaches the gospel to the poor."<sup>91</sup>

The Hughes crusade for this national movement by Methodism toward mission to the poor became known as "The Forward Movement." An admirer and disciple like J. Earnest Rattenbury could say: "The outstanding event of the last decades of the nineteenth century in Methodism was the revolution brought about by the personality and mission of Hugh Price Hughes. He it was who broke down the walls of the enclosed garden of traditional Methodism."<sup>92</sup> Hughes was a revolutionary in the sense that he persuaded Methodism that the traditional Methodist circuit system based on the principle of a triennial itinerant ministry was deemed insufficient to meet the needs of the city centres. Influential figures like Charles Garrett and W. A. McArthur had argued that poor people related to a person rather than to an office, and since no man could win the confidence of poor people by appearing in the same pulpit once a month in the morning, and once a month in the evening "for the short space of three years," the ministers serving in city centres should be allowed to stay for a minimum period of ten years. City centre missions, therefore, were placed in the charge of ministers with long-term appointments in order to reach the urban poor by providing an attractive form of popular worship and a program of cultural activities and social relief work. It was this combination of evangelism with a deliberate program of social relief work which was the unique feature of the Forward Movement.

There had been non-denominational town and city evangelical missions since 1826 when David Nasmith founded the Glasgow City Mission, and went on to found forty-four more in the British Isles and thirty-six in North America before his death in 1839.<sup>93</sup> The aim of the town and

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<sup>91</sup>Inglis, 70.

<sup>92</sup>J. E. Rattenbury, *Evangelism and Pagan England* (1954), 31.

<sup>93</sup>Kathleen Heasman, *Evangelicals in Action* (1962), 53.

city missionaries was to improve the religious life of the poor, and to encourage them to attend a church of their own choice by:

- visiting every family and individual in the district allocated to them;
- advocating justification by faith in Christ;
- testifying against all open sin like drunkenness, profaneness, uncleanness, sabbath breaking, cruelty in parents and disobedience in children;
- holding short meetings in suitable homes of the respectable poor;
- encouraging people to read the Bible with their families, to attend church, and to send their children to Sunday School;
- distributing tracts and promoting libraries for their appointed district.<sup>94</sup>

The Methodist Mission Halls and School-Chapel Missions had used the same basic pattern of activities, but the Forward Movement was committed from the beginning, as a matter of principle, to provide a comprehensive range of evangelistic, cultural, and philanthropic activities. The aim of Hughes was to recall the younger generation of Methodists to what he regarded as “the broad, catholic, tender-hearted theology of early Methodism” reinterpreted in the light of modern knowledge.<sup>95</sup> Hughes restored the philanthropic and political dimensions of Wesley’s teaching on the nature of Christian holiness: “Jesus Christ came into the world to save society as well as to save individuals; you cannot save the one without the other.”<sup>96</sup> The grand Central Halls he advocated were also a revival of that neutral ground found in cottages and plain preaching houses which had so appealed to the poor throughout the history of Methodism’s growth. The new central mission halls were designed to be commodious, handsome, bright, well ventilated, comfortable places with a good organ and choir to encourage hearty singing. To begin with, the inner city missionaries had to be content with whatever large premises they could rent or buy and convert to suit their purposes. Hughes launched the West London

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<sup>94</sup>Read & Dobson, *A Voice in the City: Liverpool City Mission, 1887-1979* (1979), 17-18.

<sup>95</sup>Hughes, *Life of Hugh Price Hughes*, 165.

<sup>96</sup>Sails, *At The Centre*, 5.

Mission in the rented accommodation of the St. James's Hall. The Glasgow mission was housed for years in the Windsor Halls. Charles Garrett in Liverpool and Samuel Collier in Manchester and Salford conducted their mission work through a number of small halls placed in strategic positions. By 1903, however, seven of the grand halls—the cathedrals of Methodism celebrating the Connexion's mission the poor—had been erected in great provincial centres.<sup>97</sup>

What sort of answers, then, did the Forward Movement give to the four problems posed by R. S. Inglis?

The deserted city centre chapels were made into central missions served by ministers freed from the Methodist Circuit itinerant system.

Financing the missions was a complex operation. Numerous were gifts in kind. Most common were parcels of clothing, though sacks of peas, onions, turnips, or apples, bundles of blankets, parcels of toys and bunches of flowers. Clearly the mission was greatly dependent on the goodwill and financial support of thousands of people for the continuance of its work.<sup>98</sup> When the specialised grand central halls were built, the allowances of the staff were met by letting part of the premises for business purposes. At Birmingham it was the ground floor and basement areas that were set aside for this purpose.<sup>99</sup>

The poor were not attracted by the use of "gimmicks." The presence of the mission in their neighborhood, the willingness of the missionaries to enter their homes, and the social relief provided by the mission all served to express the concern of the mission for the poor. Inside the mission building all the seats were free. The Manchester City News was impressed by the number of "roughs" in their ragged clothes present in the congregation at Oldham Street in 1894 and went on to say: "It is to the credit of the Central Hall that everyone in the Hall attended on a footing of perfect equality; there were no reserved seats of any kind."<sup>100</sup> The services themselves were

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<sup>97</sup>Sails, Appendix A, 53-102.

<sup>98</sup>P. S. Bagwell, *Outcast London: The West London Mission of the Methodist Church, 1887-1987* (1987), 7.

<sup>99</sup>Rita Armitage, *Mission in the Second City, 1887-1987* (1987), 7.

<sup>100</sup>Sails, *At The Centre*, 17.

traditional Methodist ones at their best—marked “by strong evangelism and hearty fellowship, sincerity, warmth, clearness, courage, vigour, sympathy, and friendliness.”<sup>101</sup>

Because the necessity for providing role models of efficient Christian living had been created by “the moving out to the suburbs of the better-to-do,” the cure for the resultant “separation of classes, the intellectual starvation of the poor, the growing lack of competent administrators and workers in the poorer districts” was, according to Scott Lidgett, to attract “the educated and more prosperous youth at universities, colleges, and schools” back into the inner cities.<sup>102</sup> The nucleus of the acclaimed “Sisterhood” of the West London Mission was composed of Miss Katherine Page of Walmer Court, Miss Tindall, the daughter of the Rev. William Tindall, and then an old Lalehamite, Miss Clara Holden, daughter of Mr. Edward Holden of Bradford.<sup>103</sup> The ideal answer to the problem would have been the lives of the mission converts. At Birmingham the manager of the Men’s Home in Newton Hall, Tom Broomhall, was a converted alcoholic and recidivist who had served 39 jail sentences.<sup>104</sup> The great majority of the converts had no Christian background to sustain them and needed patient nurturing. At Leeds 90% of the converts were non-churchgoers. Many of them relapsed into their former ways of life, and those who remained underwent several relapses before they were firmly established in the Christian faith.<sup>105</sup>

On the basis of membership figures, the Forward Movement was a great initial success. Luke Wiseman began the Birmingham Mission in 1887 with the 100 members transferred from the old Cherry Street Society, and by 1893 there were 400 members. The West London Mission grew from 123 members in 1888 to 1,357 in 1902. The Manchester and Salford Mission went from 93 members in 1887 to 3,521 in 1902. A survey of church attendance in London in 1902 carried out by the *Daily News* showed that Wesleyan Methodism, despite its middle-class “formal

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<sup>101</sup>Sails, 23.

<sup>102</sup>J. S. Lidgett, *My Guided Life* (1936), 110-111.

<sup>103</sup>K. P. Hughes, *The Story of My Life* (1945), 51.

<sup>104</sup>“H. J. J.,” *What I Saw . . . In the Birmingham Mission* (1902), 27.

<sup>105</sup>Sails, *At The Centre*, 23.

and ministerially-centred” character, attracted 78,139 attendances in working-class Inner London and 44,468 attendances in middle-class Outer London. Even so, the verdict of some modern historians is that the statistics are deceptive.

The Mission Centres, “in terms of their stated aims to minister to and capture the allegiance of the classes and areas alienated from the church, were really a failure.”<sup>106</sup> They touched the lives of only a fraction of the surrounding urban poor, were middle-class in ethos and appeal, and drew mostly Methodists from other churches and regions into membership. Samuel Chadwick at Oxford Place, Leeds, certainly drew on a large constituency. In fact, “the Sunday evening train from Keighley to Leeds was even known as ‘Chadwick’s train.’”<sup>107</sup> Ministers like Joseph Dixon, still doubted the wisdom of “spending sufficient money on one hall to build a dozen convenient and handsome churches.”<sup>108</sup> Conference, as a body, was also not convinced of the need for a social gospel to accompany its evangelistic work: “By inheritance we are a Missionary Church. . . . The same missionary spirit must animate us in our work at home . . . deep feeling has been roused by the discussion of moral problems. . . . The fact that social work is so unselfish, and has something of the largeness and noble emotion of Christian charity, may hide from us the fact that little account is taken of the inner conflict between good and evil, between temptation and grace; we may lose sight of the great final issues of time and eternity.” All this had been preceded by an appeal to the example of John Wesley who “strove to lift the whole life of the people of his own land, yet ever kept before his mind what is the chief aim of the Christian worker—viz., the regeneration of nations by divine grace, creating new life in individuals. The interest he took in objects political and philanthropic, yet subordinating all to the work of saving souls, suggests how we ought to think and act in our own sphere and time”<sup>109</sup>

The irony is that the Central Hall Missions were simply Methodist reproductions of the Anglican strategy to meet the needs of the industrial towns and cities by recreating in their midst the ideal Anglican rural Parish. The Notice Board of the Birmingham Wesleyan Mission in 1902

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<sup>106</sup>Davies, George & Rupp, *History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, Volume 3, 141.

<sup>107</sup>D. C. Dews, *Oxford Place Methodist Centre, 1835-1985* (1985), 16.

<sup>108</sup>Dixon, *Preacher’s Half Century*, 187.

<sup>109</sup>Minutes of The Wesleyan Conference, 1903, 141.

bears a striking resemblance to the ideal requirements of an efficient Anglican parish sub-divided into mission school-chapels. The Superintendent (Rector) of the Mission was F. L. Wiseman, and his assistant (vicar) was J. T. Gurney. There were at least four other ministers (curates). All these men had been released from the itinerant principle and circuit system to conduct concentrated ministries in a particular locality for an indefinite period. The Forward Movement was an unconscious expression of Methodist despair with its traditional circuit system manned by an itinerant ministry. The evangelistic pastorate of the central missionary was a pseudo Methodist imitation of the traditional comprehensive parish ministry of the Anglican Church, even though, in one way, true to its inherent dilemma, it fulfilled Wesley's ideal of a ministry based on the ideal parish ministry!

#### Acknowledgment

The author wishes to thank E. Alan Rose, B.A., the editor of the *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* for permission to reproduce material from pages 145-147 of my article on "James Caughey's Challenge to Wesleyan Concepts of Ministry and Church Growth: 1841-1846," in Volume 49, Part 5 (May 1994).

**THE “COLOR LINE” WASHED AWAY  
IN THE BLOOD?  
IN THE HOLINESS CHURCH, AT AZUSA  
STREET, AND AFTERWARD<sup>1</sup>**

by

**Charles Edwin Jones**

Had they thought in H. Richard Niebuhr's terms,<sup>2</sup> turn-of-the-century Holiness and Pentecostal people would have been categorized by others and by themselves as transformers of culture. That such was their intent is written large in their history. Because the same history, however, shows them to be people in tune with the social currents and undercurrents of the times, it provides a map to the direction of popular American thinking on a wide range of issues, race and poverty among them. The treatment of these issues within two early radical expressions of these movements, the Holiness Church of California and the Azusa Street Apostolic Faith Mission of Los Angeles,<sup>3</sup> provides a gauge to their impact on each at the dawn of the age of Jim Crow.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Frank Bartleman, *How Pentecost Came to Los Angeles: As It Was in the Beginning* (Los Angeles, 1925), 54.

<sup>2</sup>See H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper, 1951).

<sup>3</sup>See Sandra Sizer Frankiel, *California's Spiritual Frontiers: Religious Alternatives in Anglo-Protestantism, 1850-1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 105-106, 117-118.

<sup>4</sup>See C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955).

The role of the Azusa Street revival as precursor of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements is well known. Heretofore, its debt to the priorities and convictions of the Holiness Church of California has not been recognized, however. The outlook of this group, a quarter of a century in the making, was to be the source of much which was later to be regarded as unique in early Pentecostalism. Perennial theme of its official organ, *The Pentecost*, was the teaching of the Holiness Church that entire sanctification and the endowment of power received by the disciples on the Day of Pentecost are one and the same, cleansing fully surrendered believers from inner sin, baptizing them with the Holy Spirit, and empowering them for effective Christian service. The reformulation of this teaching at Azusa Street was to predicate much of that which lay ahead.

Second-blessing holiness, held the leader James Wesley Swing (1840-1896),<sup>5</sup> clothed one with inner qualities necessary for effective service and freed one from attachment to the love of money and social distinction, the unacknowledged promise of American life. He explained:

Taking carnally minded people into the church, in order to get them saved, is like electing a thief to the office of treasurer in a benevolent society, in order to reform him. The result would be he would appropriate the funds to his own use, leaving the poor to suffer on and the society unable to help them. So the carnal mind, when honored with a place among God's people, robs them of their power to get sanctified and leaves the world to go on in sin. Saints of the most High God cannot compete with anybody for anything. Their business is not to compete with one another, but to give out freely to others, what they already have. If Holiness is not the basis of membership in the church, what is it the basis of? If the church is not to be holy in the world, what is to be holy?<sup>6</sup>

Holiness Church members burned bridges to many aspects of secular aspiration, making this body, throughout its history, a monumental example of rebuke to the social, economic, and racial idolatry of the age. Its

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<sup>5</sup>The parents of Assemblies of God general superintendent Ernest Swing Williams (1885-1981) were charter members of the first independent Holiness Church in San Bernardino, which was organized by J. W. Swing in 1884. See L. A. Clark, ed., *Truths of Interest: Origin and Distinctive Teachings of "The Holiness Church"* (El Monte, Ca.: Standard Bearer Publishing House, 1939), 2.

<sup>6</sup>Washburn, *History and Reminiscences of the Holiness Church Work in Southern California and Arizona*, 218.

adherents embraced minorities and the poor as brothers and sisters in the Lord and eschewed needless adornment in dress and in worship (instrumental music, for example) as antithetical to such commitment.<sup>7</sup>

William J. Seymour (1870-1922),<sup>8</sup> the black leader at Azusa Street, built on foundations laid by his teacher and patron, Charles Fox Parham (1873-1929),<sup>9</sup> who at Topeka, Kansas, in the first hours of 1901 had come to regard the ability of his students to speak in languages unlearned by them<sup>10</sup> as the talisman of the new acts<sup>11</sup> of the Holy Spirit in the last days. There, tarrying for the enduement of power in one of the turrets of a sometime mansion known as Stone's Folly, Parham believed they had seen reenacted events recorded in Acts 2. At Azusa Street in the years 1906 to 1908, amidst phenomena reminiscent of the Upper Room, Seymour and his disciples believed that they too experienced Pentecost.<sup>12</sup> The racial identity of the leader, the communal context, and the physical setting had changed. Otherwise, the expectation of reenactment of the Day of Pentecost remained as it had been at Topeka.

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<sup>7</sup>Standards were identical to those of the Free Methodist Church, except for profession of entire sanctification as a qualification for membership.

<sup>8</sup>Douglas J. Nelson, "For Such a Time as This: the Story of Bishop William J. Seymour and the Azusa Street Revival, a Search for Pentecostal/Charismatic Roots" (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Birmingham, 1981); and James S. Tinney, "William J. Seymour: Father of Modern-Day Pentecostalism," *Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center*, 4 (Fall 1976), 34-44.

<sup>9</sup>Sarah E. Parham, *The Life of Charles F. Parham, Founder of the Apostolic Faith Movement* (Joplin, Mo.: Hunter Printing Co., 1930); James R. Goff, Jr., *Fields White Unto Harvest: Charles F. Parham and the Missionary Origins of Pentecostalism* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1988); and Thomas A. Robinson, "The Conservative Nature of Dissent in Early Pentecostalism: a Study of Charles F. Parham, the Founder of the Pentecostal Movement," Malcolm R. Greenshields and Thomas A. Robinson, eds., *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Religious Movements: Discipline and Dissent* (Lewiston, N. Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), 134-161.

<sup>10</sup>Parham at first believed that those so endowed, who were called as foreign missionaries, could go to the field and give witness without having first studied the language. See D. William Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel: the Significance of Eschatology in the Development of Pentecostal Thought* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

<sup>11</sup>In this vein *New Acts* was the title chosen by Levi Rakestraw Lupton (1860-1929) for a paper he launched in 1907 at Alliance, Ohio.

<sup>12</sup>Charles Edwin Jones, "Symbol and Sign in Methodist Holiness and Pentecostal Spirituality," Timothy Miller, ed., *America's Alternative Religions* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 23-31.

To insiders and outsiders alike, Azusa Street appeared to be a "fullness of the time"<sup>13</sup> event. That to this humble place strangers should flock from the four corners of the continent and beyond to be taught by a semi-literate, partially blind black man seemed to be nothing short of miraculous proof of the latter-day Pentecost. Reports by those from other places, who at some time during the twenty-one month heyday of the revival had visited the mission, filled every issue of *The Apostolic Faith*. Pentecostal saints of the Diaspora far outnumbered those in Los Angeles. But, because most came and went, the impact of those remaining in the vicinity was to be far in excess of their numbers. This is the reason for emphasizing the subconscious role played by local converts, particularly those coming from the Holiness Church, in determining the theology, worship style, and attitudes toward race, poverty, and gender which were to characterize Azusa Street.

The Holiness Church of California was one of the earliest organized bodies to separate from episcopal Methodism over the issue of aggressive promotion of the doctrine and experience of entire sanctification. The group was the product of the revivalism, dating from 1880, of James Swing, Hardin Wallace, Frank and Henry Ashcraft, and others.<sup>14</sup> In places where success attended their efforts, the meetings resulted in organization of cell groups, called Holiness bands, outside the churches. Allied with the Southern California and Arizona Holiness Association, the bands and the independent churches which sprang from them amalgamated in 1896

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<sup>13</sup>Gal. 4:4 (AV).

<sup>14</sup>A tangential relationship exists between the origin of the Holiness Church and that of the Church of the Nazarene. One of the earliest meetings of Hardin Wallace and the Ashcrafts was in the Fort Street Methodist Church, later called the First Methodist Church of Los Angeles. Those sanctified during that meeting were by their prayers in 1885 to inspire their pastor, P. F. Bresee, to become more deeply than ever committed to the experience of entire sanctification. Ten years later, they in turn were among those who supported him in founding the Church of the Nazarene. See Josephine M. Washburn, *History and Reminiscences of the Holiness Church Work in Southern California and Arizona* (South Pasadena, Ca.: Record Press, 1912; reprinted: New York: Garland Publishing, 1985), 7; and Carl Bangs, *Phineas F. Bresee: His Life in Methodism, the Holiness Movement, and the Church of the Nazarene* (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, c1995), 130, 187, 199, 222.

as a church body requiring the profession of entire sanctification as a prerequisite for membership.<sup>15</sup>

The life and symbolism of the Holiness Church presented a premonition of things to come. As would be its tongues-speaking heir, the church was aggressively evangelistic. *The Pentecost*, launched in 1885, was replete with reports from immigrants and others, like its leaders,<sup>16</sup> who had been won to the cause in California and had returned to their home communities to witness. These workers learned of like-minded saints in Kansas, Illinois, and North Carolina.<sup>17</sup> In 1886 they had also made contact with a nearly-identical fellowship in England also called the Holiness Church which was led by Mrs. Sophia Chambers.<sup>18</sup>

Every member of the Holiness Church was a worker. They were unpaid and frugal. At death many, like J. W. Swing, left nearly all they had for the furtherance of the cause. The minutes for 1896 state:

The sum of \$100, left to the Association by our beloved Bro. Swing, was presented and received with thanks and much emotion as memories of him filled our minds. A letter of appreciation was ordered sent to Sister Swing, who had gone home from camp. Many wished to make a voluntary offering for her and \$28.15 was brought in.<sup>19</sup>

Apart from bare necessities, such material assistance as was given was for tents, buildings, and equipment used in the work.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>The Holiness Church, by making testimony to entire sanctification a requirement for membership, inadvertently had made profession of the experience a "work." Pentecostal candidates for ministry were later to experience a similar dilemma in relation to speaking in tongues as the initial evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. See Wayne A. Robinson, *I Once Spoke in Tongues* (Atlanta: Forum House Publishers, 1973).

<sup>16</sup>J. W. Swing, the Washburns, and others. See Washburn, *History and Reminiscences of the Holiness Church Work in Southern California and Arizona*.

<sup>17</sup>Washburn, *History and Reminiscences of the Holiness Church Work in Southern California and Arizona*, 80, 83, 209, 220, 289- 290, 294. The North Carolina group was black.

<sup>18</sup>Mrs. Washburn noted that recently the circulation of its publication, *The Holiness Advocate*, had skyrocketed from 2000 to 8000. See Washburn, *History and Reminiscences of the Holiness Church Work in Southern California and Arizona*, 75.

<sup>19</sup>Washburn, *History and Reminiscences of the Holiness Church Work in Southern California and Arizona*, 229.

<sup>20</sup>See Washburn, *History and Reminiscences of Holiness Church Work in Southern California and Arizona*, 378.

Although there were many blacks in the Holiness Church, their identity is difficult to determine because of the attitude of the historian of the movement, Mrs. Josephine Washburn,<sup>21</sup> who appeared to be unconscious either of race or station. In accounts of church activities compiled by her it is impossible in most instances to determine from the context the racial identity of participants. Only thirteen of the more than eighty pages in her book alluding to African Americans contain the words "colored" or "black."<sup>22</sup> The pervasiveness of this attitude, together with the depth of its consecration of material things, lay at the root of the effectiveness of Holiness Church work among the poor.

Conversion to Pentecostalism constituted an act of bridge-burning. As in other instances of re-direction, the proselyte thought that a far more all-encompassing process was occurring than was actually the case. The bridge to be burned was laden with many things. Before the fire was set, however, the bridge-burner unconsciously brought most of his or her habitual responses and convictions to the far end of the bridge. Typically, only one crucial issue was left on it.

For members of the Holiness Church attracted to Pentecostalism, the bridge-burning issue was belief in the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a third work of grace—the *sine qua non* of the new teaching—acceptance of which made necessary a radical shift in thinking concerning the witness of the Spirit. In Wesleyan teaching all crisis experiences are witnessed by the Holy

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<sup>21</sup>Mrs. Washburn's father, Horace Holdridge (1821-1896), had been sanctified during a camp meeting at Binghamton, New York—her birthplace—under the ministry of the noted Holiness evangelist J. A. Wood (1828-1905). Not until 1880, however, five years after coming from Iowa to California, did she under the preaching of workers associated with Hardin Wallace claim the experience. She recalled:

The teaching of these brethren was so definite . . . and the Holy Spirit showed me so plainly that this was my last chance, . . . that after a struggle . . . I yielded; put my will concerning everything for time and for eternity, on the altar, Christ Jesus, believing the altar was greater than my gift and that Jesus accepted the gift and crucified the carnal mind that had given me so much trouble . . . and the Holy Ghost, the abiding comforter, took up His abode in my heart to stay; not merely neutralizing the sin principle by His indwelling power, but by destroying it.

See Washburn, *History and Reminiscences of the Holiness Church Work in Southern California and Arizona*, 7-10 [Josephine]; 217- 218 [her father].

<sup>22</sup>Washburn, *History and Reminiscences of the Holiness Church Work in Southern California and Arizona*, 89, 92, 138, 183, 239, 240, 244, 264, 266, 322, 362, 388, 417.

Spirit. Regeneration is witnessed by changed behavior, by ethical conduct, and by determination not willfully to sin. Entire sanctification is witnessed by a love for God heretofore unknown and by a will “set like a flint”<sup>23</sup> to do His bidding. Holiness inquirers could embrace the Pentecostal corollary to the Wesleyan doctrine of the witness of the Spirit only after first having burned the third-work-of-grace bridge. Once that was done, acceptance by the seeker of tongues as both sign and seal was but a short step.

As a young man in Louisiana the African-American leader at Azusa Street had been associated with the Evening Light Saints,<sup>24</sup> a group whose teaching concerning sanctification was identical to that of the Holiness Church of California. Seymour’s entrance into the Pentecostal movement came as a result of attendance in 1905 at a short-term Bible school conducted in Houston by Parham who, building on Holiness foundations, distinguished entire sanctification from the baptism of the Holy Spirit, characterizing the latter as a third work of grace made evident initially by the ability of those so baptized to speak in languages unlearned by them. Parham at first believed that those so endowed who were called as foreign missionaries could go to the field and give witness without having first studied the language. At Houston, the African American embraced the theology of the self-styled “projector” of the Apostolic Faith movement and became, intellectually, Pentecostal.<sup>25</sup>

Seymour’s teacher, a British Israelite, believed the Anglo-Saxon peoples to be descended from the ten lost tribes of Israel.<sup>26</sup> Because per-

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<sup>23</sup>See Isa. 50:7c (AV). By the turn of the century, this metaphor of arrow-like determination to persevere had become enshrined in the shibboleth of Holiness prayer and testimony.

<sup>24</sup>An early designation of the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana).

<sup>25</sup>His teacher’s influence on Seymour was evident long after the two had broken fellowship. The 95 page book of discipline which he compiled in 1915 for the mission consists, without attribution, of material from two sources: passages copied from the Methodist Episcopal Church discipline (90 pages) and from a re-worked version of Parham’s statement of faith (5 pages). See *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Apostolic Faith Mission of Los Angeles, Ca., 1915, with Scripture Readings by W. J. Seymour, Its Founder and General Overseer* (Los Angeles, 1915); and Robinson, “The Conservative Nature of Dissent in Early Pentecostalism,” 161.

<sup>26</sup>J. H. Allen, *Judah’s Sceptre and Joseph’s Birthright: an Analysis of the Prophecies of Scripture in Regard to the Royal Family of Judah and Many Nations of Israel* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Shaw Publishing Co., c1902); and William L. Ingram, “God and Race: British Israelism and Christian Identity,” Timothy Miller, ed., *America’s Alternative Religions* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 119-126.

sons with such a heritage were by nature promised more than others, this belief<sup>27</sup> made for ready acceptance of customs and laws<sup>28</sup> which required separation of the races. As a result, Seymour was not allowed in the classroom at Houston, but was required instead to listen from the hall. Those who, like Parham, believed themselves to be of that lineage, however, also bore a special responsibility toward those not so privileged. When, therefore, a few weeks into the term Seymour received an invitation to become pastor of Sister Hutchinson's mission<sup>29</sup> on Santa Fe Avenue in Los Angeles, his teacher, after some hesitation over his not having yet received the

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<sup>27</sup>In 1893 or 1894 Parham was introduced to the British Israel theory by J. H. Allen (1847-1930), who thirty-five years later was to recall (see Parham, *The Life of Charles F. Parham, Founder of the Apostolic Faith Movement*, 421-422):

I first met our Brother Parham when he was a young preacher and unmarried. He then being pastor of the Methodist Episcopal Church at Eudora, Kan., at which time I was holding the Blue Mound Holiness Camp Meeting.

Bro. Parham came into the service a little late, his congregation having come to the Camp Meeting. I had announced previously that I would preach on our Anglo-Saxon identity with the house of Joseph of "the ten lost tribes of Israel." The theme was new to him as it was also to the entire congregation.

The inspiration of the Holy Spirit was upon me, and I preached for two hours and a half, and no one left or thought of dinner. After looking at my watch, I told the people to get some dinner and that I would continue the subject at the afternoon service. I did and preached for one hour and a half.

During that morning service, I was especially drawn to that young boyish looking brother who came in late and sat in the rear of the tabernacle, and I went to him. After the introduction and first greetings were over I said, "Brother, do you know that these are the last days, and that Jesus is coming soon?" His reply was, "Every sanctified man knows that."

That melted our dawning fellowship and brotherhood, which remained unbroken and which, I am sure will now remain unbroken throughout the eternity of God.

<sup>28</sup>Following *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), all Southern states passed legislation—not all at the same time and not all dealing with the whole range of issues relating to separation of the races—which would later be called Jim Crow laws. See Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*.

<sup>29</sup>The mission had been established after Sarah J. Hutchinson and a number of black converts had been barred from a nearby Baptist Church because of their advocacy of entire sanctification. At that time Hutchinson had been associated with Holiness Church work for two decades. From 1895 to 1897 she had served as a missionary to lepers in Hawaii. See Washburn, *History and Reminiscences of the Holiness Church Work in Southern California and Arizona*, 90, 199, 207-208, 218-219, 235; and Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited*, 61, 65.

Pentecostal baptism, agreed to pay his student's railroad fare to Los Angeles. After prayer and the laying on of hands, Seymour departed.<sup>30</sup>

When the new pastor arrived and started preaching his new gospel, however, the leadership of the mission rejected the message and locked him out. Whereupon, he and a handful of followers moved to the porch of a house nearby. Soon, however, the weight of those congregated overcame the structure and the porch collapsed. They next found a meeting place in a tumble-down building which had been used successively as an African-American Methodist church, a livery stable, a tenement, and a warehouse. They cleaned it up and began holding services there.

For seating, the members strung planks between nail kegs. These improvised benches, with a capacity of perhaps thirty, they then placed along three sides of a rectangular area. Along the fourth side they placed a similarly constructed bench, which served as an altar rail or mourner's bench. Seymour presided at the meetings from behind a couple of packing cases.<sup>31</sup>

Beginning in September, 1906, and continuing for twenty-one months, the mission published a paper called *The Apostolic Faith* containing reports of meetings and testimonies. Each issue also contained a statement of faith which, except for the third work and tongues, would have been acceptable to most Holiness people. The content was based on the Holiness consensus and represented the commitments of Seymour and his

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<sup>30</sup>Robert Mapes Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: the Making of American Pentecostalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 60-61. The source of money for the fare is a matter of dispute, with Mrs. Parham and Howard Goss saying it was Parham and the editors of *The Apostolic Faith*, 1:4 (Dec. 1906), 1:1, claiming it was "the saints in Los Angeles." See Robinson, "The Conservative Nature of Dissent in Early Pentecostalism," 148, 152.

<sup>31</sup>See Nils Bloch-Hoell, *The Pentecostal Movement: Its Origin, Development, and Distinctive Character* (Oslo: Universtetsforlaget, 1964), 30-52; and Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited*, 62-78. He left to his mostly white staff tasks such as editing *The Apostolic Faith*, requiring skills he did not possess, a fact made evident by a comparison of issues of the paper edited by him and those edited by Florence Crawford and Clara Lum after 1908, when these women took the non-Los Angeles mailing lists to Portland and started publishing the paper there. Compare the quality of editing and format of *The Apostolic Faith*: vol. 2, no. 13, May 1908 (Los Angeles) and vol. 2, no. 15, July and August 1908 (Portland), prepared by Crawford and Lum; with [vol. 2, no. 14, June 1908] (Los Angeles), prepared by Seymour. Neither [vol. 2, no. 14] (Los Angeles), nor vol. 2, no. 15 (Portland), are reprinted in Fred T. Corum, comp. *Like as of Fire* (Wilmington, Ma., 1981).

local followers. It was on these criteria that the Apostolic Faith Mission of Los Angeles issued credentials to its largely white staff. The paper was distributed free upon request. Similar in format and content to *The Pentecost* and *The Nazarene Messenger*, also published there, the paper, like them, had many readers in other sections.

The spectacle of a black person teaching whites—unheard of at the time—and the exuberance of the worship, the tongues speaking, the prostrations, and the around-the-clock meetings, attracted the interest of journalists whose accounts gave the impression of huge crowds. Because the meeting room only had a seating capacity of thirty, this simply could not have been the case. Although there was widespread interest and on occasion large crowds outside the building, a large local Pentecostal membership was not created. Southern California had to wait until the Dust Bowl migration of the 1930s for a significant Pentecostal population.<sup>32</sup>

A number of Southern Holiness preachers visited Azusa Street. Among these were G. B. Cashwell (1862-1916) and John A. Jeter (1854-1945), a white and a black, who—attracted to and put off by what they saw there—were to be in the vanguard of those in their section promoting and cautioning against acceptance of the new teaching. Coming also were former disciples of Benjamin Hardin Irwin,<sup>33</sup> who once had promoted a third experience called the baptism of fire,<sup>34</sup> and “the projector of the Apostolic Faith” himself, who was repelled by what he saw. Whatever their reaction, the experience at Azusa Street altered in no discernible way

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<sup>32</sup>Azusa Street was easily overlooked. None of the six churches and 538 members of the Apostolic Faith movement reported in the 1906 federal census of religious bodies were in California. Pentecostalism did not gain a foothold in the state before 1920. See U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Religious Bodies: 1906* (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1910), 2:279-280; and Frankiel, *California's Spiritual Frontiers*, 117-118.

<sup>33</sup>In February 1907 the former apostle of fire-baptism had been recruited to work in Pentecostal missions in Oakland and San Francisco. See *The Apostolic Faith*, 1:6 (Feb./Mar. 1907), 1:1; and 1:7 (Apr. 1907), 4:1-2.

<sup>34</sup>In 1905 the 83 ordained and appointed evangelists reported by the Royston, Georgia, offices of the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church included 15 designated as “colored,” one of whom (W. E. Fuller) was listed also as “assistant general overseer” and “trustee.” See *Live Coals*, 3 (Jan. 11, 1905). Three years later, after accepting Pentecostalism, the Fire-Baptized group separated along racial lines and Fuller became general overseer of the Colored Fire-Baptized Holiness Church. See Vinson Synan, *The Old-Time Power* (Franklin Springs, Ga.: Advocate Press, 1973), 100-101.

ideas on a myriad of other issues, race among them, which outsiders had brought with them to Los Angeles.

Like those attracted to the Holiness Church and the Church of the Nazarene, not all who came to Azusa Street came for the purpose of attending the meetings. Some were tourists.<sup>35</sup> Alexander Boddy (1854-1930), an Anglican vicar in the north of England, had published previous to this visit accounts of travel in Russia. Others such as R. E. McAlister (1880-1953), a Presbyterian from Ontario, and William Durham (1873-1912), a Baptist from Chicago, had first attended to satisfy curiosity.

The interest in Azusa Street was by no means unique. For decades *The Pentecost* had been full of reports by people who had visited California, been sanctified in Holiness Church meetings, and returned home to witness. Blacks in particular had gone home to Kentucky and Tennessee and established work there. There is no evidence, however, that any Azusa Street converts from the Holiness Church were black. In 1906 the General Assembly of the Holiness Church voted to “place \$1,000 of the proceeds” from the sale of property “in the hands of Bro. and Sister Goins for an [African-American] industrial and training school work in the South, and \$500 in the hands of Bro. and Sister Chapman to finish the [African-American] house of worship at Columbus, Georgia.” In the next two decades, as the mostly-white congregations in California were declining, the mostly-black ones in Kentucky and Tennessee were registering gains.<sup>36</sup>

Among local constituents of the Azusa Street Mission in the fall of 1906 were twenty-seven Caucasian individuals and their pastor, William Pendleton,<sup>37</sup> formerly of the Hawthorne Street Holiness Church of Los

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<sup>35</sup>In the twenty-two years preceding this visit, Boddy has authored six volumes recording travels in “Muhammedan” Africa (1885), Russia (1892), British Columbia, Manitoba, and eastern Canada (1896), the Holy Land (1897 and 1900), and Egypt (1900). In 1909 he was destined to be one of the founders of the Pentecostal Missionary Union, independent predecessor to the Overseas Missions Council of the Assemblies of God in Great Britain and Ireland formed in 1925.

<sup>36</sup>In 1916 the Holiness Church reported 33 churches and 926 members; in 1926, 32 churches and 861 members; and in 1936, 15 churches and 404 members. In 1946, when it united with the Pilgrim Holiness Church, it had approximately 300 members in California. Before that date its African-American minority appears to have joined the entourage of C. P. Jones (1865-1949), former associate of C. H. Mason (1866-1961), songwriter, and senior bishop of the Church of Christ (Holiness) U.S.A.

<sup>37</sup>Washburn, *History and Reminiscences of the Holiness Church Work in Southern California and Arizona*, 376-378.

Angeles, representing fully one-half of the membership of that "first church" which espoused Pentecostalism.<sup>38</sup> When Holiness Church representative W. M. Kelly (1858-1907) came to see what had happened at Hawthorne Street, the pastor asked him:

"Are you ready to receive the baptism of the Holy Ghost?" I said, "Another Holy Ghost? No. I would have to deny Him who is abiding in my heart, to receive another." Then Sister McGowern [i.e., McGowan?] began to speak in an unknown tongue, and shook her finger at me as if rebuking me and the Spirit in me felt the rebuke as much as if she had said, "You are on the road to hell and will be lost if you do not repent." Sister Lemoine jumped up from the altar and said she felt the Spirit had been grieved. F. E. Hill taught a third experience very definitely and several of them were all talking at once.<sup>39</sup>

Pendleton was requested to withdraw from ministry in the Holiness Church. Those loyal to him also withdrew.<sup>40</sup>

Few if any African Americans joined the exodus from the Holiness Church. What then is the significance of twenty-eight others at Azusa Street who did? The answer is the role they exercised in bringing settled convictions of the church to the mission. Their presence among approximately 150 local converts in the first months of the revival<sup>41</sup> helps to explain the origins of distinctive characteristics of the fellowship which was to develop from it.

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<sup>38</sup>J. M. Roberts, "Heresies and Erroneous Doctrines," Clark, *Truths of Interest: Origin and Distinctive Teachings of "The Holiness Church,"* 41-44.

<sup>39</sup>Prefiguring the end in store for many early Pentecostal faith missionaries, Kelly was to die November 13th the next year in Monrovia, Liberia. On November 3rd, in his last letter home, he declared: "The stream of grace flows as freely here as there and I thank God I have access to it." See Washburn, *History and Reminiscences of the Holiness Church Work in Southern California and Arizona*, 383-385 [an experience of a night with the so-called tongues]; and 407 [death].

<sup>40</sup>"The writer [i.e., J. F. Washburn] being one of the elders present who, with others, plead [!] with them, showing clearly that in taking the step they were about to take they denied their faith and experience of many years, also set aside their teaching as having been in error, and that many having been made happy under their former teaching were left in confusion if their course was followed out. All our efforts, prayers and tears seemed to be unavailing." See Washburn, *History and Reminiscences of the Holiness Church Work in Southern California and Arizona*, 389-390.

<sup>41</sup>By September 1906, it was estimated that 150 had received the experience in Los Angeles. See *The Apostolic Faith*, 1 (Sept. 1906), 1:3.

They—who had a long history of aggressive work, who had not been accustomed to having instrumental music,<sup>42</sup> who had no paid workers, who had few status aspirations, who were used to worshipping and working with blacks, and who because of this were able with ease to accept the leadership of a black pastor—could hardly have had a more appropriate preparation. The color line had been washed in the blood long before ever they set foot on the bridge. It was with these convictions and practices of the Holiness Church that they were to furnish their new spiritual house on Azusa Street.

The conflict which was to develop between local Pentecostal adherents and those of the Diaspora arose, not over convictions that had been jettisoned, but over those which remained unchanged by the experience. It was these which were to spell the end of racial and doctrinal confraternity at Azusa Street.

Many came from churches which did not teach the possibility of a deeper experience of grace.<sup>43</sup> The bridge-burning issue for them was the baptism of the Holy Spirit as empowerment for Christian life and service. Such converts believed the experience to effect no radical internal change, but to rest solely on the meritorious work already accomplished by Christ on Calvary. This interpretation, though setting them apart, enabled Baptist, Presbyterian, and Anglican proselytes to rationalize the second crisis in terms of their own traditions. Sign of a rear guard truce, the “finished work of Calvary” standard was soon to move to the center of the field.

By 1910 the demands of every-night activity at Azusa Street disappeared and Seymour was free to itinerate as an evangelist. During one of his absences an incident occurred which revealed the failure of the mission to sustain the original basis of racial and doctrinal harmony in the new movement. The occasion was the appearance of William Durham. Refused the pulpit at Elmer Fisher’s mostly white Upper Room Mission a few blocks away, Durham moved on to Azusa Street. He was holding forth there with his “finished work” teaching, when the black founder—

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<sup>42</sup>At the 1905 General Assembly of the Holiness Church, William H. Pendleton, destined to convert to Pentecostalism the following year, spoke in favor of a resolution to repeal the rule against instrumental music. The measure was defeated three to one. See Washburn, *History and Reminiscences of the Holiness Church Work in Southern California and Arizona*, 357.

<sup>43</sup>For non-Wesleyan sources see Edith Lydia Waldvogel [Blumhofer], “The ‘Overcoming Life’: a Study in the Reformed Evangelical Origins of Pentecostalism” (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University, 1977).

himself once locked out—returned unexpectedly and barred his white convert from the premises.<sup>44</sup>

Prelude to the black leader’s own eclipse, the incident proved an omen of the next two decades when division in the infant movement was to become rampant. Springing ostensibly from conflicts over doctrine—sanctification, baptism, the Godhead, and healing—the new bodies, both white and black, responded to the social currents and undercurrents of the times in ways scarcely distinguishable from other less earnest ones. Ironically, though now segregated by race, African-American Pentecostals who remained trinitarian were hereafter to be congregated almost exclusively in the Wesleyan-Holiness camp.

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<sup>44</sup>Bartleman, *How Pentecost Came to Los Angeles*, 145-160.

# **JOHN WESLEY'S PURITAN AND PIETIST HERITAGE REEXAMINED**

by

**Scott Kisker**

John Wesley and the Calvinist wing of the English Methodist eighteenth-century revival both had connections to earlier Puritanism. George Whitefield was influenced by Puritan literature following his conversion. Among other factors, this literature attracted him to moderate Calvinism. Wesley was connected to Puritanism and Dissent through his family. Furthermore, scholars such as Robert Monk have noted Wesley's use of Puritan authors in his "republications" and therein have seen theological links between the revivalist and his Puritan forebears.

While agreeing with Monk on particulars, this paper will argue that Wesley's heritage is not Puritanism, but a type of experiential piety which found expression in certain wings of English Puritanism. This piety, sometimes referred to as heart religion or Pietism (when used in a general rather than specifically Lutheran sense), focuses on regeneration and sanctification and leaves disputed questions of theology peripheral to "real" Christianity. Wesley's post-Aldersgate affirmation of experiential faith drew him to pietistic Puritan authors. He rejected their Calvinism, however.

In his relations with other groups involved in the revivals, Wesley followed a similar course. Despite Moravian influences, he did not adopt a form of Lutheranism, nor did he adopt the evangelical Calvinism of the revivalists with whom he began outdoor preaching. Instead he wedded a more catholic (Eastern influenced) vision of Anglican Christianity, formed during his Oxford days, to the pietism of his Aldersgate experi-

ence. His cooperation with all “confessions,” like his affinities with “moderate” Puritans, was due to his and their commitment to a pietistic understanding of Christianity.

This article will first look at Robert Monk’s argument for Wesley’s connections to Puritanism in light of pietistic developments within Puritanism. It then will examine Wesley’s Pietist connections. Finally, it will examine the conflict between Reformed and Wesleyan Methodists in light of their connections to Pietism.

### John Wesley’s “Puritanism”

Robert Monk’s *John Wesley: His Puritan Heritage* attempts to establish the importance of Puritanism for Wesley, noting especially his use of Puritan authors in his republications. Concludes Monk: “The large number of Puritan writers included in Wesley’s abridgments indicates that Wesley is not only familiar with the writings of the Puritans, but he had a very high estimation of their value.”<sup>1</sup> Monk also notes that Wesley did not republish these writers without significant alterations with regard to “God’s election of the believer, man’s active role in salvation, the perseverance of the saints, and the extent of man’s perfectibility.”<sup>2</sup> The result scarcely resembles anything close to orthodox Calvinism.

Wesley, in reality, mined these authors for what he and they shared theologically and dispensed with the rest. Monk’s argument for connection focuses on practical divinity—experience, justification by faith, assurance, covenant, sanctification, sin and repentance in believers, and even final justification (with reference to the somewhat Arminian Puritan, Richard Baxter). He concludes:

The similarity between the spirit, theology, and practice of Wesley and the Puritans, the real relationship evident in theology and teachings, and his definite dependence upon that tradition for instances of precept and pattern make it possible to affirm a conscious, distinct, and significant connection of Wesley with the Puritans in their interpretation of, and compulsive concern for, the *Christian life*.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Robert C. Monk, *John Wesley: His Puritan Heritage* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966) 62.

<sup>2</sup>Monk, *John Wesley: His Puritan Heritage*, 63.

<sup>3</sup>Monk, *John Wesley: His Puritan Heritage*, 247. Emphasis added.

From Monk's presentation one might infer that Wesley was theologically close to Puritan *Calvinism*. That would be a mistake. What Monk fails to note is the relationship between Pietism and Puritanism. Wesley was pietistic. The Puritans with whom Wesley found affinity were as well.

Pietism as a movement is usually dated with the publication of Phillip Jakob Spener's *Pia Desideria* ("Pious Wishes") in 1675. This work gave the movement its name and served as a manifesto for renewal within the German Lutheran church. However, Pietism also has a broader meaning which is its general usage in continental scholarship. Following the lead of August Lang, the term "Pietism" has come to designate the experiential tradition within post-Reformation Christianity. This tradition, which developed as a response to conflicting and often arid orthodoxies, emphasizes practical piety as the crucial concern of the Christian life and complex questions of speculative theology and polity peripheral.<sup>4</sup>

Egon Gerdes, as well as Dale Brown,<sup>5</sup> have attempted to define Pietism for the English speaking world. Gerdes, in his 1976 essay "Theological Tenets of Pietism," includes "the sibling movements of that name on the European continent and their Anglo-American cousins usually called Awakenings."<sup>6</sup> Gerdes lists four "tenets" of Pietism based on different aspects of its piety: (1) *Natura pietatis*, shifts theological language toward biological categories with an experiential focus on the new creature, its birth and growth, on the way of salvation; (2) *Collegia pietatis*, anticipates the kingdom of God in human fellowship; (3) *Praxis pietatis*, emphasizes life over doctrine and uses the concept of *adiaphora* in theological debate; and (4) *Reformatio pietatis*, advocates "a second set of reforms to complement the first reformation."<sup>7</sup> For Pietists, doctrinal orthodoxy was insufficient. True Christianity was about heart and life.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup>August Lang, *Puritanismus und Pietismus: Studien zu ihrer Entwicklung von M. Butzer bis zum Methodismus*. Beiträge zur Geschichte und Lehre der reformierten Kirche series, vol. 6 (Neukirchen: Buchhandlung des Erziehungsvereins, 1941).

<sup>5</sup>Dale Brown, *Understanding Pietism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978). Brown's definition uses a similar set of theological motifs, but he restricts his discussion to Pietism to its Lutheran manifestations.

<sup>6</sup>Egon W. Gerdes, "Theological Tenets of Pietism," *The Covenant Quarterly* (Feb./May, 1976), 25.

<sup>7</sup>Gerdes, "Theological Tenets," 28.

<sup>8</sup>F. Ernest Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism* (Leyden: E. J. Brill, 1965), 23. "Where the possibility existed to remain within the territorial churches the early Pietists were content to do so, where separation became necessary they accepted willingly the inevitable loss of statue or persecution."

Puritanism, in contrast, began during the Vestarian controversy (1559-1567) after the ascension of Queen Elizabeth I to the throne. Its concern was literally orthodoxy, right worship, the purification of the church from "popish" remnants. However, as winds of politics in England turned against Puritanism, piety concerns became more prominent. German scholarship, following Heinrich Heppé, has tended to see in this development the origins of continental Pietism.<sup>9</sup> August Lang divided Puritans into four categories: (1) Those who desired purer forms of worship; (2) Those who desired purity in all of church discipline; (3) Those whose desire for purity led to separatism; and (4) Pietistic Puritans whose overriding concern was for piety and for individuals as opposed to ecclesiastical politics.<sup>10</sup>

By the late sixteenth century Puritan reforms were generally being set aside by Queen Elizabeth's *via media*. Still, aspects of pietistic Christianity begin to be found in Elizabethan Puritans such as William Perkins (1558-1602) and his disciple William Ames (1576-1633).<sup>11</sup> Ted Campbell writes: "What we have with Perkins and Ames, then, is an indication of a developing shift in the focus of religious life, a shift in which concerns for the out-working of election, and especially the affective appropriation of the grace of election, were moving to the foreground of theological concern."<sup>12</sup>

For Puritans who remained in England and its church through the reigns of James I (r. 1603-1625) and Charles I (r. 1625-1649), the shift toward pietistic Christianity is even clearer and includes those Puritans whose works were influential on later German Pietists and Methodists. Lewis Bayly (d. 1631), though professing Puritan opinions, became chaplain to James I and bishop of Bangor. His *The Practice of Piety: Directing a Christian How to Walk that He May Please God*, was beloved in a German Lutheran translation by the young Spener. Joseph Hall (1574-1656), though a moderate Calvinist, became Bishop of Exeter in 1627. His later

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<sup>9</sup>Heinrich Heppé, *Geschichte des Pietismus und der Mustik in der reformirte Kirche, namentlich der Niederlande* (Leyden: E. J. Brill, 1879), 14-52, refers specifically to the *puritanische Pietismus Englands*.

<sup>10</sup>August Lang, *Puritanismus und Pietismus*, 72f.

<sup>11</sup>For an analysis of the pietistic aspects of Perkins' and Ames' theologies, see Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, 49-58 and 133-141.

<sup>12</sup>Ted Campbell, *Religion of the Heart* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 48.

writings, written in the Cromwellian period, reflect the influence of mysticism in their concern for meditation and the goal of union with God. His *Art of Divine Meditation* was early on translated into German and his *Heaven on Earth* was reprinted by Wesley in his Christian Library.

With the accession of Charles II in 1660, Puritan mysticism of the revolutionary period and the political realities of a King with Roman Catholic sympathies combined to give new impulse to pietistic Puritan literature,<sup>13</sup> including works by Joseph Alleine and Richard Sibbes. The outstanding example from this period of irenic theology driven by piety concerns is Richard Baxter (1615-1691). Monk highlights Wesley's connection. "Richard Baxter's name and teachings have run like a thread throughout this study. Baxter is a prime example of this moderate position and it is with him that Wesley most closely identifies himself."<sup>14</sup>

In his ministry, Baxter made use of small groups for catechizing and promoting piety. Though not ambivalent toward systematic theology, he felt no compulsion to tow the line on Reformed orthodoxy. In Baxter's theology, Christ died for sins, not select persons. He believed that the benefits of substitutionary atonement were available to all sinful people. He rejected double-predestination. He insisted that every sinner has agency in the process of conversion and that what is imputed to the sinner in the work of justification is not the righteousness of Christ but faith in the righteousness of Christ. These deviations from "orthodoxy" have their root in pietistic concern for holy living. Of the Puritan authors Wesley reprints,<sup>15</sup> all with the exception of John Fox were active in the time that

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<sup>13</sup>Stoeffler, *Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, 78ff. Campbell, *Religion of the Heart*, 49-53. Jerald C. Brauer, "Types of Puritan Piety," *Church History* 56 (May 1987), 47-51, distinguishes between "evangelical" and "mystical" forms of piety. The former Campbell equates with Pietistic Puritanism, whereas Stoeffler sees the mystical as an extension of the Pietistic. Given the intimate relationship between mysticism and Pietism, Stoeffler's analysis seems most helpful.

<sup>14</sup>Monk, *John Wesley: His Puritan Heritage*, 245.

<sup>15</sup>Monk, *John Wesley: His Puritan Heritage*, Appendix I. The Puritans listed are: Samuel Clarke, Joseph Hall, Robert Bolton, John Preston, Richard Sibbes, Thomas Goodwin, Richard Alleine, John Bunyon, Lewis Stuckley, John Brown, Samuel Annesley, John Kitchin, Matthew Pool, Richard Baxter, Thomas Crane, Stephen Charnock, Edmund Calamy, John Flavel, John Howe, William Dell, Thomas Manton, Isaac Ambrose, Francis Rous, John Owen, Herbert Palmer, William Whateley, Joseph Alleine, Samuel Shaw, Samuel Rutherford, and Hugh Binning.

both F. Ernest Stoeffler, in *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, and Ted Campbell indicate as the time that pietistic Puritanism was coming to the fore.<sup>16</sup> Monk's theological connections can be more easily made to the Pietism of Puritans than to Puritanism *per se*. By linking Wesley with Puritans, without delineating type, Monk obscures the Pietism and thus the exact nature of Wesley's Puritan heritage.

### John Wesley's Pietist Heritage

Pietistic Puritanism likely formed John Wesley's family background. In his introduction, Monk notes that both grandfathers and two great-grandfathers were Puritans. On Samuel Wesley's side of the family, both Bartholomew Westley and John Westley were removed from their pulpits by the 1662 Act of Uniformity. Susanna Wesley's maternal grandfather, John White, and father, Samuel Annesley, suffered the same fate. However, in 1661, when John Westley (John Wesley's grandfather) defended his ministry at the combined parish of Winterbourne Whitchurch, Dorset, he did so on the basis of the fruits of his work and not on any "Reformed" understanding of church polity. Furthermore, in his interview with Bishop Ironsides, he explained his refusal to accept episcopal ordination by saying that he was called to the "work" of ministry but not the "office."<sup>17</sup> Samuel Annesley's papers, entrusted to his favorite daughter Susanna, were destroyed in the Epworth fire. Although a Puritan, he opposed the execution of Charles I, and when his daughter Susanna converted to Anglicanism he did not object.

Both of John Wesley's parents (despite being raised Puritans) converted to Anglicanism. Through them his pietistic Puritan heritage was augmented by the piety of the High Church religious societies. This too was pietistic. Three years after the publication of Spener's *Pia Desideria*, a similar movement was begun in England by a Palatine immigrant. Around the year 1678, Anthony Horneck (1641-1697) began to found religious societies in London. Horneck immigrated to England the same year as the Restoration. He converted to Anglicanism and was connected to the revival

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<sup>16</sup>Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, 78ff. Campbell, *Religion of the Heart*, 49-53.

<sup>17</sup>Adam Clarke, *Memoirs of the Wesley Family* (London: J. & T. Clarke, 1823), 36-37.

<sup>18</sup>Ted Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1991), 20.

of interest in primitive Christianity within the Church of England.<sup>18</sup> Wesley read his *Happy Aescetic* while a student at Oxford. In this work Horneck praised Anglicanism for having so many “Prelates who are bent upon reviving the Strictness of the Primitive Church.”<sup>19</sup>

Although Horneck’s contacts with German Pietists are disputed,<sup>20</sup> his ministry was pietistic. His sermons stressed Pietist themes, insisting on the necessity of the “new birth.” His theology was the *ordo salutis*. “The Word of God convinces us, the Holy Ghost changes us, the merits of Jesus Christ recommend us, our good works testify of us, and at last heaven receives us.”<sup>21</sup> A 1689 sermon before William and Mary, entitled “The Nature of True Christian Righteousness,” took a practical view of holiness as God’s love united with human love.<sup>22</sup> Wesley republished it in his *Christian Library*. The rules which Horneck drew up for the guidance of his societies reflected Pietist themes of holiness as well as the principle of adiaphora in disputed matters of theology. Note, for instance:

1. All that enter the Society shall resolve upon a holy and serious life. . . .
4. They shall not be allowed, in their meetings, to discourse of any controverted point of divinity.
5. Neither shall they discourse of the government of Church or State. . . .
18. The following rules are more especially recommended to the members of this Society, viz. To love one another. When reviled, not to revile again. To speak evil of no man. To wrong

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<sup>19</sup>Anthony Horneck, *The Happy Ascetick: or the Best Exercise* (London: Henry Mortlock, 4th ed., 1699), “Epistle Dedicatory” in Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity*, 20.

<sup>20</sup>Rupp, Gordon, *Religion in England, 1688-1791* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 291, disputes the claim by both A. W. Nagler and Martin Schmidt that Horneck had Pietist influences. Though Rupp may be right about limited evidence of Pietist contacts, Horneck’s childhood home in the Palatinate in the early seventeenth century makes such contacts probable. Furthermore, Horneck, fluent in German, was likely aware of developments on the continent. The fact that he began his societies, which are very similar to Spener’s conventicles, three years after the much heralded publication of *Pia Desideria* is probably not a coincidence.

<sup>21</sup>R. B. Hone, *Lives of Eminent Christians*, 4 vols., 2nd ed. (London, 1834-43), 287-290, in John S. Simon, *John Wesley and the Religious Societies*, 2nd ed. (London: Epworth Press, 1955), 20.

<sup>22</sup>Simon, *John Wesley and the Religious Societies*, 20.

no man. To pray, if possible, seven times a day. To keep close to the Church of England. To transact all things peaceably and gently. To be helpful to each other. To use themselves to holy thoughts in their coming in and going out. To examine themselves every night. To give everyone their due. To obey superiors, both spiritual and temporal.<sup>23</sup>

Though the groups were not originally intended for mutual confession, as contemporary Josiah Woodward recounts, “these young men soon found the benefit of their conferences one with another, by which, as some of them have told me with joy, they better discovered their own corruptions, the devil’s temptations, and how to countermind his subtle devices; as to which each person communicated his experiences to the rest.”<sup>24</sup>

After the Glorious Revolution, these devotional groups spawned other organizations with specifically philanthropic agendas. In 1691 they gave rise to societies for the reformation of manners, in 1699 to the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (SPCK), and in 1701 to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG). As Daniel L. Brunner has written, “Behind the activism of the SPG, the SPCK, and the societies for the reformation of manners lay the fervent spirituality of associations like those of Horneck and Woodward, in which an introspective, quasi-Puritan concern for the personal safety of the individual soul blended with the liturgical devotion of the Restoration Church.”<sup>25</sup> The religious societies became the primary institutions in England by which Halle Pietists, and later Moravians, extended the influence of German Pietism,<sup>26</sup> even into the Wesley household.

In 1698 Samuel Wesley preached before the Society for the Reformation of Manners. His *Pious Communicant Rightly Prepared* (1699) included an appendix which defended the religious societies. In 1700 he began a small religious society in Epworth built on Horneck’s model. He ordered Josiah Woodward’s *Account of the Religious Societies* from the

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<sup>23</sup>“Life of Anthony Horneck, D. D. Prebendary of Westminster and Preacher at the Savoy,” in Hone’s *Lives of Eminent Christians*, ii., 309-310, reprinted in Simon, *John Wesley and the Religious Societies*, 10-11.

<sup>24</sup>Woodward, Josiah, *Account of the Rise and Progress of the Religious Societies*, 3rd ed. (London, 1701), 138?, in Simon, *John Wesley and the Religious Societies*, 15.

<sup>25</sup>Daniel L. Brunner, *Halle Pietists in England* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 71.

<sup>26</sup>See Brunner, *Halle Pietists in England*.

SPCK, and became a corresponding member. Susanna, who was also strongly influenced by reports of the Danish/Halle sponsored mission to India,<sup>27</sup> experimented while her husband was away in London with something like a religious society. She was accused by his Curate of holding a “conventicle.”

It is hardly surprising that when the Wesley brothers arrived at Oxford, something reminiscent of religious societies would develop. Henry Rack makes clear that The Holy Club at Oxford did not begin similarly nor follow the exact pattern of Horneck’s societies. However, he admits that “when work by the Oxford Methodists extended to the townspeople, . . . societies more like the old type do seem to have been developed.”<sup>28</sup> Richard Heitzenrater sees a closer connection,<sup>29</sup> and writes: “Wesley’s search during this period for a meaningful understanding of the demands of Christian living led him to tie together the perfectionism of the Pietists, the moralism of the Puritans, and the devotionalism of the Mystics in a pragmatic approach that he felt could operate within the structure and doctrine of the Church of England.”<sup>30</sup>

At Oxford Wesley also developed his love for the traditions of the ancient church and of the Eastern Fathers. Upon deciding to enter the ministry, Wesley’s father advised him to read Chrysostom’s “On the Priesthood,” and to concentrate on the study of the Church Fathers.<sup>31</sup> Wesley came under the influence of the Manchester Non-jurors, a sort of conservative Anglican subculture which heavily employed ancient Christian writers in their apologetic. Campbell makes clear that Wesley’s use of early Christianity was in a programmatic rather than conservative way (similar, incidentally, to Horneck’s use of them). Nonetheless, Wesley’s contact with

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<sup>27</sup>Susanna’s concern for the care of the individual souls of her children came to her after reading an account of the Danish-Halle mission in Tranquebar. *Journal and Diaries II*, 285. Reprint of a portion of a letter from Susanna to Samuel, Feb. 6, 1711/12.

<sup>28</sup>Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 85.

<sup>29</sup>Heitzenrater, *John Wesley and the Oxford Methodists*, 35. “There appear therefore to have been several groups meeting together with various degrees of proximity to the leadership of John Wesley somewhat after the organizational pattern of his father’s at Epworth.”

<sup>30</sup>Heitzenrater, *John Wesley and the Oxford Methodists*, 24. The interconnectedness of Pietism, Puritanism, and mysticism makes this statement’s divisions somewhat arbitrary.

<sup>31</sup>Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity*, 23-26.

the Manchester circle, and his reading William Cave's *Primitive Christianity*, grounded him in a particular understanding of early Christian beliefs and practice. He developed his vision of a Christian culture of holiness which took the lives of the early Christians and practices of the early church as a pattern for the renewal of church life and theology.<sup>32</sup>

On his missionary journey to Georgia under the auspices of the SPCK, Wesley had opportunity for contact with both Moravian and Halle Pietism. He was drawn to the Moravians—largely because of his prejudices regarding apostolic succession. Because Moravians conformed to Wesley's understanding of primitive church practice, they were able to influence his understanding of experiential faith. When he returned to England, a failure as a missionary and, in his own mind, as a Christian, Moravian Peter Böhler helped lead him to experience saving grace in Aldersgate Street.

Böhler could not lead him to Lutheranism. Wesley made a pilgrimage to the seats of continental Pietism, including Marienburg, Halle, and Herrnhut, and he visited with Count von Zinzendorf. However, he returned convinced of the legitimacy of his own Church of England and of the apostolic witness regarding perfection which neither Zinzendorf nor the Moravians could accept. Issues of sanctification, and particularly of the role of works in salvation, led to Wesley's split from the Moravian controlled Society at Fetter Lane.<sup>33</sup>

### The Conflict Between Wesley and Whitefield

Wesley exhibited the same steadfastness of theological opinion in dealings with reformed Methodists. He had much in common with the leader of Calvinistic Methodism. While at Oxford, as a servitor, Whitefield was invited by Charles Wesley to participate in the group of students who gathered for study and religious exercises. Whitefield "thankfully embraced the opportunity. . . . My soul, at that time, was athirst for some spiritual friends to lift up my hands when they hung down, and to strengthen my feeble knees."<sup>34</sup> At their first meeting, Whitefield was presented Pietist August Hermann Francke's *Nicodemous, or the Fear of Man*.

<sup>32</sup>Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity*, 20-21.

<sup>33</sup>Gary Steven Kinkel, "The Big Chill: The Theological Disagreement which Separated John Wesley and Count Zinzendorf," *Unitas Fratrum* 27:28: 89-112 (1990).

<sup>34</sup>Whitefield, *Journals*, 46.

Charles Wesley also gave Whitefield Henry Scougal's *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* (1677) which the latter accounted as the immediate cause of his later conversion. Scougal (1650-1678), whose father had become the Anglican Bishop of Aberdeen in 1664, had been "perpetual president" of a religious society at King's College, Aberdeen, where he was Regent and Professor of Philosophy.<sup>35</sup> The book convinced Whitefield of the need for the new birth. He reported:

At my first reading it, I wondered what the author meant by saying, "That some falsely placed religion ingoing to church, doing hurt to no one, being constant in the duties ofte closet, and now and then reaching out their hands to give alms to their poor neighbors," "Alas!" thought I, "if this be not true religion, what is?" God soon showed me; for in reading a few lines further, that, "true religion is a union of the soul with God, and Christ formed within us," a ray of Divine light was instantaneously darted in upon my soul, and from that moment, but not till then, did I know that I must become a new creature.<sup>36</sup>

In his search for the new birth, Whitefield increased his asceticism. During Lent, 1735, he vowed he would take only coarse bread and sage tea without sugar. By passion week, a physician (informed by his tutor) confined him to bed. During his time of convalescence he prayed, read his Greek New Testament, and Joseph Hall's *Contemplations*. During this period Whitefield probably experienced the new birth, though the exact circumstances of the event are debated.<sup>37</sup> During a leave of absence from Oxford which followed this convalescence, Whitefield went to Gloucester. There he read the works of several pietistic Puritans, including Joseph Alleine's *Alarm to Unconverted Sinners* and Richard Baxter's *Call to the Unconverted*. At this time, Arnold Dallimore argues, he was drawn to moderately Reformed theological categories.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup>D. Butler, *Henry Scougal and the Oxford Methodists* (London: Blackwood and Sons, 1899), viii.

<sup>36</sup>Whitefield, sermon "All Men's Place," 702 in Dallimore, *George Whitefield* I, 77.

<sup>37</sup>Arnold A. Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, vol. I (London: Banner of Truth, 1970), 73ff, cites evidence from Whitefield's sermon "All Men's Place" published in *Sermons on Important Subjects* by the Rev. George Whitefield (Baynes, London, 1825), 702, that his conversion took place at Oxford. Stout, *Divine Dramatist* locates the conversion in Gloucester where Dallimore points to his acceptance of Calvinism.

<sup>38</sup>Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, 84-85.

Like Wesley's, Whitefield's personal connections to German Pietists began on his first journey to America in 1738. They continued beyond the founding of his orphan house in Georgia. Karl Zehrer has documented the correspondence between Whitefield and Gotthilf August Franke, the son and successor to August Hermann Francke at Halle.<sup>39</sup> In a letter, written the year of his death, Franke wrote that he "would have been so happy to have gotten to know [you] personally, about whom, to my edification, [much] has certainly reached me."<sup>40</sup>

Despite shared history, contacts, and spiritual experiences, the conflict over doctrine between Whitefield and Wesley began early. Regarding predestination, Wesley wrote to Whitefield in 1740, "For a time you are suffered to be of one opinion and I of another."<sup>41</sup> Although Wesley had been warned not to preach against predestination in Bristol, he did, even calling on the Spirit to testify to the truth of his position with ecstatic manifestations in his hearers. In 1741 Wesley brought the disagreement public by publishing his sermon "Free Grace" with a hymn by Charles entitled "Universal Redemption." In the sermon he calls predestination "a doctrine full of blasphemy; of such blasphemy as I should dread to mention." Whitefield felt obliged to respond in an open letter that same year. The controversy split the nascent Methodist societies into Reformed and Arminian camps.

Wesley's most systematic discussion of the differences between himself and the Calvinists on this issue is his *Predestination Calmly Considered* (1752). This treatise offers a very negative, and not necessarily "calm," view of Calvinism. He begins by citing the foundational texts of orthodox Calvinism, including that of the Synod of Dordt. He then seeks to utterly destroy the logic of orthodox Calvinism, setting forth both predestination and free will to see which is more defensible in terms of God's glory. Not surprisingly, the arguments for free will are "more for the glory of God, for the display of his glorious attributes, for the manifestation of his wisdom, justice, and mercy to the sons of men."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Zehrer, Karl, "Die Beziehung zwischen dem hallischen Pietismus und dem fruhen Methodismus" in *Pietismus und Neuzeit: Jahrbuch 1975 zur Geschichte des neuen Protestantismus*, Andreas Lindt and Klaus Deppermann, editors (Luther-Verlag, Bielefeld: 1975).

<sup>40</sup>1 C 29, no. 9B, undated letter in Zeher, "Die Beziehung," tr. by James Dwyer, *Methodist History* 17:211-224 (JI 1979), 222-223.

<sup>41</sup>John Telford, *Letters of John Wesley*, vol. I (London: Epworth Press, 1960), 352.

<sup>42</sup>Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 232.

Throughout his ministry, Wesley had only a few positive things to say about Calvin or Calvinism. He used Calvin as an example to defend himself against a charge of being schismatic.<sup>43</sup> He also cited Calvin's status as a layperson to defend his own practice of using lay preachers.<sup>44</sup> Perhaps the kindest thing Wesley ever said about Calvinism was that his Methodism was a "hair's breadth" from it at certain theological points. In the *Large Minutes*, published in 1745, the question is asked, "Does not the truth of the Gospel lie very near both to Calvinism and Antinomianism?" The response was:

A. Indeed it does; as it were within a hair's breadth: So that it is altogether foolish and sinful, because we do not quite agree with one or the other, to run from them [Calvinists] as far as ever we can.

Q.23. Wherein may we come to the very edge of Calvinism?

A. (1.) In ascribing all good to the free grace of God. (2.) In denying all natural free-will, and all power antecedent to grace. And, (3.) In excluding all merit from man; even for what he has or does by the grace of God.<sup>45</sup>

Unfortunately, this "very edge of Calvinism" is partly semantic. Wesley, Reformed Methodists, and all Pietists, were within a hair's breadth of each other with regard to salvation by grace. However, Wesley's understanding of prevenient grace alters the implications of his statement on free-will. For Wesley, no one has "natural" free-will, but all people have a degree of free-will through God's prevenient grace which enables them to respond to God. Wesley is here using the same words as Calvinist Methodists, while still preserving a theological distance. In general, Wesley agrees theologically with Reformed Methodists at the same points where he agrees with pietistic Puritans. Their differences in other areas were considerably wider.

These differences lay with Calvinist doctrines of predestination and sin in believers, which Wesley thought weakened the doctrine of holiness. Rack writes: "Though both sides saw humanity as sinful and in need of salvation by grace, Wesley had been imbued with the vision of perfection

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<sup>43</sup>Wesley Works (Jackson) 7.182 in Sermon "On Attending the Church Service."

<sup>44</sup>Wesley Works (Jackson), 8.222.

<sup>45</sup>Wesley Works (Jackson), 8.285.

as possible in this life and never lost it, even when he added 'evangelical' views of salvation by faith to it."<sup>46</sup> In 1773, Wesley wrote to Richard Thompson: "We [John and Charles Wesley] set out upon two principles: 1. None go to heaven without holiness of heart and life; 2. Whosoever follows after this (whatever his opinions be) is my 'brother, and sister, and mother:' And we have not swerved an hair's breadth from either one or the other of these to this day."<sup>47</sup> This doctrine was part of the heritage of the ancient church as he understood it and, Wesley believed, the consistent testimony of Scripture.

### Conclusion

Wesley shared with Whitefield a common history in the Oxford Holy Club. Both were attracted to the same pietistic Puritan literature. Both were in contact with German Pietist movements on the continent. Both were evangelists, proclaiming God's call to all who would hear. Both were Pietists—committed to experiential religion and the pilgrim's progress. Yet they could not maintain the unity of their ministries. Wesley was a primitivist Anglican, Whitefield moderately Reformed. Wesley's confessional and theological commitments to a more catholic (even eastern) vision of Christianity made him incapable of seeing the Christian life or the Scriptures through Reformed lenses. These commitments, which he believed to be both biblical and the tradition of the early church, meant he could not close the "hair's breadth" distance which separated him from Calvinist Methodists.

Nonetheless, Wesley's concern for authentic and experienced Christianity recognized its fulfillment in other Christian traditions and did not hold his own as the sole vessel of this piety. He, like continental Pietists, made distinctions between fundamentals of the faith and opinions. In his sermon "On the Trinity" Wesley wrote:

"Whatsoever the generality of people may think, it is certain that opinion is not religion. . . . Persons may be quite right in their opinions, and yet have no religion at all; and, on the other hand, persons may be truly religious, who hold many wrong opinion. . . . Nay, who can doubt of it while there are Calvinists in the world—asserters of absolute predestination? For

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<sup>46</sup>Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 200.

<sup>47</sup>*Wesley Works* (Jackson), 12.477.

who will dare to affirm that none of these are truly religious men.”<sup>48</sup>

The piety which allowed Wesley to preach Whitefield’s funeral sermon, led him to extend a hand to any Christian whose “heart was as [his] heart.” His Pietism linked him to certain Reformed Puritans, to Reformed Pietists, and to Reformed Methodists. But the conflict between the Calvinists, Methodists and Wesley remained—a family squabble between Pietism with a moderately Reformed theological grid and Pietism overlaid overlaid with a more catholic Anglican theological grid.

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<sup>48</sup>*Wesley Works* (Jackson), 6.198.



**J. Kenneth Grider**  
**Honored, 1999, Wesleyan Theological Society**  
**with the award**  
**“Lifetime Service to the Wesleyan/Holiness Tradition”**

## **TRIBUTE TO J. KENNETH GRIDER**

by

**Paul M. Bassett**

It may boggle a mind or two that Dr. J. Kenneth Grider, the 1999 recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award of the Wesleyan Theological Society, had the strength to be at the award occasion. He has testified, after all, to having undergone several radical surgeries. He has written or spoken on occasion of a removal of his rationalism, removal of his Bostonian personalism, removal of his Platonism, a partial removal of his *inclinatio philosophicus*, and a full removal of his premillennialism, followed recently by a postmillenialectomy. He has undergone a number of

remedial surgeries: the insertion of a Bonhoefferian ethical shunt, the construction of a Barthian by-pass of the fundamentalism, a Bloeschian infusion of *sola gratia/sola fide*, a diluting of the *contra-papam*, and a critical ideational re-positioning of article ten in the *manualis nazarenius*. This last has taken place as a general rehabilitation program aimed at improvement upon his Wesleyanum and a corrective to the Holiness Movement.

“Theology,” says our honoree, “wears overalls, and has legs long enough to reach all the way to the ground.” Christian theology should be daily-life-oriented reflection upon the Christian faith. That basic conviction has remained a constant through all of the construction and re-construction that he has undergone as a theologian. It was not always so for him. He was bought up a devout Roman Catholic in the Illinois suburbs of St. Louis, Missouri, and in the Ozark Hills of the Show-Me State. That was back when popes Benedict XV and Pius XI were carefully trying to help Roman Catholics to get past a long period in which the Church encouraged the rank and file to stick to its personal and corporate pieties and leave theologizing and other religious thinking to duly certified experts.

Pope Benedict XV’s election in 1914 opened a mild revolt against the outlook that had characterized the papacy since Pius IX had dug in against the modern world in 1850. And Pius XI, elected just four months after our honoree was born, would follow Benedict’s path until his death in 1939. But in spite of the efforts of Benedict and Pius, the Roman Catholic Church in America generally remained on the older, reactionary path. European Roman Catholics, especially, marveled at American Catholicism’s theological conservatism in such a free-wheeling political and social climate. These were the years of Harding and Coolidge, *The Great Gatsby*, *Babbitt*, and *Elmer Gantry*, flappers and “Barney Google, with His Goo-goo-googly Eyes.” American Catholic rank and file believed that they had but four basic religious obligations—to say their prayers, attend Mass, keep the fasts and feasts, and trust the hierarchical-sacramental system for the rest. American Roman Catholic theology did not “wear overalls,” and Roman Catholic theologians in those days seldom worried over whether their work had “legs long enough to reach the ground.” Such was the church of our honored member’s youth, the church which he loved and respected.

This is not a lecture on American Roman Catholic thought, of course. But this much of such a lecture does help us to understand the

person and work of our honoree, for both reaction to his upbringing in that context and clear reflection of that upbringing have shaped his thought all along the line. Reaction is what marks his insistence that the vocational task of a theologian is to guide the church's rank and file to understand and articulate their faith—to understand it well enough to articulate it in both word and work. Ministry and laity alike are to know both whom and what they believe with as much sophistication as possible. For him, theology is no ark of the covenant as it were—some body of holy and arcane intellection surrounded by mystery and approachable only by duly anointed, trained and garbed high priests. Rather, theology is everyone's business, and every Christian's business is to seek to articulate good theology across all of the terrain of daily life, guided by learned teachers and pastors.

Not that Dr. Grider eschews theological and philosophical subtleties and complexities—and even obscurities. He knows the mazy etiquette and the sometimes convoluted language of the court of the “Queen of the sciences,” and he hesitates only slightly (but almost always very gently) to press them upon the less informed. So, for instance, he uses 106 words in his published systematic to tell us that we should speak of baptism *with* the Holy Spirit instead of baptism *of* the Holy Spirit. In the unedited original, he worked that one over for better than 500 words. One must pay attention to these seeming *adiaphora*, he insists, in order to avoid at least the “touch of error,” and eventually the iron grip of apostasy. Stoutly on occasion, he has sought to correct some who have dared to speak too self-assuredly from Her Majesty's throne-room on matters too great for them—folks who wanted to fly before they had learned to walk. So it was that he rose in a chapel service publicly to call to account a guest speaker who, with no little hierarchical approval, was advocating “seed faith”—tithing a tenth of what you *wanted* to make. And then he has offered the same favor to some whom he figured should know better than to say what they said, especially if they were former students of his and had vented their opinions in print. So it is that in his own inimitable fashion he once softly declared that his “fourth best” (former) student in a particular graduating class had written the “third most dangerous thing” to Christian practice that he had ever read.

Our honoree came by his commitment to “theology in overalls” quite honestly. As a freshman, and now a deeply committed Protestant, he helped Olivet College move eighty miles north from its fire-gutted old

campus to the vacant campus of St. Viator College. His very Protestant college now had to fit into the fabric of a former very Catholic school and neighborhood. Here was a parable on his own character—a profoundly Protestant religious experience in a very Catholic frame of mind. At Olivet, he discovered Stephen Solomon White, who now, in 1940 at age 50, had been president of four holiness colleges and knew the Holiness Movement exceptionally well. White had also earned a Ph. D. from the University of Chicago with a thesis comparing the philosophies of Schiller and Dewey. Here was educated, churchly practicality. White had a knack for teaching “preacher boys,” as he called them (even the women), to love the church and to love theology and theologizing, always with real life in mind.

That knack found one of its surest targets ever in the heart and mind of Kenneth Grider. Our friend took both the Th. B. and the A.B. at Olivet. That meant five years of White. White went as the first professor of theology at the new Nazarene Theological Seminary at the end of those years and along came our honoree for two more years of White. H. Orton Wiley’s three volumes had now been published and provided the written canon for Holiness theology. White as oracle and Wiley as canon hooked young Grider. White taught what the great questions were, what their implications were, and how to frame them. Wiley, thirteen years older than White, more aware of the difference between philosophy and theology, and more systematic in his approach, fanned the flames of historical and systematic theological learning. To the work of White and Wiley was added Russell DeLong’s rhetorically imposing, tightly-knit, personalistic reading of the faith, with its high regard for philosophical coherence.

“Authority” mattered a great deal to Grider in those days, and White and DeLong filled their lectures with citations from the authorities. Wiley’s work was nothing if not an anthology. Holiness Movement authorities, Methodist authorities, sixteenth and seventeenth-century Protestant authorities, modern Protestant authorities (especially from White), philosophical authorities and arguments (from DeLong), and (especially from Wiley) patristic authorities. Theological education consisted in large part of knowing the authorities, and Grider was mastering the art.

That developing mastery even showed up in his prayers. As a boy of 10 to 12, I remember our honoree’s visits to our church, where his mother-in-law was a member. When he prayed, we all settled in for a

good spell of sublime thoughts and big words. We would wind our way from sheer transcendence down across the Milky Way and finally land on earth; once terrestrial, we would travel from the Creation through the prophets and apostles and martyrs to dwell at last on the wonders of the Holiness Movement, its leaders and its message, and wind down with some somewhat monitory petitions based upon the pray-er's perception of the spiritual state of the local congregation. Even in those prayers of a newly-minted theologian in his mid-twenties, theology first appeared in a posh frock, but bit by bit was seen to wear overalls. Still, he was a theologian, and a theologian he would be, even at corporate prayer. Perhaps especially at corporate prayer.

I remember too that on one of those trips through Toledo, Dr. Grider and his wife Virginia were on the way to Drew, where our honoree intended to study with a theological wonder named Lewis. Edwin Lewis' name now seldom appears in anthologies and analyses of twentieth-century theology. But one book in those days dubbed him with the grand honorific of the time—he was a “pace-setting” theologian. In the early to mid-1930s, in mid-career, Lewis underwent a thorough and quite well-noted conversion from liberalism to something like Barthianism. All along, he was an “authority,” a well-published “authority.” Even the daily secular press said so. He was a “somebody,” and his “conversion” made him a more-or-less orthodox “somebody” to whom a doctorate-hungry denomination could send its brightest for study. In the course of three years, Lewis taught the admiring Grider how to sail about in an even wider theological sea. Then Grider decided to go to Scotland, to Glasgow University, where he earned a doctorate with a thesis on the problem of natural evil in the light of the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, written under the supervision of J. G. Riddell. Again, his practical interests came through as he argued in that dissertation what he called a “life-situation solution” to the problem of natural evil. Here in Scotland he also formally entered his teaching career as an instructor at Hurler College, the predecessor to the present Nazarene Theological College at Manchester, England.

The thesis was actually finished in 1952 back in the United States where Grider had taken up a post as Assistant Professor of Theology at Pasadena College. But already the wheels were turning in Kansas City and by the autumn term of the 1953-54 school year, he was at Nazarene Theological Seminary where he was to remain for 38 years as a teacher of

theology—so far, the longest tenure of any faculty member in the school’s 54-year history.

In his early years as a teacher at the Nazarene seminary, he was noted for his concern to cite written authorities for almost everything he said. By the early 1960s, however, he was beginning to unfold his own wings. By then, he had himself become published, and therefore an “authority.” His first book, *Repentance unto Life*, appeared in 1964, and it was followed the next year by *Taller My Soul*, then in 1980 by *Entire Sanctification: The Distinctive Doctrine of Wesleyanism, Born Again and Growing* in 1982, *Gibraltarers of Faith* in 1983, and finally (but probably not last) *A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology* in 1994, his magnum opus. Garnishing these has been a steady run of articles, scholarly and popular; Sunday School lessons; and encyclopedia-type articles.

Dr. Grider was one of three editors of the *Beacon Dictionary of Theology*. This and all of his works bear the mark of concern to put “theology in overalls,” to help us all to see that theology “has legs long enough to touch the ground.” In addition, especially since the mid-1970s, he occasionally has taken on the role of guardian and defender of the faith and confronted quite directly and candidly what he calls in his systematic theology “touches of error.” This has put him in the role of rainmaker at more than one parade.

Here we recognize abiding value and achievement. Here we celebrate our honoree’s deep love for us and for our institutions, and we thank God for the privilege of being gifted with our friend’s mind and heart. Dr. Grider has never for a moment stinted in offering these gifts fully to us in service, both for our sake and for the sake of the Lord whom we all seek to love unconditionally. We surely are immeasurably richer for them.

## BOOK REVIEWS

Michael Slaughter, *Out on the Edge: A Wake-Up Call For Church Leaders on the Edge of the Media Reformation*. CD-ROM included. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998.

Reviewed by Heather Ann Ackely Bean, Associate Professor, Azusa Pacific University, Azusa, California.

Michael Slaughter, lead pastor of Ginghamburg (Methodist) Church in Tipp City, Ohio, has successfully led a congregation that had less than a hundred members twenty years ago and now has grown to over a thousand members who worship with almost three thousand “pre-Christians” in five services each weekend and meet in seventy small groups during the week, all in spite of their rural location. Slaughter’s vision for effective twenty-first-century Christian congregations is that they will evangelize twenty-first-century people using the communication technologies that drive our culture. To achieve that goal, he suggests that the church can use the window opened by post-modern spiritual seeking in North America as both a means and an opportunity to share the good news of Jesus Christ.

In spite of this “post-modern” evangelical objective, Slaughter reminds us that effective communication is not about compromise. Twenty-first-century church leaders must clearly articulate gospel truths, but in ways that connect with twenty-first-century people. In particular, Slaughter addresses the differences between evangelism in a post-modern world and evangelism as it was done (effectively) among prior generations. He argues that a radical paradigm shift has occurred in American churches and culture, as evidenced by markedly decreased participation in Christian institutions by self-described Christians. According to national

surveys by Gallup, University of Notre Dame and George Barna cited by Slaughter, only 22% of Protestants and 26% of Roman Catholics attend church at least once a month. The “twentysomething” generation is absent from nearly all churches, even from mega-churches with a contemporary worship style.

Even more importantly, Slaughter argues, is our communication strategy in this “post-literate age” in which about 50% of all people in the world today are illiterate, about 20% struggle with literacy, and the remaining 30% get most information from sources other than print. Lest we think that this is only a third-world problem, Slaughter points out that recent studies show that even the average American college graduate reads less than two books a year. Like pre-moderns, those whom we now would evangelize may be most responsive to an oral storytelling style like Jesus and the apostles themselves used. Although Johannes Gutenberg’s fifteenth-century printing press made the Bible, catechisms, and primers available to common people and ushered in a text-centered Age of Reason, in the media age of today, multi-sensory experiences seem to predominate again.

In such a context, Slaughter argues, our basic assumptions about those whom we evangelize and teach must change. Two generations have grown up in a mass-media, television-saturated culture. We cannot assume that lecture-style sermons will hold their attention, since they have been trained by television to be most responsive to visually-oriented fragments. We cannot even assume that twenty-first-century congregations are biblically literate. More surprisingly, Slaughter points to the absence of “Busters, GenXers” and younger Christians in churches and warns us that we cannot assume that evangelism strategies that work for “Baby Boomers,” such as “contemporary worship” with music that is more like that of the 1960s and 1970s than that of the 1990s and beyond, will reach generations who follow.

Slaughter’s proposal for addressing this dilemma is to develop a theology of ministry that incorporates the Christian values of evangelism with the strategies of the marketplace. He argues that the people of God can surprise and exceed the expectations of those we evangelize by understanding and being able to communicate to their needs in ways they understand. The advantages of such a strategy are that it helps us to identify the needs of the media generations as *they* perceive them, to find solutions that meet those needs, and to communicate Christian solutions

effectively to those who need them. In Slaughter's own mega-church, multi-media ministry has identified and addresses the following needs "post-modern" people perceive themselves as having: to be anchored in a spiritual reality; to *experience* rather than merely to be informed; belonging to something greater than oneself; giving and receiving unconditional love; hope; understanding oneself and one's relation to the world, including one's mistakes; *shalom*: freedom, wholeness, and simplicity; authenticity: integrity, consistency, and honesty, and the sense of fulfillment that comes from making a difference.

Disadvantages of Slaughter's strategy may be more obvious, but include not only the church's skepticism of postmodern methodologies but also, more surprisingly, the possibility of the strategy's success. The stability and privacy of traditional congregations are threatened when evangelism is successful. Worship that successfully communicates with currently "unchurched" people is likely to produce tension among those who are already "churched" and comfortable with the way things currently are.

Critical differences between Slaughter's proposal and commercial marketing include his insistence that God's presence is essential to Kingdom "business" and that it is better for the church to lose members than to compromise its core truths. If we use the wisdom of the world (marketing-style strategies), then we must do so *with the integrity of the Holy Spirit*. To balance the multimedia approach of postmodern worship advocated by Slaughter, church leaders must also be prepared to adopt his relational ministry strategy. First, ministry itself is transformed by being shared in cooperative, self-directed ministry teams rather than shouldered by an individual lead pastor. Next, church committees are transformed by moving volunteers out of committee meetings and into mission experiences, touching real lives. Finally, the congregation is transformed through cell group meetings in addition to worship. Slaughter suggests that cell groups should take different forms depending on the needs of individual members. Discipleship groups strengthen one's walk with God and empower one to reach out to others; support groups offer love to and from people seeking healing and wholeness together; and ministry teams equip those with a common passion for service to a particular need.

Having used this text in a ministry and theology practicum for undergraduate Christian ministries seniors, I would caution that it is an effective tool for stimulating discussion about post-modernism, context,

theology of ministry, and evangelism, but should be used critically. Even students who identify themselves as “*Gen-Xers*,” “*Busters*,” and “*Blasters*,” although they agree with Slaughter that we live in a media-dominated age, are critical of his contention that the church is—or should be—“*post-literate*.” Rather, ministry students on the cusp of the new millennium believe that today’s churches must use media *creatively* but also *effectively* in ways that both *entertain* and are *relevant* to communicating the gospel message. Like any other evangelism strategy, media must be used to *communicate*, not just to entertain. Worship and communication of God’s Word must be truly *interactive* and *relational*, not passive and individualistic like watching television or even “surfing the Web.” Most importantly, the church’s relationship to media should be *corrective* and *transforming*, rather than “worldly.”

Before adopting Slaughter’s strategies, no matter how successful they have been in producing thousands of worshippers in his church on Sunday mornings, we must ask ourselves whether his starting assumption that the “language” of 20th-century mainstream Christian worship is excluding today’s “post-modern, post-Christian, post-literate” people is completely accurate. Although having a worship experience that bridges God’s presence with the personal needs of *unchurched* people is surely a core value for evangelical Christianity, we must use discernment to integrate media and cell groups into our ministries in ways that are *creative* and *effective*, yet *relational*, *interactive* and uncompromisingly *Christian*.

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Jon Gjerde, *The Minds of the West: Ethnocultural Evolution in the Rural Middle West, 1830-1917* (Chapel Hill, London: University of North Carolina Press, 1997). 426 pps.

Reviewed by David Bundy, Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, IN.

During the century before the First World War, thousands of immigrants moved from Europe, primarily Scandinavia and the British Isles, to the upper Mid-West of the USA. Among these were thousands of Scandinavian Lutheran Pietists and Methodists who left Scandinavia for both religious and economic reasons. Methodist sources indicate that the Methodists in Scandinavia were converted to Methodism under the influence of missionaries and Norwegian Methodist clergy who were heavily influenced by the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition within the Methodist Episcopal Church. Once in the Mid-West, these people identified with and participated in the Wesleyan/Holiness camp meetings. Many of these also transferred into the Pentecostal tradition. This volume by Jon Gjerde, Professor of History at the University of California, Berkeley, explores the context of this evolution that is central to the history of the Holiness and Pentecostal traditions in the USA as well as in Scandinavia.

Gjerde argues that the Scandinavian immigrants and the early European-American immigrants, who had already acculturated to “mainline” American values and had adopted English language and cultural structures, had different expectations for life on the prairies of the upper Mid-West. The Scandinavians were hoping to improve their lives while preserving cultural structures from the old countries. The other European-Americans anticipated that the cultural differences would be muted in this area and a new distinctively American culture would be created. This tension continued up until World War I when the pressure of local governments and mobs made it impossible to continue the creative evolution of old-world cultures. In Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Iowa, the Scandinavian immigrant experience fulsomely documented in this volume was forced to abandon its distinctives, especially language, and integrate more fully into the emerging American cultural mainstream.

The volume makes significant methodological contributions to the study of American culture by demonstrating the importance of religion in the settlement of the upper Mid-West and in the process of sorting out the relationships to other dimensions of American culture. Most studies on

immigration have focused on urban culture, primarily on the East and West coasts. Gjerde demonstrates, through a careful demographic and cultural analysis, the importance of rural ethnic culture in the development of the American experience. Religion was one of the factors that facilitated the grouping of immigrants into rural communities. Religion thus became one of the major contributing factors to the eventual dominance of a particular ethnic group in the culture and ethos of the county. In rural areas, local congregations served as focal points of the often widely spread communities. The ethnic religious press served to maintain a larger experience of the language and culture and to link the communities spread across the larger region. This press, and the church, also maintained links of varying degrees with the traditions in Europe and facilitated the continuing flow of immigrants to “Canaan’s land.” The result was a vibrant and confident social and ethnic culture.

From early on there was evidence of divergences of values between the immigrants and the native-born European-Americans: there was a multiplicity of “minds of the West.” There were different understandings of the value and meaning of the land, divergent approaches to inheritance and the meaning of family units, and significant differences in birth rates (immigrant higher than native born). At this point there is one significant gap in the research of Gjerde. Missing from the analysis are the non-Lutheran immigrants to the region. These communities also had carefully structured communities with ethnic publications and ecclesiastical structures. There was an identification not only with fellow believers back in Europe, but also an expanding network of American co-religionists. Many of these non-Lutheran immigrants also had a different set of hopes and expectations relative to their lives in North America. Most appear to have anticipated the survival of their linguistic and cultural heritages. However, most of the Methodists and Baptists (as well as Mormons in the West) had come to the USA partly to achieve legal and social rights in a state where there was an established division between church and state. In Norway, and to a lesser extent in Sweden, conversion to non-Lutheran traditions had the consequence of being deprived of social and civic rights. When the pressure grew during World War I to demonstrate an American identity, it would be important to know both the role of the non-Lutheran Scandinavian immigrants in the process of forced inculturation and the role of the English-language Methodist and Baptist churches populated primarily by native-born believers. This would appear to be the single

most important lacuna in an otherwise thorough and carefully documented investigation and analysis of the “ethnocultural evolution of the rural Middle West.” The relationship of these two trajectories of the Scandinavian immigration is worthy of additional study.

This lacuna does not decrease the importance of the volume. It is truly important, both as a framework for understanding the evolution of the groups central to the analysis, and also to understanding the cultural framework for important centers of American Wesleyan/Holiness, Methodist, and Pentecostal culture. For example, the Iowa Holiness Association was one of the strongest such associations in the nation. Among its other claims to global influence, it provided succor and funds for the Norwegian Methodist Episcopal pastor Thomas Ball Barratt, who, caught between the mutually exclusive demands of the Methodist Mission Board and the Methodist bishops, went from speaking at the Iowa Holiness Association (to many sympathetic Norwegian immigrants including some from congregations he had pastored in Oslo) to New York in 1906. In New York, Barratt became Pentecostal (in the company of Norwegian Holiness expatriates) and returned to Norway to lead the Pentecostal revival in Europe from December 1906.

Because of the importance of the region and its immigrant populations to the development of the Wesleyan/Holiness traditions, and because of the methodological contributions implicit and explicit in the use of the factor of religion as a cultural feature, this volume should become a part of the standard canon by which the tradition is understood.

## BOOK REVIEWS

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Arline M. Westmeier, *Sanidad del alma herida: Vol. I: Camino a la sanidad interior* (Miami: Editorial Unilit, 1991). Pps. 122. ISBN 1-56063-105-8. Arline M. Westmeier, *Sanidad del alma herida: Vol. II: Cerrando las puertas abiertas* (Miami: Editorial Unilit, 1993). Pps. 158. ISBN 1-56063-406-5. Arline M. Westmeier, *Sanidad del alma herida: Vol. III: Llevando cautivo todo pensamiento* (Miami: Editorial Unilit, 1997). Pps. 213. ISBN 0-7899-0143-9. Arline M. Westmeier, *Die verletzte Seele heilen: Gesundung durch Seelsorge* (Wuppertal, Bern: Blaukreuz-Verlag, 1983, 4th printing 1993). Pps. 119. ISBN 3-89175-035-8. Arline M. Westmeier, *Auch tiefverletzte Seelen Können heilen: Belastende Blindungen lösen Leben entfalten* (Wuppertal, Bern: Blaukreuz-Verlag, 1993). Pps. 151. ISBN 3-89175-099-4. Arline M. Westmeier, *Wenn wir an Gedanken kranken: Zwanghafte Gedanken überwinden neu denken lernen* (Wuppertal, Bern: Blaukreuz-Verlag, 1996). Pps. 158. ISBN 3-89175-126-5.

Reviewed by David Bundy, Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, IN.

The publication of the third volume of this trilogy makes it important to discuss the significance of these volumes about “healing for the wounded soul,” which grow out of the intellectual and missionary career of the author. Arline Westmeier is a German Christian and Missionary Alliance missionary who, with her husband Karl Wilhelm Westmeier, a scholar of Latin American Pentecostalism and mission theory, spent more than two decades in Colombia. There, after nine years of work in student ministries and church planting, they taught at the Seminario Bíblico Alianza in Bogotá. Since 1992 they have been teaching at the Christian and Missionary Alliance Seminary in Puerto Rico. Arline Westmeier did her B.A. at the University of New York in Albany, a degree in Clinical Psychology at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, an M.A. in Clinical Pastoral Studies at Alliance Theological Seminary, Nyack, and a M.Th. (1988) at the University of Aberdeen under the direction of Andrew Walls, entitled, “Healing and Power in the Protestant Community of Bogotá: With Special Emphasis on the Christian and Missionary Alliance Church.” In this quite remarkable thesis, she explored the diverse roles of the different understandings of the nature of healing among the many different denominational groups in Bogotá. She argued that healing “gave shape to the conceptualization of their conversion and power experience

(p. 178).” She concluded: “To the degree that the *creyentes* find power in their new faith experience to combat their inner weakness and strengthen their permeable body boundary, they advance toward the Evangelical ideal of depending solely on God as the source of power for living a power-filled and healthy life (p. 178).”

It was while working as clinical counselor at the Seminario Bíblico Alianza of Bogotá that Westmeier became aware of the need for a careful and intentional integration of the results of the research on clinical psychology and theology. In contexts where it was normal to seek and expect the healing of God for the body, Westmeier began to search for ways to help persons search for the divine healing of the mind and the transformation of experience. This was in many ways a return to the healing traditions of the Wesleyan/Holiness movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There had been a long tradition of contributions of Wesleyan/Holiness writers to both psychology and to the application of this science to spirituality, including T. Upham, E. E. Shellhammer and H. E. Baldwin. Psychology and counseling were taught in Holiness institutions, but there were few publications that attempted to integrate and apply the results of scientific endeavor with Wesleyan/Holiness theology and spirituality. Free Methodists Leslie Marsten and W. C. Mavis were exceptions.

Two factors had led to the general discontinuity between spiritual and psychological healing in the Wesleyan/Holiness and other American Evangelical traditions. First, there were fears about competition and claims of healing within the Pentecostal movement. Second, there was the intimidating clinical psychological establishment that considered religion part of most psychological and personal problems. Therefore, Wesleyan/Holiness religious professionals tended to speak very tentatively if at all about divine healing, at least until the work of David Seamands in the USA during the 1980s. Even then the tradition would generally appear to have been more at ease with the secular clinical language than with religious language. It is still an issue that divides the Wesleyan/Holiness churches from their religious cousins in the Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions.

It is perhaps no accident that the challenge to re-examine the split between clinical and theological language for healing arose in the context of missions in Latin America. There, with the predominance of both Catholic and Pentecostal theological analyses of healing (which share a

large number of common features), it became a quest that has formed the core of Westmeier's psychological and missiological research. This identification of the issue of "healing and power" as a missiological issue is an important insight. An important part of mission is the way one describes the relationship between the body, mind, and the individual. This in turn relates to the metaphors (or lack of metaphors) by which one describes the elemental relationships of the universe. Without a merging of religious and psychological language, one can convert/heal the minds and lives, but in the framework of secular psychological theory rather than within the structures of religious theory. Therein lies the importance of Westmeier's work.

Westmeier has taken the results of clinical psychology and counseling and integrated them with the biblical paradigms of spirituality and has allowed the theology of the Holiness tradition to provide the hermeneutic for both—and without detracting from the integrity of either. Often when one reads such efforts, one feels that the biblical language has merely become a screen for the secular understandings of the human person and the processes of healing. In Westmeier's volumes, the research undertaken in secular contexts during the past century is skillfully used to enhance the theological understandings. The product of her work is a sensitively written three-volume introduction to emotional and spiritual health that speaks to the problems of alienation and sin. These books are written so that they will be accessible to lay persons on three continents. It is a remarkable achievement that reflects and defines Westmeier's decades long struggle to integrate her clinical and theological education and to speak with pastoral sensitivity to her context. These are important books, and an important achievement for both publisher and author.

John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1990. 438 pages. ISBN 0-631-18948-3. John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997. 298 pages. ISBN 0-631-20336-2.

Reviewed by Henry W. Spaulding II, Trevecca Nazarene University, Nashville, Tennessee.

The publication of *Theology and Social Theory* and *The Word Made Strange* establishes John Milbank as a significant figure on the theological landscape. These monumental volumes argue a straightforward thesis with an amazing breadth of theological and philosophical material. The former Cambridge University, now University of Virginia professor has something to say to those within Wesleyan-Holiness circles, especially those attempting to critically and creatively engage postmodernism.

Milbank argues in *Theology and Social Theory* that a place has been given to secular reason which is both unnecessary and self-defeating. It is unnecessary because theology draws from far more fundamental and rich wells and it is self-defeating because secular reason stands in contradiction to the best interests of theology. Toward this end he adopts “an ‘archaeological’ approach” (3) which attempts to understand the main contours of secular reason. Milbank hopes to show that “secular discourse does not just ‘borrow’ inherently inappropriate modes of expression from religion as the only discourse at hand but is actually constituted in its secularity by ‘heresy’ in relation to orthodox Christianity, or else a rejection of Christianity that is more ‘neo-pagan’ than simply anti-religious” (3). One is struck by the insight that secularity is dependent on religion for its life. The fundamental problem with secular reason is an underlying ontology of violence. He explores this observation with relentless passion and erudition.

Milbank argues a counter thesis to modernity. His argument is three-fold. First, he argues for *poesis*, which places human making in the context of an opening toward the transcendent. Second, he argues for the Christian doctrine of creation, which stands in stark contrast to the Greek idea of rational insertion of order. Third, he argues for the priority of practice in the Aristotelian tradition as opposed to disembodied principles or rights of liberalism. These three ideas, *poesis*, creation, and practice, form the backbone of Milbank’s attempt at the re-narration of the Christian faith.

*Theology and Social Theory* is divided into four parts: Theology and Liberalism, Theology and Positivism, Theology and Dialects, and Theology and Difference. It is impossible to fully explore every nuance of Milbank's argument, but an attempt will be made to look at its broad contours. The first section serves as a prolegomenon for the entire book. He argues that the secular is complicit with an ontology of violence, which assumes the priority of force. One might wonder at this point if Milbank conceives of power only in coercive forms. It may very well be that such a conclusion is unwarranted and unduly colors any understanding of power, even God's power in theological reflection. Yet, the ontology of violence suggests the incommensurate nature of any serious association between theology and secular reason. Milbank argues further that theology accomplishes this un-holy alliance by relating the image of God to human autonomy and by attempting to understand humanity apart from God. This leads to a keen observation: "It follows that if Christianity seeks to 'find a place for' secular reason, it may be perversely compromising with what, on its own terms, is either deviancy or falsehood" (23). Milbank returns to this insight and its many derivatives throughout the two volumes.

The next section, "Theology and Positivism," suggests that sociology and theology should end any attempt at dialogue. The reason for this is that all sociology turns out to be a positivism which is based on "the isolated, self-conserving individual" (51). He suggests further that "sociology is only able to explain, or even illuminate religion, to the extent that it conceals its own theological borrowings and its own quasi-religious status" (52). Finally, Milbank argues that sociology has always been sociology of religion that requires that theology become something other than its birthright suggests. He observes: "Religion cannot be encompassed in space as a social whole, the social margin or a social transition: so here the discourse of sociology collapses" (126). We can see clearly that Milbank's thesis suggests that religion should not be domesticated by any discipline.

The third section, "Theology and Dialectics," presents an analysis of Hegel and Marx who, according to Milbank, come the closest to deconstructing the secular. Yet both of these thinkers finally capitulate to the modern project. Milbank's judgment is clear: "Hegel is . . . still a liberal" (170). He argues a similar thesis with Marx by acknowledging that he offers an incomplete critique of capitalism. He points out that Marx still

offers an inadequate anthropology and history. He observes that Christianity goes far deeper and deals with the issue at hand more fully. Having admitted that both Hegel and Marx come the closest to getting it right while falling short of being fully adequate, Milbank looks at liberation theology. He says that “in recent Catholic theology, the Hegelian and Marxist traditions have acquired an unprecedented degree of influence” (206). He concludes that such a degree of influence is unfortunate because liberation theology runs the risk of attempting to locate *a priori* a particular site for religion and it individualizes religion. Here it might be worth noting that Milbank runs the risk of too broadly lumping all liberation theologies together. It seems quite reasonable to see that not all liberation theology is primarily a reflection of Hegel and Marx. In fact, some liberation theology is less an attempt to deal with social structure than it is a renewal of the scriptural call for justice. There is a sense in which liberation theology might even embody some of the emphasis on the particular which is important to Milbank’s overall argument.

The final section, “Theology and Difference,” extends Milbank’s thesis to moral reflection by pointing to the difference between virtue and nihilism. Here he opts for narration over explanation. This section makes it clear that Milbank is critical both of the “Enlightenment project” and the nihilism inherent in much of postmodernism. What lies at the root of these options is still problematic; it is an ontology of violence. This is the problematic of postmodernism and it is the virtue of difference as well. All that precedes the last chapter should be understood as Milbank’s attempt to locate the problems associated with theology’s attempt to reconcile itself with secular reason. He is critical of this attempt because it includes an acceptance of an ontology of violence, which subverts the Christian faith. The last chapter, “The Other City: Theology as Social Science,” provides Milbank’s constructive proposal.

The final chapter is worth the effort of reading through the previous 379 pages of analysis. Here he spells out a constructive proposal, which includes the priority of practice, peaceful reconciliation, the church, conversion, and the trinity. After reading this chapter one is left with the idea that Milbank is both critical of postmodernism and one of its finest theological spokespersons. This chapter represents a carefully crafted argument as it offers a vision of “the Other City” which is a theological project that erases any attempt to make peace with secular reason. He intentionally invokes the theological giant Augustine and his *City of God* as an exam-

ple of a past attempt to offer a vision of the Christian faith. Milbank feels Augustine points to an understanding of God and the Christian faith free of violence. For Augustine this is evident in his conception of atonement, not as sacrifice, but as an offer of love. Beyond this, Milbank makes it clear that the church “must seek to extend the sphere of socially aesthetic harmony” (422). This means that the church is a place where peace and reconciliation stand instead of *dominium* and violence. The model of the trinity as a counter-ontology is also important, because it provides a way of understanding relation without reference to a finished totality, but a harmony of infinity (424). All of this suggests that the answer to the problems posed by the modern/postmodern dilemma call for a new practice, which engenders a counter-kingdom. The final chapter is full of insight and it provides the reader with a constructive postmodern theology which moves beyond mere critique of the “Enlightenment project.” One could only hope that at some point either Milbank or others will develop further the constructive possibilities present within this chapter.

*The Word Made Strange* continues the project advanced in *Theology and Social Theory*. It is certainly no easier to read, but is still worth the attention of Wesleyan-Holiness theologians. Milbank begins this book by advancing his original thesis. He argues that the first task of the theologian is to “redeem estrangement” (1). He means by this at least that theology must find again the radical orthodoxy which lies on the other side of any attempt to accommodate modernity. He pursues the same end as in *Social Theory* by questioning the theology of right and asserting that only theology overcomes metaphysics. There is, of course, much more to be said about this book and its argument, but the following will sufficiently elucidate his continuing argument.

The first major essay in *The Word Made Strange* is entitled “A Critique of the Theology of the Right.” Milbank attempts to unearth the “transcendentalist presuppositions” (7) of modern theology and suggests that “these be eradicated” (7). He begins by placing Kant alongside Aquinas in order to critique the theology of right. Milbank locates an agnostic reserve in Kant that makes any knowledge of God contentless. This goes along with all attempts to do theology by locating some abstract foundation prior to language. Here he is criticizing the separation of theoretical and practical reason, which is so important for Kant’s project. This leads to an agnostic reserve “dominated by a liberal priority of right . . .” (16). Milbank suggests another option represented by a revision

of Aquinas. This is “grounded in a notion of common and always particular good, conceived both as fact and value . . .” (17). According to Milbank the advantage of Aquinas is that “any predication of goodness of Being to finite things already refers to a dynamic ontological tension in which they are constantly drawn forward towards the divine perfection” (9). In other words, Milbank finds that Aquinas, after revision, offers a far richer pathway for theological reflection in that he more adequately takes note of the need to participate in the divine, thus giving theology content. He also feels that Aquinas handles language in way that allows more fully for linguistic mediation. All of this brings Milbank back to his preference for *poesis*, which, according to him, allows for us to see the world as more than a human construction and forces us to deal with the divine movement more adequately. All of this goes back to Milbank’s understanding of theology in a way that refuses to do business with liberal deontology. He opts for a more particular, participatory, and artful form of theology.

The chapter entitled “Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics” is a provocative essay which extends Milbank’s thesis. The chapter begins with his analysis of the French phenomenologist Jean-Luc Marion who attempts “to think God through the pure reception of his word, which alone gives us God himself” (36). After giving careful attention to this proposal, Milbank concludes that it fails because it inevitably will collapse into the old subject/object dilemma. He ends this chapter by suggesting that theology “must entirely evacuate philosophy, which is metaphysics, leaving it nothing to do or see. . .which is not manifestly. . .malicious” (50). Therefore, theology is better equipped to deal with the “reception of the poetic word”(50). This conclusion arises from Milbank’s idea that philosophy arises out of theology/religion. When it declares its independence from its “mother,” it tends to become problematic. Milbank, thus, declares that theology does not need metaphysics to accomplish its end, the worship of the triune God.

The final chapter that I will treat is entitled “Can Morality Be Christian?” Milbank responds to this question as follows: “Let me tell you the answer straightaway. It is no. Not ‘no’ there cannot be a specifically Christian morality. But no, morality cannot be Christian” (219). This is yet another example of how shockingly, yet refreshingly different Milbank’s work is for those of us who do theology. Perhaps by this point in the volume one would expect this response from one who is attempting to

look at the consequences of construing humanity in the image of God as a fundamentally poetic being. If one takes this seriously it is easy to see that morality, as it is traditionally conceived, assumes a very different understanding of humankind. Milbank offers his analysis of the five marks of morality (reactive, sacrifice, complicity with death, scarcity, and generality), all of which are incommensurate with theology. Then, he offers the five notes of the gospel (gift, end of sacrifice, resurrection, plenitude, and confidence), that to his thinking open the Christian to a far richer place than does morality. Once again Milbank has held true to his original thesis regarding the priority of religion over philosophy. This chapter is well worth the entire volume in that it re-construes the task of morality from conscience to confidence.

The arguments and sources from which Milbank draws make it easier to miss his contribution to theological work in general and to Wesleyan/Holiness theology in particular. I will leave his contributions to the broader theological agenda to others, because my chief interest is in what Milbank has to say to Wesleyan/Holiness theology. First, he recovers the importance of the doctrine of the Spirit for Holiness theology. He does this by charting a pathway out of the deep impasse that afflicts much of Holiness theology. This impasse exists between liberalism and conservatism because finally both are foundationalism and thus are allied with the "Enlightenment project." Milbank is only concerned with the ontology of violence that lies at the center of liberalism, but his argument can be reversed toward conservative theology. It seems consistent with Milbank to conclude that liberalism, because of its accommodation to secular reason, and conservatism, because of its reaction to secular reason, are subverted equally by the modern project. This moves Milbank and us to see the importance of the Spirit who works within the church to constitute the faith.

Second, Milbank points to the need to recover the importance of the church. We are at the end of a century that has been suspicious of institutions in general. Theologians of the stature of Reinhold Niebuhr gave many sufficient warrant to doubt the importance of the institutional church as a society less likely to act morally than the individual. Liberation theology has allowed some to argue that the world ought to evangelize the church instead of the reverse. While most have abandoned the wrong-headed distinction between visible and invisible church, the thought remains that the institutional church is more of a hindrance than

encouragement to faith. Milbank's work might serve as a reminder to those within the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition that the church exists through the move of the Spirit and the preaching of the Word. This means that the church exists to engender the harmonic peace, which is holiness. If Milbank's work is taken to the heart of the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition, it might very well lead to a renewed emphasis on the material relationship between holiness theology and ecclesiology.

Third, Milbank's emphasis upon the trinity is crucial to Wesleyan-holiness theology. For those who have sought warrant for theological work in Western metaphysics the well has proven to be too shallow. Milbank's works remind all theologians that theology is first and last an act of worship. This practice of worship is located in a God who is Father, Son, and Spirit. The trinity is the ontology of the faith. It is in the harmonic peace of the trinity that the Church finds the language of the faith that pierces through the nihilism of much metaphysics to radical orthodoxy.

While Milbank is not an easy read, he is well worth the effort for those who seek to do business with postmodernism. He is a vigorous critic of the "Enlightenment project," but he is equally hard on those aspects of postmodernism which betray the best of the Christian faith. For all those who are willing to think again about the categories by which we do theology in this postmodern era, Milbank can be a most helpful partner.

*How United Methodists Study Scripture*. Edited by Gayle C. Felton with chapters by Catherine G. Gonzalez, Ben Witherington III, and C. Everett Tilson. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999. 120 pages.

Reviewed by John E. Stanley, Messiah College

A more accurate title for this book would be “How United Methodists Have Interpreted and Valued the Bible” because the authors actually present an excellent summary of how United Methodists view and regard Scripture. It is a valuable primer in elementary hermeneutics and the history of interpretation. A controlling thesis is that “better than asserting that the Bible *is* God’s Word, is to understand that the Bible *contains* God’s Word” (98).

Acknowledging there is not a distinctively United Methodist way of reading the Bible, Gayle Felton suggests that Methodists respect the Bible as the church’s book which fosters personal piety and holiness flowing from divine grace. She believes that “we all recognize a canon within a canon” and that the Bible tells one unified story through three orders of existence—creation, fall and redemption.

Chapter one, “Reading the Bible in the First Sixteen Centuries” is by Catherine Gonzalez. She provides a history of how the Bible has been read. She shows that, although Protestant Reformers claimed that Scripture is the ultimate authority in the church, they also appealed to the Spirit for authority.

Ben Witherington’s fascinating chapter, “The Study of Scripture in Early Methodism,” analyzes the contributions of John Wesley, Francis Asbury, and Richard Watson. He explains Wesley’s theology of double inspiration wherein the Spirit initially inspires the mind of the biblical author and then the believer’s mind who later interprets the text. Asbury, who went “on the road with the Word,” knew the New Testament by memory. Watson liked to address the prophetic portions of Scriptures. For Wesley, the primary purpose of Scripture study was to lead one to salvation, whereas Asbury sought basic principles for daily Christian living and Watson stressed the necessity of meditation. Witherington’s section “Stewards of the Living Word” succinctly states the hermeneutical beliefs and approaches of these three foundational figures.

In the chapter “A Contemporary Approach: Interpreting the Bible in Historical Context,” C. Everett Tilson explains in lay language the roles of revelation, canonization, and interpretation. He shows how the Hebrew

Bible critiques the contemporary market economy and affirms the surprising character of God's Word which can open new vistas in life and history.

This book is a helpful survey that posits two assumptions which are not majority views in contemporary biblical scholarship. First, Tilson's emphasis on studying and knowing the historical context of biblical writers and the biblical text does not reflect the diversity of current methodological approaches such as rhetorical, canonical, and literary. Sometimes users of these methods disregard the historical context of the writer. Second, does the Bible have a unified story as Felton maintains? No less a scholar than Walter Brueggemann departs from these two assumptions in *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997). Rather than posit the priority of the historical approach, Brueggemann castigates it by claiming that "what we have in the Old Testament is speech, nothing else" (713). Also, not only does Brueggemann find diverse stories in the Old Testament, but he even questions the unity of God as he finds "a profound, unresolved ambiguity in Yahweh's life" (227). One suspects that there is an important middle ground between Brueggemann and Tilson's views.

This excellent resource and companion to the *DISCIPLE* Bible study program states basic principles of interpretation and presents a brief history of interpretation. It is commended to the reader with such needs.





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1999-2000**

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