

Wesleyan Theological Journal

Publication of the
Wesleyan Theological Society

THE END OF PROTESTANTISM AND THE METHODIST CONTRIBUTION	7
Stanley Hauerwas	
WESLEYAN THEOLOGY IN A TECHNOLOGICAL CULTURE	18
Philip R. Meadows	
FROM NEURONS TO POLITICS.....	41
Nancey Murphy	
TOWARD A DISTINCTIVELY WESLEYAN RECOVERY OF THE CHURCH'S CANONICAL HERITAGE	56
Douglas M. Koskela	
CHURCH PRAXIS FROM THE FRAMEWORK OF THE BOOK OF AMOS	72
Brad E. Kelle	
KEEPING THE CHURCH IN ITS PLACE: REVISITING THE CHURCH(ES) IN ACTS	96
Richard P. Thompson	
"CHRISTIANIZING CHRISTIANITY": THE HOLINESS MOVEMENT AS A CHURCH, THE CHURCH, OR NO CHURCH AT ALL?.....	116
Harold E. Raser	
SPIRITUAL DIRECTION WITHIN A WESLEYAN ECCLESIOLOGY	148
Douglas S. Hardy	
EIGHT-DAY RISING LOAVES: A POSTMODERN/ ANTE-NICENE DIALOGUE ON BAPTISMAL NEW CREATION....	162
Kenton M. Stiles	
ECUMENISM, SPIRITUALITY, AND HOLINESS: WESLEY AND THE VARIETY OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITIES.....	189
Donald Thorsen	
JOHN WESLEY REDFIELD AND 19TH-CENTURY AMERICAN METHODIST REVIVALISM	205
Howard A. Snyder	
JOHN WESLEY AND SLAVERY: MYTH AND REALITY	223
Irv Brendlinger	
BOOK REVIEWS AND ADVERTISING	244

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

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The Society's mission is to encourage the 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.

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EDITOR'S NOTES

The articles in this issue are selected from the many presented at the 2005 annual meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society, convened in March, 2005, on the campus of Seattle Pacific University in Seattle, Washington. Gratitude is expressed to both the participants at the meeting who critiqued the initial presentations and the authors who subsequently edited their work for publication. The keynoter, Stanley Hauerwas, presented a stimulating challenge to the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition in our volatile times. The presidential address of Philip R. Meadows carries considerable perspective and demands much reflection.

After many years of service on the Editorial Committee of the Wesleyan Theological Society, David Bundy of Fuller Theological Seminary has concluded his tenure. We all are in his debt. A hearty welcome is extended to the new committee member, Richard P. Thompson of Spring Arbor University.

On the facing page is an historic photograph of many of the past presidents of the Wesleyan Theological Society, gathered around the first president, Richard S. Taylor (seated), recipient of the Society's Lifetime Achievement Award.

Barry L. Callen,
Editor,
March 2006

THE END OF PROTESTANTISM AND THE METHODIST CONTRIBUTION

by

Stanley Hauerwas

Until I was asked to provide my vision of the twenty-first century church, I did not realize that I do not think we—and theologians in particular—should try to anticipate what the church should look like as we face this new century. Twenty centuries have passed since the birth of Christ. I suspect that the forms the church has taken as the centuries have passed could not have been anticipated by those in each preceding century. For example, how could anyone have imagined monasticism as one of the most effective forms of Christian evangelism? Our future is in God’s hands. We best not try to anticipate what God is doing and is going to do. Indeed, it is not even clear what a century might mean in God’s time. We best keep on keeping on, hoping that God can make use of us in ways we cannot imagine.

The church seldom wills herself to be faithful. Faithfulness is more likely the result of necessity. Here our guide must be Israel and the people Israel became, that is, the Jews. Israel sought to be a great nation, Israel sought like other nations to have a king, but Israel was exiled. Through exile Israel developed the skills of survival necessary when you find you are not in control. Christians, as we face whatever our future may be, hopefully will relearn by rediscovering our Jewish identity how to live by our wits.

The Ending of Protestantism

Of course, you can hardly anticipate the future when you are not sure what is happening to you in the present. But if we do not know what

is happening to us in the present, we also are not sure how to tell the story of our past. Church history is a determinative theological enterprise requiring some account of what is deemed important for the challenges facing us in our time. I think, for example, that we may be coming to a time when the story we call the “Reformation” will not determine our understanding of where we are as Protestant Christians.

Bluntly put, we may be living during a time when we are watching Protestantism coming to an end. What that means for the future I am not sure. The very name “Protestant” denotes a protest movement, a reform movement, in the church catholic. When Protestantism became an end in itself, when Protestants became denominations, we became unintelligible to ourselves. Our inability to resist the market, our inability as Protestants not to become consumers of our religious preferences, is but an indication that we are in trouble. Of course, Roman Catholicism is also beset by the challenge of choice, which helps explain why Catholicism in America may now be a form of Protestantism!

The Protestant world is beset by the Groucho Marx problem. Groucho Marx said he would not want to be a member of a country club that would have him as a member. In like manner, I suspect most of us distrust a church that we have chosen. We do so because we do not trust our own ability to choose because we think our lives are also the result of our arbitrary choices. We, therefore, have great difficulty passing on our faith in God to our children because we think they ought to make up their own minds about such important matters.¹ As a result, too often our children think they get to make up the kind of Christianity they will practice, which usually means after a time that they quit practicing altogether. It is interesting to note that often parents who believe they should let their children make up their own minds about being a Christian (or a Jew) do not think their children can or should make up their minds about their loyalty to an entity called America.

Current Moral Confusion

That we find ourselves in this unhappy situation helps us account for the moral confusion that surrounds the church and the challenges we face. There is no better indication of our confusion than the current attention

¹Sentimentality, not atheism, is the deepest enemy of the Christian faith. Unfortunately, sentimentality is the sentiment that possesses Protestant Christianity.

religious denominations are giving to questions concerning homosexuality. Screwtape of C. S. Lewis fame could not have wished for a better result to make the church look silly. In a time of war, when bishops ought to be exercising their authority to help Christians discern how to think about war, bishops find they have no authority at all. Bishops have no authority because they now understand their office primarily in terms of being the chief executive officer of a dysfunctional company. As a result, the Protestant denominations of America have simply not had anything useful to say about the current doctrine of preemptive war that guides America's foreign policy. All we have left to talk about is sex because we have accepted the concordat of liberal political theory that the church gets to occupy the space and only the space called "the private."

I once wrote an essay called "Why Gays (as a group) are Morally Superior to Christians (as a group)" in which I argued that gays had done an extraordinary thing—they had got themselves banned from the military as a group!² Why, I asked, could not Christians as a group get themselves banned from the military? The essay was not really, of course, about gays but rather was a way to help Christians discern why their arguments about gays reflect more the class character of the church than the theological convictions that should inform such discussion.

Ask yourself what arguments about gays might look like if Christians were seen as so subversive that they could not be trusted to be in the military. The ethics of sex would not be considered primarily in terms of what is or is not fulfilling for an individual, but rather in terms of what kinds of discipline are necessary to sustain a community distrusted by the wider society. Would gays (who have enough trouble already) want to be members of such a group? Moreover, if they did want to be Christians, they would have to understand that their "sexuality" could not be the most important thing the church has to consider. Rather, Christians must lead lives of faithfulness that make them warriors against war.

Of course, the failure of the church to challenge the current war in Iraq is also the result of the inability of Christians to distinguish our reaction to September, 2001, from the general American response. If there is any mood that characterizes current American culture it is the mood of fear. The most powerful nation in the world runs on fear. We are scared literally to death because we have used our wealth to live lives that are

²Stanley Hauerwas, *Dispatches from the Front: Theological Engagements with the Secular* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 153-155.

lived to deny death. Being wealthy makes those who possess wealth stupid, and America is very wealthy. The people of the world have to know who we are, but we do not have to know anything about who they are. At least, we do not have to know anything about the rest of the world except what we need to know to sell Coca Cola.

For example, Americans cannot understand why “they” (that is, the September, 2001, terrorists) came here. We cannot understand why a few people could want so desperately to harm Americans in our own country. It never seems to occur to us that they came here because Americans are here. Moreover, we never ask “why are we there?” There may be some very good answers to why we are “there,” but we never hear what those answers may be because we never ask the questions necessary to elicit the answers. All is blurred by the need of American foreign policy “to keep America strong.”

So Americans, Christians and non-Christians, now find their lives dominated by the need for security. We not only want to feel safe, we want to be safe. We rightly want to lead normal lives, that is, lives that allow us to get on with the everyday. We want to fall in love, we want to be of use to others through work, we want to go to universities, we want to live in communities that can sustain trust. These are goods we should want. But those goods cannot be guaranteed by trying to erect walls that give the impression that there is nothing to fear. We live in a dangerous world often made more dangerous by the goods we rightly desire. Our deepest immorality results from our attempt to avoid the dangers constitutive of a worthy way of life. We have forgotten that the courageous have fears the coward can never know because to be courageous makes the world more dangerous.

Danger of Nationalizing the Church

Of all people, Christians should know that this is a dangerous world. We are, after all, a church of the martyrs. That our entry doors are painted red is not an accident. Those doors make clear that the Christian “we” cannot always be the American “we.” “We” Christians are different. Sometimes the Christian “we” may find much in common with the American “we.” But that commonality must be found, not assumed. At the very least, Christians know that we are bound to other Christians around the world, which makes it impossible for us to think we can easily go to war. The Mennonite poster, “A Modest Proposal for Peace: Let the Christians

of the World Agree That They Will Not Kill One Another,” is surely what it means to be made one through the body and blood of Lord Jesus.

But it is exactly the issue of unity that bedevils Protestantism. If we are coming to the end of Protestantism, I suspect one of the reasons God is killing us is our inability to avoid nationalistic identifications of the church. We are American Lutherans, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Methodists, not Methodists who happen to live in America. I am often introduced as the theologian who was named by *Time* magazine as America’s best theologian. It is a terrible burden to have been so designated, but at least I can point out that I was named, not America’s best theologian, but the best theologian in America. Where the qualifier stands is important.

It may be objected that Catholics and Mennonites often are just as willing to embrace nationalistic identification as those in Protestant denominations. Of course, that is true, but at least Catholics and Mennonites have resources Protestants do not have to suggest why such identification is a problem. That they do, moreover, is the reason that Mennonites discover that they may well have more in common with Catholics than with mainstream Protestant denominations that trace their beginnings to Martin Luther and John Calvin.

Church as Alternative Politics

The account I have given of why we may now be coming to the end of Protestantism is just one version of the story I have been telling for some time. That story suggests that, for better or worse, we are coming to the end of the Constantinian settlement. Allegedly, the so-called American doctrine of the separation of church and state means that America has never had an established church. Yet such a reading of Constantinianism is too unimaginative. You do not need legal establishment when you have social and cultural power. America has been and continues to be the great experiment in Protestant cultural formation. William Willimon and I argued, however, in *Resident Aliens* that the social and cultural power of Protestantism is fading.³ Accordingly we tried to make suggestions about how the church should reclaim the political significance of the practices that make the church the church.

Of course, the presidency of George Bush seems to give lie to the claim that the power of Protestant Christianity, and in particular what is

³William Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989).

described as the Christian right, is fading in America. However, I am not convinced that President Bush or the Christian right are an indication of the continuing power of Christianity in America. What needs to be said is that, no doubt, George Bush is a sincere Christian, but that is but a reminder of how little sincerity has to do with being a Christian. The difficulty is this. The Christianity that seems to be important to President Bush and the Christianity of the religious right is such a pathetic form of Christianity. It is the individualistic kind of Christianity that a capitalist economy is so adept at producing. It is important to remember that the kind of Christianity represented by the religious right is but the mirror image of liberal Protestantism. Both are forms of Christianity that cannot survive the loss of the civil religion necessary to sustain the general presumption that everyone ought to believe in something.

Because in *Resident Aliens* Willimon and I tried to imagine a different future for the church in America, we were called sectarian, fideistic, tribalist. Some of those who would so label us did so because we challenged the assumption that the Christian way of securing justice in societies like America consists primarily in being on the left wing of the Democratic Party. We had nothing against people being on the left wing of the Democratic Party, though we think it is increasingly unclear if there is any Left left in America. But we were trying to remind Christians that our politics was first and foremost to be the church of Jesus Christ. I am not sure if such a way of conceiving the task of the church constitutes “a vision of the twenty-first century church,” but I am sure that, if the church is to be faithful to the task of first and foremost being the church of Jesus Christ, then we must recover what it means for the church to be an alternative politics in the world in which we find ourselves.

Ecclesiology and Methodism

I am aware that talk of the church as an alternative politics may sound overblown. The church is a far-too-accommodated institution to be any kind of alternative. Moreover, it is not clear why this emphasis on the church as an alternate polity is the kind of emphasis that is at the heart of Methodism. After all, Methodism is a movement that by accident became a church in America. At best, we have emphasized sanctification, not ecclesiology, as what makes Methodism distinctive. Our emphasis on sanctification, moreover, became confused with a pietistic construal of the faith shaped by revivals. So holiness was thought to be about the individ-

ual rather than the church. Methodists confused salvation with having a personal relationship with God, which meant the church simply became the place that confirmed one's prior relation with God. The scholarship of Frank Baker, Albert Outler, Robert Cushman, Thomas Langford, Richard Heitzenrater, and now Randy Maddox on Wesley certainly have challenged this understanding of Methodism; but, unfortunately, their recovery of the catholic Wesley has had little effect on church practice.

It is interesting to ask why the good work done on John Wesley has had so little influence. Certainly it may be, as a Methodist bishop once told me, that American Methodism owes nothing to John Wesley. The American founders were Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury, not John Wesley. As troubling as such a view may be, I think even more disturbing is the profound anti-intellectualism that has characterized Methodism over most of the last century. No doubt there are many explanations for Methodist disdain of serious theological work—e.g., the identification of Methodist theology with liberal Protestantism, the emphasis on experience, concern for social action, theology primarily understood as on behalf of the oppressed, and the concern with church growth. But I think that, for whatever reasons, Methodists have not been distinguished for our theological contributions to our own life or for the church catholic.

I think, however, that Methodism could make a real contribution to the common life as Protestant Christians if we took seriously the ecclesial implications of Wesley's stress on sanctification. I think Maddox is quite right to say that Wesley understood that without God's grace we cannot be saved, but without our (grace-empowered but uncoerced) participation, God's grace will not save.⁴ Wesley, of course, was not unique in this emphasis—thus Augustine's observation that the God who created us without us will not save us without us. Participation is, of course, signaled by baptism, by which we are made members of a community in which we are made accountable to one another. In short, Methodists are free-church catholics.⁵

I am aware, of course, that some may think that, given the character of Methodist churches, this is not a realistic proposal. However, my views

⁴Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood's Books, 1994).

⁵One of the great virtues of Richard Heitzenrater's *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995) is how we get to see the importance of the church for Wesley. See p. 19.

have been shaped by participation in a Methodist Church. Broadway United Methodist Church taught me that the kind of alternative politics I think the church must be is as real as the people that claimed me when I lived in South Bend, Indiana. Indeed, when I received the invitation to join the faculty at Duke Divinity School, I told the congregation they could tell me to go or stay. I hope I would have stayed if they had told me to do so. Instead, they told me that I could go as long as I taught what I had learned there. I have tried to do what they told me to do and it has gotten me into a lot of trouble.

I need to be clear. I do not think every church should be a small-membership church. I want churches to be like Broadway in their own way. Since the politics of the church is a local politics that requires constant discernment developed through argument and time. In his wonderful account of Broadway, *Vital Ministry in the Small-Membership Church*, Mike Mather uses E. B. White's description of his wife's bulb planting in their garden. She was "calmly plotting the resurrection." This describes Broadway.⁶ He notes that the small-membership church has time to nurture the opportunities for resurrection that arise from pain and suffering. Mather observes that taking the time to know one another's names and the stories that give those names life is an indication of a people who believe that God has given them all the time in the world to honor and worship God.

Mather suggests that the life given by God's Spirit comes from the lives of the people of the parish. Such life "means we can take the time to trust that God has put inside each one of us gifts for the building of community. We trust that to be true both inside of our walls and outside them" (24). Such a people can take the time to ask those who come to the food pantry not how poor they are or how deeply they are in need, but what assets they can bring to the church. Exactly because Broadway does not have many resources, they need all the help they can get. Money too often makes it possible for us not to need one another. But the people at Broadway will always need each other because they certainly do not have any money.

I find it quite interesting that Ephraim Radner, in his recent book, *Hope Among the Fragments: The Broken Church and Its Engagement of Scripture* (a book that quite effectively argues that even Anglicans should

⁶Mike Mather, *Vital Ministry in the Small Membership Church: Shaping Stories, Shaping Community* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2002), 20.

not give up on the church), in a manner quite similar to Mike Mather's, calls attention to the importance of time. Radner notes that Anglicanism in America has probably always been unintelligible to the extent that the church in America lacked the support of the establishment it had in England. Now that Anglicanism in America is coming unraveled, the temptation is to believe that we do not have time to make the adjustments necessary for the church to survive. In Radner's words:

We do not have time in our hands—time to make the changes we need to make in order to convert cultures, historical diseases, and so on—but God does. We do not have the power any longer to embrace a culture as a whole with our religion and so, in a deliberate squeeze, to transform it—but God does. We do not have the focused Spirit to quench the passions of human hatred that poison even the heart of religion—but God does. What we have are the forms that tie themselves to God's time and to God's power and to God's transformation. We have such forms, and whoever we are, and to whatever church we belong, we can submit to them.⁷

The forms that tie us to God's time are as common as our worship, how we govern ourselves, and our respect for our past teachers. I do not think Broadway United Methodist Church could ever have become Broadway nor could it remain Broadway over the years without the time the church took to move to every-Sunday Eucharist. Ministers will come and go. They will each have differing pastoral styles. The challenges before the neighborhood will change. The politics of the city will change. New members will come with new agendas. Yet, Sunday after Sunday, the Word will be preached and the Eucharist will be served, the church year will be kept, and Lent will climax with Holy Week. Broadway is able to remain Broadway because the connection between worship, service, and politics is never lost.

Because Broadway has been a small-membership church, I am sure it is hard to imagine that Broadway would have been able to be Broadway if they had been a larger church. I have no doubt that there are many virtues to being small. Indeed, I am convinced that size is one of the crucial issues that determines whether a polity is capable of sustaining the politics necessary for the discovery of goods in common. Of course, Plato

⁷Ephraim Radner, *Hope Among the Fragments* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004), 50.

and Aristotle also thought that size matters. However, I do not think being small necessarily insures that the church will be faithful.

Some may think that a church of “resident aliens” would necessarily be small. I do not assume that to be the case. But I am sure that, if God is in the process of making his church leaner and meaner, it becomes all the more important for the churches to be connected with other churches. A church is constituted, as Mike Mather suggests, by many small stories. We learn to be the Gospel for each other by having our lives narrated by God’s life. Yet, we are subtle sinners constantly tempted to make our story more important than the story God would tell of us. One of the gifts God has given us in order to test whether we have distorted the Gospel is our connection with churches around the world. That connection is called “catholic.”

My Hope for the Church

If I have any hope, if I have any vision that I would wish for the church of this century, it is that we might discover how desperately we need each other. This need is often described as the ecumenical movement, but the unity we must discover is deeper than simply acknowledging that the reasons for our divisions in the past no longer pertain. As Cardinal Kasper has said:

The ecumenical aim is not a simple return of the others into the fold of the Catholic Church, nor the conversion of individuals to the Catholic Church (even if this must obviously be mutually acknowledged when it is based on reasons of conscience). In the ecumenical movement the question is the conversion of all to Jesus Christ; in him we move nearer to one another. Only by a renewal of the spiritual ecumenism, by common prayer, and common listening to the Word of God in the Bible can we hope to overcome the present ecumenical impasses and difficulties.⁸

Such a movement is all the more important for Christians who live in the United States. We are constantly tempted to confuse the universal-

⁸Walter Cardinal Kasper, “Present-day Problems in Ecumenical Theology,” *Reflection 6* (Spring 2003): 64-65. For a fascinating and compelling exploration of the holiness movement, see John Wright, “Catholicity Before Identity: The Catholicity of the Church of the Nazarene and its Membership Ritual,” in *It’s All About Grace: Wesleyan Essays in Honor of Herbert L. Prince* (San Diego: Pont Loma Press, 2004), 46-55.

ity of the church with the universal pretensions of liberal regimes. The small stories we learn to tell each other at churches like Broadway offer some hope and resistance to the seductive story that America represents the “end of history.” But we must also learn to hear and retell the small stories of our brothers and sisters in other countries who suffer from our pretentious empire—an empire all the more dangerous to extent it lacks the resources to acknowledge that it is an empire.

I make no apology for celebrating a church like Broadway United Methodist Church. God through this church has quite literally saved some of its members’ lives. The work done in the church’s neighborhood and in South Bend, Indiana, by Broadway is good work. But also let us not forget that we are not only members of the church of Jesus Christ. We are also Americans.⁹ If we are to survive that fate, we are going to need all the help we can get from Christians around the world. God help us.

⁹In *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), Alasdair MacIntyre observes: “The story of my life is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity. I am born with a past; and to try to cut myself off from that past in an individualist mode is to deform my present relationships. The possession of an historical identity and the possession of a social identity coincide. Notice that rebellion against my identity is always one possible mode of expressing it” (221). By acknowledging that we are Americans, Christians rightly confess that we owe America much. That debt we should rightly return with a loving criticism made possible by our participation in the church.

WESLEYAN THEOLOGY IN A TECHNOLOGICAL CULTURE

The Presidential Address of Philip R. Meadows to the
2005 Annual Meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society

The film *For Richer, For Poorer* opens with the tenth wedding anniversary of Brad and Caroline Sexton in a salubrious New York City banquet hall.¹ As they dance among the guests and admirers, it would appear that they have it all: an enviable marriage, many good friends, a successful real-estate business, a substantial fortune, and an exceedingly commodious lifestyle. A view from behind the scenes, however, reveals it all to be fake. This anniversary celebration turns out to be nothing other than a scheme to gather an audience for selling their latest business plans. True love long forgotten, they have settled into a marriage of convenience, with friends who turn out to be mere clients or social parasites, immersed in a life of luxury built upon debt. During a day that concludes with the threat of divorce, we also discover that the couple's chief accountant has embezzled the business out of several million dollars, and the IRS is now hunting them down. I am sure we are meant to make a connection between their business ventures, the building of theme parks, and the skill with which they have carried off the illusion of success. In the words of Umberto Eco, their work, like their lives, bears the marks of an "absolute fake"!²

In a bizarre turn of events, Brad and Caroline find themselves being pursued by a gun-crazed IRS officer. They flee from the city in a stolen taxi-cab. As they make their way through the neighbouring Pennsylvania

¹*For Richer, For Poorer*, Universal Studios, 1997.

²Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality* (Picador, 1987).

countryside, in the middle of the night, they are forced off the road to avoid a stray cow, and the car ends up stranded in a soggy ditch. After enduring a night under the stars, they find themselves in Amish country, and see an opportunity to lie low for a while. Doing what they have learned to do best, they pretend to be something they are not, distant cousins from another Amish community who have come offering help for the arduous planting season. As the story unfolds, they find themselves having to adapt to the life of a conservative *ordnung* which has successfully resisted the encroachment of all modern technology. But what begins as unbearable toil and a resentful participation in this completely other way of life is transformed into a willing embrace of meaningful work and joyful participation in the community. Lying low for a while becomes an extended stay in which their marriage is healed, their desires reordered at the deepest level, and a new vision of life bestowed.

The focal moment in the film, however, is when Brad (aka Jacob) kneels down in the middle of a field that he learned to plough, surrounded by the miracle of new life as a carpet of little green shoots springs forth from the carefully tilled and planted rows. In a brief conversation with his host, Samuel, who kneels down beside him, with a handful of soil running through his fingers, Brad struggles to articulate the deep mystery of the moment...

Jacob: This is unbelievable. Look at all these little guys. I made them. Well, you know, I planted them and they're growing.

Samuel: I too never grow tired of the miracle, Jacob.

Jacob: Well, it's, it's, it's so honest. I mean you plough it; you plant it; and it grows. It's like they say, you reap what you sow.

Samuel: Aye, the process is so simple isn't it? The way things grow. So quiet, so steady. It's easy for people to take things for granted, the English especially. *They view us as backward, as hiding from reality. But this is the reality.* This is the process of life. We sow humility and we reap a great harvest. It is not we who are hiding.

Jacob: It's those English. Always hiding.

Both humour and seriousness emerge in the film as two ways of life are brought into sharp relief: the illusions of a glamorous technoculture and

the realities of engaging work, true friendship, intimate community, and festive celebration. On the one hand, this film hints that our dominant culture is out of touch with reality and that our technologically specified way of life causes us to live in an illusory world of wealth and commodities which conceals the truth of real things. On the other hand, we are also presented with the idea that coming in touch with real things can be finally be healing and redemptive.

In this address, I want to do two things: first, to present a brief sketch of our contemporary technoculture; and, second, to explore what it might mean to do Wesleyan theology in the midst of it. Like our Amish example, I will argue that Wesley holds forth a vision of reality that is capable of liberating us from the idolatries of technological perfection. Unlike the Amish, however, I will conclude that this vision of reality and the way of life it calls forth is capable of being pursued in the midst of our technological culture, and must do so as a witness against it.

Reality in a Technological Culture

Before proceeding any further, however, it is proper that I should give a clearer account of what I mean by reality. My approach does not begin with either metaphysical or methodological accounts, but with what Albert Borgmann refers to as “deictic discourse,” a form of explanation that reveals how we take up daily life.³ Such explanations are a form of “world articulation” insofar as the significance of real things is disclosed in the way they shape a whole pattern of life, or way of being in the world.⁴ Our film can help illustrate this kind of deictic discourse in a pre-modern culture.

First, real things bring a sense of *focus* that helps us see the world clearly and live in a certain way, just as does the tilling a field connect the support of a community, the skill of the farmer, the strength of the horse, the potential of the seed, and the fertility of the soil in a world full of life and growth.⁵ Second, real things bring a sense of *depth* that reveals the

³Albert Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life: A Philosophical Enquiry* (University of Chicago Press, 1984), 71f, 169f.

⁴What follows is a summary of themes which can be found in Borgmann’s discussions about “focal” things and practices. See, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*, 41f., 196f.; *Crossing the Postmodern Divide* (University of Chicago Press, 1992), 116f.; and, *Power Failure: Christianity in the Culture of Technology* (Brazos Press, 2003), 22f., 124f.

⁵It is worth remembering that the verb “to till” (Latin *colere*) has the same etymology as “to cultivate,” from which we also derive the word “culture.”

contingencies of such a life, just as the tilling depends upon the power of nature, the rhythm of the seasons, and the mystery of dying and rising. Third, real things bring a sense of *orientation* that provides meaning and direction in life, just as the tilling anticipates the harvest and the celebration of nature, community, and mutual commitment. Fourth, real things also require a significant *engagement* of the whole person. They entail the acquisition of new skills that leave dirt under the fingernails as it were, skills that exert our bodies, stretch our minds, and test our spirits, skills that cultivate the virtues of patient endurance and joyful thanksgiving. And, fifth, real things have an *eloquence* and *commanding presence*. They summon our engagement, resist our control, and command our respect. The eloquence of reality is encountered in the loveliness and ugliness of other people, the fruitfulness and recalcitrance of nature, the strength and frailty of our own flesh.

The Allure of Technology. The experience of human wickedness and natural disaster, sickness and suffering, poverty and hunger, toil and oppression are all reminders that the commanding presence of real things can also be harsh in their eloquence. And it is this experience of reality that gets addressed by the promise of technology.

First, the *promise of control* is that we may analyze, predict and manipulate all of reality. As Martin Heidegger puts it, science presents the world to us as a lawful nexus of cause and effect, “a calculable coherence of forces,” capable of control through technological means.⁶ Second, the *promise of liberation* is that we may be set free from the capricious forces of nature and culture that enslave us, and disburdened from the toil and patient endurance that the harsh reality of things requires from us. Third, the *promise of enrichment* follows from this as an increased quality of life, one of affluence, leisure, health and happiness in a progressive society.

A more recent movie, *The Village*, provides a useful counterpoint to our opening story by reminding us that modern technology has indeed brought many blessings in the relief of human suffering, and disabusing us of any romantic return to the past as a means of escape from the darker

⁶Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, translated by William Lovitt (Harper & Row, 1977), 21f. See also the accompanying essay “Science and Reflection” for an articulation of the scientific view of reality and its relationship to technology.

side of technological culture.⁷ We dare not turn our backs upon those advances (especially in medicine) that have brought healing and wholeness consistent with God's good future for us. Yet, the evidence would suggest there is a vacuity to the promise of technology. Domestic and international violence worsens; the gap between rich and poor widens; the fabric of society continues to decompose; people are increasingly bored, dissatisfied and addicted.

Heidegger claimed that "the essence of technology is by no means anything technological."⁸ By this, he meant that our technological devices merely signify the way we take up all of reality as a "standing reserve." In other words, the essence of technology is manifest in the way our lives have become oriented toward "setting upon," "entrapping" and "ordering" all things as resources for ends of our own choosing.⁹ But human beings and even God become "entrapped" by this reality as manipulable resources;¹⁰ and the "rule of technology" will continue to "hold sway" and "entrap" us in this way of living so long as its orienting power can be concealed behind our own will to master its devices as neutral tools.

In specifically biblical language, Jacques Ellul suggests that the principalities and powers of our "technological society" deceive and domesticate us by promising a share in their rule.¹¹ Duped by this "technological bluff," however, we are hustled by the god of "Technique" into a way of life that that finally enslaves us.¹²

Modern Technoculture. It is possible, of course, to suggest that human life has been specified by technology from the beginning. Even the use of a plough carries the promise of control, liberation, and enrichment. Such pre-modern technologies, however, still belonged to a culture that was more fundamentally shaped by the eloquence and commanding presence of real things: a palpable intimacy of nature and community

⁷*The Village*, Touchstone Pictures, 2004. Written by M. Night Shyamalan.

⁸Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," 4.

⁹Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," 16f., 23f.

¹⁰Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," 26.

¹¹See Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (Random House, 1964). For a helpful summary of his language about the principalities and powers, see Marva Dawn, "The Biblical Concept of 'the Principalities and Powers': John Yoder Points to Jacques Ellul," in: Stanley Hauerwas et al (eds), *The Wisdom of the Cross* (Eerdmans, 1999), 168f.

¹²See Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Bluff* (Eerdmans, 1990).

within which the practices of production and consumption were located. But modernity represents a paradigm shift in the use of technology. Modern *science* has provided us with a whole new worldview in which reality can be *analyzed* all the way down; and modern *technology* specifies a scientific culture in which reality can be *controlled* all the way up. Neil Postman claims that we now live in a state of “technopoly” which “eliminates alternatives to itself precisely the way Aldous Huxley outlined in *Brave New World*. It does not make them illegal. It does not make them immoral. It does not make them unpopular. It makes them invisible and irrelevant.” Technopoly “consists in the deification of technology, which means that culture seeks authorization in technology, finds its satisfaction in technology, and takes its orders from technology.”¹³

The technological promise of control, liberation, and enrichment in the daily life of modern culture is fulfilled through what Borgmann calls the “device paradigm”; that is, the machinery that turns reality into commodity.¹⁴ *Real meals* and the culture of the table are reduced to the consumption of mere food as the machinery of packaging disburdens us of growing, picking, preparing, cooking, and presenting our daily bread.¹⁵ *Real warmth* and gathering around the hearth is reduced to the consumption of mere heat as the machinery of boiler and furnace disburdens us of gathering and chopping wood, lighting and tending the fireplace.¹⁶ *Real music* and the sharing of stories is reduced to the consumption of mere entertainment as the machinery of audio-visual equipment disburdens us of learning how to read, tell, play, sing, and accompany others. *Real care* and mutual compassion are reduced to the consumption of mere security as the machinery of insurance disburdens us of bearing one another’s bur-

¹³Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 71.

¹⁴Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*, 40f, 76f. See also, *Power Failure*, 17f., 31, 121f.

¹⁵Consider the way microwavable television dinners have eroded not only the culture of the table but also the intimacy of household life.

¹⁶Borgmann notes that the origin of the word “hearth” literally means “focus,” the place around which a community would gather to get warm, cook, share stories, etc. The fireplace has often retained some of this significance in its adornment with pictures and other artifacts which gather the memory of a more intimate family life. It is worth noting how the television has become a new focal thing in our homes, reorienting our lives in the ways of individual consumption and passive distraction.

dens, sharing our possessions, and giving sacrificially. *Real hospitality* and the culture of the home are reduced to the consumption of mere services as the machinery of the hotels disburdens us of the need to welcome strangers and offer them real meals, warmth, friendship and care.¹⁷

The things we need and desire are reproduced as commodities which can be procured instantly, easily, safely, ubiquitously and, above all, disposable. According to Borgmann, the problem is that technology not only disburdens us of harsh reality, but disengages us from all real things in the process. A life supplied with mere food, heat, entertainment, security and services is not the same as a life nurtured in homes, sustained by meals around the table, warmed by a hearth, filled with music and story, and surrounded by mutual care. On the one hand, *commodities* are made available for mere consumption by autonomous individuals whose lives are oriented (or disoriented) by the rule of technology. On the other hand, *real things* bring intimacy, engagement, and eloquence to the lives of persons, families and whole communities. The machinery that turns reality into commodity tends to evacuate life of that which graces it with meaning and direction by disengaging us from the very things, people, and practices that make life truly worth living. The eloquence of reality is silenced by the tyranny of technological control as real things are turned into commodities stripped of focus, depth, and orienting power.

Postmodern Technoculture. Our disengagement from real things takes a further leap as this universe of commodities assumes a reality of its own, and we find ourselves living in what Umberto Eco and Jean Baudrillard have called “hyperreality.”¹⁸ If modern technology can be described as the machinery that turns reality into commodity, then postmodern technology can be described as the machinery that turns commodity into hyperreality, a world of simulation and information—another paradigm shift in our technological culture.

We can explain this in terms of Baudrillard’s three stages of simulation. First, our *commodities reflect reality* in all but “availability” as the

¹⁷I note the way that the over-programming of modern family life has often turned the home into a hotel where the honourable practices of homemaking have been replaced by more or less impersonal services such as cleaning rooms and serving food to those who just happen to live under the same roof! So-called labour-saving devices have only fostered this kind of alienation.

¹⁸See Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality*; and Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (University of Michigan Press, 1994).

things we desire can be procured instantly, easily, safely, ubiquitously, and disposably. Second, our *commodities hide reality* by their “glamour” as things can be reproduced with greater brilliance (stimulating all our senses), greater richness (possessing more desirable features), and greater pliability (being entirely subject to our manipulation).¹⁹ Finally, our *commodities become hyperreal* the more they are desired for their own sake. They become pure simulacra, or copies of things that never really existed. They are perceived as better than real, more exciting, more beautiful, more inspiring, more terrifying, and generally more interesting than the things of “real life.”

To illustrate the hyperreal, think of a sports drink of a flavor that doesn’t exist, like “frost riptide rush” or “xtremo mango electrico”; a fitness machine that simulates running on Mars, a digital photograph that has been touched up by a computer, a compact disk of already synthesized music, most television soap operas, all video games; and, especially, theme parks like Disney World which locate the commodification and consumption of reality in a technological city of pure simulacra. It is no coincidence that the project which generated the crisis in Brad and Caroline’s life was the plan to develop a Holy Land theme park; to make the story of God not only “available” and “glamorous” but hyperreal!²⁰

Hyperreality has come to specify daily life most glamorously through the technologies of cyberspace, where real things are reduced to bits and patterns of information, made infinitely brilliant, rich and pliable. As information technology comes to shape our entire culture, cyberspace no longer signifies a distinct realm we enter by logging onto the internet, but the way we take up with, and inhabit, reality as a whole. E-mail, mobile phones, instant messaging, palm pilots and laptop computers keep us permanently interfaced to the hyperreality of cyberspace. It defines our work, fills our leisure, shapes our relationships, and educates our children.

Our Technological Condition. What then, is the condition of human life in our modern and postmodern technoculture? What kind of person is to be addressed by our theology, the reality of the gospel, and its

¹⁹I borrow the idea of glamour and its terms from Borgmann, *Crossing the Postmodern Divide*, 87f.

²⁰It is ironic to discover that this fantasy became hyperreality four years after the film was released in the Holy Land Experience, located nine miles north-east of Disney World, Orlando, Florida.

embodiment in the life of the church? It is the person whose life is caught up between technological labor and technological leisure, between maintaining the machinery of our technoculture and enjoying the universe of commodities it procures for us.²¹

The promise of technology may well have disburdened our labor of the harsh realities associated with pre-modern forms of work, but it is hardly any more bearable. First, technological labor tends to be *dehumanizing* as our cultural machinery incorporates us as one more disposable part of some increasingly automated system. We are expected to work like the machines we use, cybernetically ingrafted into endless loops of industrial and post-industrial production, with built-in redundancy as formerly human responsibilities are constantly upgraded by newer and better devices. Second, technological labor tends to be *dissatisfying* as the work we do becomes increasingly specialized and remote from the ends which our cultural machinery serve. We are expected to work like the machines we use, indifferent to the things we produce, as the worth of our labor is calculated in monetary terms, the most hyperreal abstraction of all. Third, technological labor tends to be *draining* as meaningful work is reduced to the stultifying monotony of repeatedly processing a simultaneity of tasks. We are expected to work like the machines we use, ever more efficient and reliable.

The promise of technology to enrich our lives, therefore, is usually taken up as the disburdenment of leisure time from anything that resembles such work; but this is not without its own ambiguity. First, technological leisure tends to be *disengaging* as our time is simultaneously freed by labor-saving devices and filled with the machinery of consumption. The significant engagement with real things, people, and practices is replaced by surfing, browsing, and grazing the commodities of our hyper-real existence. Second, technological leisure tends to be *disorienting* as the focus, depth, and orienting power of real things is given up for passive entertainments and hyper-real pursuits that lack the ability to shape lives with any significant meaning or direction. Third, technological leisure tends to be *distracting* because we cannot finally escape the eloquence or commanding presence of real things. The recalcitrance of nature, the stubbornness of other people, and the frailty of our own flesh sooner or later break through the glamour of our hyper-real existence, leaving us sullen and defeated.

²¹Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*, 114f.

The division between labor and leisure in our postmodern technoculture is far from clear. The same technological devices which shape our work also fill our homes, and the cars we use to move from one place to another. Indeed, they have become attached to our hips, cradled in our laps, and implanted in our ears. Our identities are so thoroughly cybernetic that we are not prepared to be without these devices and, despite our best resolve, we find ourselves at work wherever we go. Borgmann connects our life in hyperreality with the condition of hyperactivity. Ironically, that which is diagnosed as an ailment in our children is commended as a virtue among working adults.²²

One possibility is that we might knowingly and critically embrace the technological perfections of an inevitably cybernetic and “posthuman” future.²³ There are signs, however, that people today are longing for the experience of real things, things that are eloquent and engaging, things that can bring focus, depth and orientation to the dehumanising, dissatisfying, draining, disengaging, disorienting and distracting character of contemporary life. My question is, How can turning to John Wesley help us re-conceive the mission of the church today in a culture such as this?

A Bridge to the 18th Century

I couldn't help but be intrigued by the title of Neil Postman's recent book, *Building a Bridge to the 18th Century: How the Past Can Improve our Future*.²⁴ Not only is he a well known critic of our technological culture, but he seemed to be suggesting that there might be a way to settle my question.

Turning to the Philosophers. As we enter a new millennium and look back at the technological failures of the past, Postman affirms our determination not to repeat the mistakes of history, but suggests that we are equally confused about how to imagine anything other than some kind of technological dystopia. He argues that the uncertainty and lack of conviction with which we face the future stems from a wide-scale “crisis of narrative” that characterises postmodernity.²⁵ When people do not have a

²²Borgmann, *Crossing the Postmodern Divide*, 12f., 97f.

²³See, for example, N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman* (University of Chicago Press, 1999).

²⁴Neil Postman, *Building a Bridge to the 18th Century: How the Past Can Improve our Future* (Vintage Books, 1999).

²⁵Postman, *Building a Bridge to the 18th Century*, 113.

satisfactory narrative to generate a sense of purpose and continuity, “a kind of psychic disorientation takes hold, followed by a frantic search for something to believe in or, probably worse, a resigned conclusion that there is nothing to find.”²⁶ The postmodern suspicion of metanarratives, and truthful speech in general, has left us with a fatefulness that can only look to the ingenuity of technological innovation for help. In the meantime, we worry that the future will not be either new or improved.

Postman argues that “in order to have an agreeable encounter with the twenty-first century, we will have to take into it some good ideas. And in order to do that, we need to look back to take stock of the good ideas available to us.”²⁷ To do this, we must search out the “wisdom of the sages”: not as far back as the technological innocents who are incapable of speaking to us with relevancy; but not so recent as to entrap us once again in the fateful conditions of the present. For Postman, the obvious place to stop is the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, and there to re-engage with those great thinkers who first introduced the familiar ideas that have shaped our modern world: progress, technology, democracy, education, etc.

The basic claim is that the problems we face today result from later developments which lacked the more balanced and circumspect principles of the Enlightenment project itself. For instance, Postman argues that the idea of unrestrained progress which we associate with the “technological imperative” of modern culture is actually a product of nineteenth-century optimism. Postman’s proposal, then, is to build a bridge over this period to the master narrative of the eighteenth-century founding “philosophers” of American liberal democracy; whose deism, commitment to progress, and practice of social morality sought a more careful balance between the rational principles of natural law and the moral values of Christian tradition.

Postman’s proposal may well be the best that a socially concerned deist can come up with, or even one committed to the apologetic posture of liberal theology. But it will not do for all of the reasons that liberal theory remains impotent to reorient the course of contemporary life. It is founded upon the same mechanistic and technologically specified view of reality. His method or “technique” is to mine the past in order to subdue the present and control the future. The idea that we might pick and choose

²⁶Postman, *Building a Bridge to the 18th Century*, 10.

²⁷Postman, *Building a Bridge to the 18th Century*, 13.

our narratives while remaining indifferent to the truth of them, as Postman suggests, is simply to appropriate the origins of the modern project by accepting the very postmodern conditions he had sought to escape. Ironically, he may have actually confirmed the inevitability of those unfortunate technological developments that he hoped to demonstrate were merely contingent.

I am thoroughly convinced by Postman's argument that we must engage in an act of remembrance in order to help us face our future with courage and a sense of purpose. I am also convinced that turning to the eighteenth century has the potential to supply a narrative that can help us restrain the tyrannies of our modern and postmodern technoculture. I am equally convinced, however, that his reason for settling there, and his choice of mentors, is thoroughly mistaken. In one sense, of course, his reasons and choices were already made by a prior commitment to the narrative of Enlightenment modernity and liberal democracy. Insofar as postmodernity is the "end" of that project, Postman's hope for an alternative future is stumped by his inability to see an alternative past.

We, on the other hand, should side with John Wesley for all the opposite reasons! The narrative of Wesley's theology holds out most promise precisely because he refused to take up with reality according to the emerging mechanistic and deistic narratives of the Enlightenment. Yet, any student of Wesley will know that this did not stop him from taking up the discoveries of science and technology in the service of Christ. This promise is clearly not for everyone, as it was not for Postman. It is, however, a promise for those of us who claim to be descendents of Wesley and find our reasons and choices resting with him because of the narratives we already inhabit. Indeed, those of us who have taken Wesley as mentor rather than guru discover, sooner or later, that his primary concern was to usher people into the narrative of Scripture, to sit as a community of disciples at Jesus' feet, and to find ourselves caught up in the real presence of the Triune God. So, let us learn from Wesley.

Turning to John Wesley. The eighteenth-century Enlightenment inherited the Baconian promise that scientific knowledge would bring power over nature and culture, liberate human beings from the drudgery of life, and enable social progress in the pursuit of happiness. By the turn of the seventeenth century, even before Newton gave us his laws of mechanics, Thomas Hobbes had already begun to re-conceive reality in

purely materialistic and mechanistic terms.²⁸ Likening the world to a big machine was an intellectual vision of reality that had started to dominate the minds of educated people in Wesley's day. As the father of deism, Hobbes thought that God had made the machinery of the world to operate autonomously, setting it in motion and then leaving it to run according to its own inbuilt mathematical laws. Wesley understood that the logical conclusion of deism was spiritual dissipation and practical atheism, a universe that could operate equally well with or without the truth of God.

In this mechanistic universe, Wesley observed first hand the cruel effects of poverty caused by the beginnings of an industrial and economic revolution. The prevailing *laissez faire* approach to the acquisition and accumulation of wealth, the rising tide of self-interest, and the emerging conditions of free-market capitalism were given philosophical support and moral direction by the work Hume, Mandeville, and Adam Smith. The progress of technologically-driven commerce began displacing a largely rural population from their work and their homes. The domestic production of tenant farmers was superseded by the mass production of large-scale agriculture, while the engaging work of cottage industries and skilled artisans was replaced by the exhausting work of wage-laborers in the factories and down the mines. The new bourgeoisie flourished amidst fanciful consumption and the duties of philanthropy, while the poor languished between extreme poverty and the scarcity of provisions.²⁹ For Wesley, the danger of increasing riches was not merely the temptation of worldliness, but the self-centred technological idolatry of seeking to possess that which really belongs to God and is owed to our neighbor.³⁰

In this mechanistic universe, without any final purpose or end, Wesley observes the spectre of necessity. The only difference between the

²⁸For a helpful account of Hobbes' influence on the development of our technological and democratic culture, see Murray Jardine, *The Making and Unmaking of Technological Society: How Christianity Can Save Modernity from Itself* (Brazos Press, 2004).

²⁹John Wesley, "Thoughts On the Present Scarcity of Provisions," in Thomas Jackson (ed), *The Works of John Wesley* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958-1959), vol. 11, 53. Hereafter abbreviated as WJW.

³⁰See especially the argument of John Wesley's economic sermons: "The Use of Money" and "The Good Steward," in Frank Baker, (ed), *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press), vol. 2, Sermons 50 and 51. Hereafter abbreviated as BCE. See also John Wesley, BCE 3, Sermon 108, "On Riches"; Sermon 87, BCE 3, "The Danger of Riches"; BCE 4, Sermon 131, "The Danger of Increasing Riches."

ancient Stoics and many modern philosophers is that they disagree about exactly how human beings are shaped by the fateful and inscrutable chains of cause and effect which constitute the nature of reality. He rejects the “providential naturalism” of Lord Kames, who turned the universe into “one immense machine, one amazing piece of clock-work, consisting of innumerable wheels fitly framed, and indissolubly linked together,” such that “man is one of those wheels, fixed in the middle of this vast automaton.”³¹ He also rejects the “scientism” of David Hartley which interpreted human beings as mere biological “mechanisms” whose habits of thinking and acting are ultimately resolvable to vibrations in the nervous system and brain.³² Either way, such necessity not only undermines the possibility of true virtue but strikes at the very foundation of true religion, that is, the pursuit of holiness in a world both liberated and directed by the providence and grace of God.

In this mechanistic universe, Wesley also observed “mathematicians” and moral philosophers arguing about “the state of nature,” the general operation of its “laws,” and how social virtue might be founded upon them.³³ Conceptions of the good life continued to be shaped by fragments of the biblical tradition, especially those relating to love of neighbor and love of self. Once shorn of “enthusiastic” claims about the empowering love and eternal justice of God, however, they were recast in terms of mere “benevolence” and “self-interest” as endlessly conflicting principles in human nature.³⁴ So, Wesley rejected the egoism of Hobbes

³¹John Wesley, “A Thought Upon Necessity,” IV, WJW 10:476.

³²John Wesley, “A Thought Upon Necessity,” I, WJW 10:474.

³³See Wesley’s critiques of Hartley and Kames, “A Thought Upon Necessity,” §V.1 and §VI.1, WJW 10:476-7. Although Wesley does not make a necessary connection between the study of “mathematics” and spiritual dissipation, he clearly thinks there is a tendency in that direction, which he eschews even in his own ways of thinking. The strength of Cartesian mathematics and modern science to account for the universe apart from God is a powerful temptation: “I am convinced, from many experiments, I could not study, to any degree of perfection, either mathematics, arithmetic, or algebra, without being a Deist, if not an Atheist: And yet others may study them all their lives without sustaining any inconvenience” (BCE 2, Sermon 50, “The Use of Money,” §I.2). See also, Wesley, BCE 3, Sermon 78, “Spiritual Idolatry,” §I.13, in which he associates this modern turn with the love of “novelty”; and BCE 3, Sermon 79, “On Dissipation,” ¶12.

³⁴Wesley’s rejection of “esteem” and “complacency” as foundations for benevolence (or love of neighbor) amounts to a dismissal of the whole deistic enterprise to secure public virtue upon natural capacities of moral discernment, in both its rationalist and empiricist versions (see BCE 3, Sermon 91, “On Charity,” §I.2).

and Mandeville, the sentimentalism of Shaftsbury and Hutcheson, the intellectualism of Wollaston and Clarke, and the principles of social virtue put forward by that “great triumvirate” of Hume, Voltaire and Rousseau.³⁵ His complaint is not that their formulations are variously inadequate, but that the whole deistic enterprise to secure virtue upon natural capacities of moral discernment is altogether faulty and impossible. They all sunder true religion by seeking the good life apart from the grace of God, the love of neighbor apart from the love of God, and the outward form of religion apart from the inward power of God.³⁶

In this mechanistic universe, Wesley also observed the emerging conditions of autonomous individualism and political liberalism. From Locke to Rousseau, enlightenment thinking had provided a foundation for the ideals of liberal democracy, the growing perceptions of political tyranny, and the spirit of revolution. For Wesley, the threat lay not in this or that political arrangement, but in an attempt to secure the origin of political power in the will of self-governing individuals rather than the providence and grace of God.³⁷ He argued that the idea of self-government as a human right was fundamentally incompatible with the idea of civil government, insofar as it exists to order a common life under God.³⁸

³⁵“Thus almost all men of letters, both in England, France, Germany, yea, and all the civilized countries of Europe, extol *humanity* to the skies as the very essence of religion. To this the great triumvirate, Rousseau, Voltaire, and David Hume, have contributed all their labors, sparing no pains to establish a religion which should stand on its own foundation, independent on any revelation whatever; yea, not supposing even the being of a God. So leaving Him, if he has any being, to himself, they have found out both a religion and a happiness which have no relation at all to God, nor any dependence upon him” (BCE 4, Sermon 120, “Unity of the Divine Being,” ¶19).

³⁶See Wesley, BCE 4, Sermon 120, “Unity of the Divine Being,” ¶20. Wesley rejects both the intellectualism of Wollaston and the sentimentalism Hutcheson because “both these authors agree, though in different ways, to put asunder what God has joined” (BCE 3, Sermon 90, “An Israelite Indeed,” ¶5). See also his extended critique of Hutcheson, that “smooth tongued orator of Glasgow,” for creating an actual opposition between love of God and neighbor (BCE 3, Sermon 106, “On Faith,” §II.2).

³⁷See Wesley, “Thoughts Concerning the Origin of Power,” WJW 11:46f.

³⁸Wesley argues that the very idea of self-government is a “chimera” based upon “subtle metaphysical pleas” which cannot be “reduced to practice” (“Some Observations on Liberty,” WJW 11:97). He argues that human beings are historically and socially dependent upon the civil traditions they indwell, whatever form of government they embody, and the liberties they enjoy arise from this very arrangement.

He was right, and a church that has been complicit in the successive developments of latitudinarianism, liberal tolerance, and the privatization of spiritual life has suffered from this purposeless deism ever since!

What was Wesley's response to the emerging technological world of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment to this new way of taking up with reality apart from God? How did he endeavor to bring hope and a future to those whose daily lives were being shaped by the mechanization of natural life, the industrialization of economic life, the mathematization of moral life, and the disintegration of common life? As we have seen, he certainly did engage in the practice of apologetics to offer a critique of deism and its assault on scriptural and evangelical faith. Such apologetics, however, merely provides the opportunity for a system of reality to solve its own problems on its own terms. Rather, I suggest that the promise of early Methodism lay in holding forth (or remembering) an altogether different way of taking up with reality, which Wesley called "*real* Christianity," a way of life that could heal the old and new divisions between God and World, nature and grace, self and other; heart and life, means and ends, form and power, rich and poor, individual and community.

The Promise of Real Christianity

My starting point, then, is the conviction that Wesley's theology presents us not only with a plausible intellectual vision, but a compelling account of Christian life as *reality done differently*. His primary concern was not to provide us with metaphysical speculations about the nature of reality, or methodological considerations about how we can account for the truth of Christianity in a scientific and technological age. At his best, Wesley left us with an altogether more "deictic" explanation of what it means to "take up" daily life in a world where the Triune God is Author and End of all real things, a world *narrated* by the Scriptures and *illuminated* by the stories of all those saintly "burning and shining lights" who summon our remembrance of it.

In a paraphrase of Heidegger's dictum, we might say that "the essence of Wesley's theology is nothing Wesleyan." By this, I mean that Wesley consistently argued that his particular convictions, and those of the early Methodists, represented nothing other than plain old scriptural Christianity.³⁹ If we learn anything from Wesley's own particular commit-

³⁹See, for example, his argument in BCE 11, "The Character of a Methodist," ¶17.

ments, however, it is that real Christianity may be characterized by the idea of perfection, embodied in the means of grace, and extended through disciplined Christian fellowship.

Christian Perfection. Understanding Wesley's idea of perfection is complicated because he not only appeared to change his mind over time, but because he didn't find it contradictory to use multiple modes of discourse at once.⁴⁰ This might be less surprising, however, if we understood the idea of perfection to signify a whole way of being in the world, or taking up with reality, that encompasses every aspect of human life and experience before God. When Wesley is not being drawn into arguments about specific points of doctrine, he prefers to draw us into an exercise of the imagination where we can contemplate what daily life might be like if we fully embodied the scriptural accounts of real Christian discipleship. He presents us with an eschatological vision of reality done differently, and an invitation to take it up in the face of other "realities" that compete for our souls.

The idea of perfection, as it comes to characterize a way of life, needs a qualifier. Wesley denied that it can be *divine* perfection, *angelic* perfection, or *Adamic* perfection.⁴¹ We simply cannot take up with reality the way God does, or the angels in heaven, or Adam before the fall. Rather, we are summoned to specifically *Christian* perfection, which means taking up with reality according to the promises of God to human beings in all their weakness and frailty. Equally, we must avoid striving for any other kind of perfection, especially the *technological* perfection of taking up with reality under the idolatrous promise of possessing, controlling, and manipulating the things of God. We were not made for it, and it cannot save us.

⁴⁰The idea of perfection is often relegated to an afterthought, excursus or appendix in texts dealing with Wesley's theology and spirituality. No doubt, this is because it has been subject to a great deal of controversy from the beginning. Are we best to understand it in substantial and deontological terms (as a renewal of the sinful nature in the divine image and full obedience to God's law)? Are we to understand it in more relational and areteological terms (as a participation in the life of God and the virtuous reordering of dispositional affections)? And are we to understand it in teleological or in topological terms (as the goal of sanctification or as the perfection of God's own action in the whole way of salvation)? And once we have solved these puzzles, it seems we must ask whether it is ordinarily experienced in an instant of entire sanctification or a more gradual growth in grace, or perhaps both?

⁴¹See, for example, Wesley, BCE 3, Sermon 76, "On Perfection," §1.1f.

Christian perfection should be thought of as a *telos* in the sense that it characterizes a whole way of life and salvation, and not merely the conclusion or consummation of it. *Justification* and new birth comprise the liberating experience of being awakened to and included in a reality whose perfection is not the technological imperatives of novelty and efficiency, but a perfection in love. It is being caught up in the fullness and constancy of God's own loving presence and power, as it overflows in the love and service of our neighbor, and thus returns to God in joyful prayer and thankful praise. *Sanctification* and growth in grace is the humbling experience of living in moment-to-moment dependence upon the real presence of Christ as Prophet, Priest and King. This humility is inseparable from a *faith* that sees God's providence and grace in all things, a *hope* that seeks constant and uninterrupted communion with God as our true end, and a *love* that unites us with God in time and eternity.

If Christian perfection characterizes a way of taking up with reality, then it can never be a static condition, because the truth of justification and sanctification are constantly being worked out in our engagement with all the details of life. Being "altogether a Christian" is a spiritual maturity that describes not only the *fullness* of God's love, but a *completeness* of devotion and dedication to God's purposes in every aspect of daily life.⁴² Understood this way, the experience of "entire sanctification" may be thought of as the perfection of humility, an all-consuming gift of faith, hope and love that excludes our desire for competing "realities," no matter how alluring they may be. The distinguishing mark of real Christianity, however, is not the attaining of such a condition, but the striving after it, and the whole way of discipleship which it calls forth.⁴³

The Means of Grace. This *real* Christianity, characterized by the idea of perfection, is embodied in the means of grace. When considered as a whole way of being in the world, it is not surprising that Wesley includes both works of piety and works of mercy, and even the possibility that everything we do may be considered a means of grace in the broadest

⁴²See Wesley, BCE 1, Sermon 2, "The Almost Christian." Generally speaking, his idea of perfection is one of "universal" love and obedience to God, i.e., a calling which encompasses every aspect of our heart and life, extended through love and service to neighbor.

⁴³See, for example, his argument in BCE 11, "The Character of a Methodist," ¶18.

sense.⁴⁴ This is because any practice can become a means of grace when it is situated in a way of life that takes up with reality according to the *telos* of Christian perfection. Indeed, anything else is but a formalism which takes the means as ends in themselves, or an enthusiasm that looks for ends without the necessary means.⁴⁵

Wesley reminds us that there is no intrinsic value, merit, or power in the means themselves. They cannot be appropriated technologically, as a form of spiritual magic, to convey blessing to our souls, since both the power and the end of religion subsist within the means themselves as a participation in the justifying, sanctifying, and perfecting grace of God. Holy living is not produced or procured by the means of grace, but subsists within the “form of godliness” which is constituted by them, and is made possible by the “power of godliness” which is revealed within them.⁴⁶ Wesley’s summons to constancy in the means of grace should also be understood in these terms; as they specify a whole way of life *constituted* by the works of piety and mercy, *infused* with the life transforming presence and power of God, and *extended* through the practices of Christian fellowship. Constancy in the means of grace embodies our constant communion of love with the triune God, which is the means and end of our discipleship.

As a means of grace, a gathering of Christians only becomes real Christian fellowship insofar it extends a way of life that takes up with reality according to the *telos* of Christian perfection. So, Wesley argues that the formalities of church order, when separated from their true end, only succeed in the simulation of such fellowship, “a mere rope of sand”

⁴⁴See especially, Wesley, BCE 3, Sermon 98, “On Visiting the Sick,” ¶1. A practice becomes a means of grace when it is performed with a “single eye” toward the holy love of God and neighbor. For the mutuality of piety and mercy, see also BCE 3, Sermon 92, “On Zeal.”

⁴⁵See the variety of Wesley’s arguments in BCE 1, Sermon 16, “The Means of Grace.”

⁴⁶Wesley thought of the early Methodist movement as a renewal in both the form and the power of religion. Whether the form of religion is a reliable indicator of a heart right with God or not, the absence of the form “infallibly proves the absence of the power. For though the form may be without the power, yet the power cannot be without the form. Outward religion may be where inward is not; but if there is none without, there can be none within” (BCE, “True Christianity Defended,” §II.2 and following). The form without the power, however, is mere “dead form” or a simulation of real Christianity.

which lacks the real intimacy and connexion of a people characterized by perfect love and constituted by the means of grace.⁴⁷ The truth of “social holiness” is that the form and power of godliness are sustained and extended through the constancy of real fellowship, and that we find our Christian identity to subsist within it. There is no such thing as “solitary Christianity.”⁴⁸ The biblical context in which Wesley develops the idea of social holiness, however, is that of Christian witness, where the truth of real Christianity lies in the extent to which the light and flavor of the gospel is shed through our lives into the world.⁴⁹ We might conclude, therefore, that the missionary purpose of real Christianity consists in its witness to the world of reality done differently, the reality of God made visible, credible and compelling in the form and power of our life together.

Reality Done Differently. Wesley’s description of real Christianity has all the focus, depth, orientation, engagement, and eloquence of reality done differently in a culture specified technologically. The summons of Christian perfection brings a sense of *focus* that invites us to see the world rightly and live in it well, a new life characterized by perfection in love, that both condemns and heals the brokenness of our technological condition. The contingency and grace of this new life can only be received with a sense of impenetrable *depth* as we learn what it means to have our lives and futures held in the hands of God, and in the hands of those we would not have chosen for ourselves. The meaning and direction of this new life finds its *orientation* in the pattern of dying and rising to new life in Christ,⁵⁰ as we learn how to live in the hopeful reality of Christ’s victory over those idolatrous “realities” that end in death. It is a way of life that requires significant *engagement* in the means of grace, which we find are skills in need of cultivation, skills that stretch us in mind, body and spirit, skills that mean unlearning other more seemingly “natural” ways of thinking, feeling, speaking and acting. This new life is filled with the *eloquence*

⁴⁷Wesley, BCE 11, “A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists,” §I.11.

⁴⁸See Wesley, Preface to “Hymns and Sacred Poems” (1739), ¶3-6, WJW 14:320f.

⁴⁹See Wesley, BCE 1, Sermon 24, “Sermon on the Mount, IV,” §I.6, II.4 etc.

⁵⁰Borgmann reminds us that the language of “orientation” comes from the way that churches were once built in a cruciform pattern which pointed toward the sunrise in the east, shaping a way of life in the likeness of Christ, and in the hopeful anticipation of his return.

and *commanding presence* of God and neighbor, who summon our engagement, resist our control, and command our respect.

The eloquence of God is revealed in the means of grace and the practices of Christian fellowship in the midst of prayer and fasting, in the reading and meditating on Scripture, in the receiving of bread and the wine, in the neediness of friends and strangers, in the real faces of sickness and poverty, in the watchfulness and admonition of others, in the testimony of ordinary and ineloquent persons, in the celebration, solemnity and power of covenant service, watch night, and love feast.

A Real Challenge for the Church

When tempted to think of Wesley's summons to real Christianity as an un-realistic expectation, we are simply challenged to ask what it means to be "realistic." If being *realistic* is to live consistently with the way we have chosen to take up with *reality*, then surely we might actually discover ourselves to inhabit a world in which the providence and grace of God can accomplish a life of perfection in love. If so, this represents a profound challenge to our ministry of church leadership.

Facing Our Un-Reality. In order to address the Brads and Carolines of this world, it seems we must find ways of encouraging the church to face up to the un-realistic aspects of its own life. By un-realistic, I mean living in a manner that tends to deny real Christianity by settling for the rule of technology. I have in mind all the ways we succumb to the temptations of *consumption*: to find technological means for disburdening us of the need for engagement in the contingency and grace of real fellowship; to turn real spirituality into a commodity available for private consumption, instantly, easily, safely and disposably. I also have in mind all the ways we succumb to the power of *simulation*: to find technological means for making discipleship more commodious and glamorous than the real thing; to turn the church into a theme park of spirituality detached from the dailiness of life in the world.⁵¹

In the language of Ellul, all such strategies are incapable of calling the "technological bluff" of our dominant culture because they have

⁵¹This issue cannot be reduced to matters of style, or debates about "traditional" versus "contemporary" worship and "emerging" ecclesologies. It is a critique of the formalisms and enthusiasms of any such expressions of Christian life that fall short of real Christianity, as it was for Wesley.

already settled for it. At best, they may provide a sort of chaplaincy; at worst they may kill the church through a lack of relevancy. After all, who would swap an engaging Sunday morning hike in the country for more consumption and simulation at church? Better to compartmentalise life, to have moments of escape from the “technopoly” of the everyday in the eloquence of nature, than to fill our technologically secured leisure with more hyperreal distractions.

The gift of the church to the world is not to provide a means of escape from reality, but to help us see and do reality differently, to provide a new focus, depth, orientation, engagement and eloquence to the everyday. Participation in the church should present the world to us as it exists in the providence and grace of God, a “reality check” that is capable of liberating us from the idolatry of technological perfection and the fateful inevitability of our cybernetic identities. Perhaps this is what Heidegger means when he speaks of a “turning” in the midst of our technological culture: a turning about, a change of direction, a repentance or conversion that arises in the unconcealment of technology’s rule.⁵² Only in the glimpse or “lightning-flash” of reality done differently is the disguise lifted, our entrapment revealed, our technological condition disclosed.⁵³

Learning to be Real. Addressing Brad and Caroline must not be taken up as another technological challenge to be mastered, but a challenge to our own technological captivity. And for this reason, it would seem that this call to ministry is as profoundly difficult as it is mundane. Learning to be real requires a “turning” of the church into a community intent upon real hospitality, real meals, real warmth, real friendship, real care, real sacrifice, and real celebration, in the midst of a culture that promises to disburden us of such things. The “technological bluff” facing the church is that we may adopt the promise of control, liberation and enrichment without it endangering our spiritual life or witness in the world. Sabbath rest from technological hyperactivity is not commodious inactivity, but to engage in the deeply satisfying and meaningful work of piety and mercy, in the intimacy and mutuality of real Christian fellowship.

If we would learn how to be real, we must learn to see what Wesley saw: that a life and future secured by technological means is entirely

⁵²Heidegger, “The Turning,” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, 36f.

⁵³Heidegger, “The Turning,” 49.

indifferent to the reality of God; and that there is no medium between serving God and the technological satisfaction of our own godless desires.⁵⁴ This requires a commitment to becoming the kind of community that is capable of discerning how our science and technology should either be set aside or embraced as a gift consistent with real Christianity.

For a church to take up with reality according to the *telos* of Christian perfection is to be on a journey in which we must learn to resist the machinery which silences the eloquence of real things and the commanding presence of God, while yet seeking to put all our ingenuity to the service of Christ. In those moments when we find ourselves perfectly humbled by the healing depth of real things, real practices, real people, and the real presence of God, we would give up anything to have it extended through our lives.⁵⁵ The mission of the church may well be an extended invitation to the world to join in this profoundly engaging journey with us, to do reality differently.

⁵⁴Reading the pietists and mystics of the holy living tradition convinced Wesley “of the absolute impossibility of being half a Christian; and I determined, through his grace . . . to be all-devoted to God, to give him all my soul, my body, and my sustenance” (“Plain Account of Christian Perfection,” ¶4, WJW 11:367).

⁵⁵Philippians 3:7-16.

FROM NEURONS TO POLITICS

by

Nancey Murphy

My title, “From Neurons to Politics,” represents a topic that is near and dear to my heart these days—neuroscience and philosophy of mind.¹ There is now a proliferation of new “academic disciplines” that use “neuro” as a prefix. There is neuro-economics, neuro-ethics, and even, God forbid, “neuro-theology.” I do not intend here an exercise in “neuro-politics.” Rather, in keeping with the Wesleyan predilection for mixing theology and all sorts of other resources, I plan a round-about route from neuroscience to some reflections on Christian political involvements. I’ll begin with neurobiology, move briefly to philosophy of mind, then to biblical studies, theology, spirituality, and then to Christian ethics and politics. I’ll begin with the thesis that the recent developments in neuroscience are making it more and more difficult to be an intellectually fulfilled anthropological dualist. In fact, I join a large majority of current philosophers in adopting a “nonreductive physicalist” account of the person.

The prevalence of physicalism in the academic world calls on Christians to re-evaluate centuries of biblical interpretation and theology. Despite being in conflict with much of the tradition, I claim that Christian theology can and should incorporate a physicalist anthropology. I am a bit speculative regarding the differences that a physicalist theology would have made in Christian attitudes toward politics throughout Western his-

¹Much of this essay is drawn from a paper by Nancey Murphy that was presented to the Wesleyan Philosophical Society in March, 2005. It will appear in Murphy’s forthcoming *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?* (Cambridge University Press). Used by permission.

tory. In brief, I speculate that if there had been no such thing as souls to save, Christians would have had to find something else to worry about, and maybe they would have concerned themselves more with Jesus' teaching about the real, and present, and realizable kingdom of God on earth. And maybe, just maybe, people like Jim Wallis would not need to write a book titled "The Politics of God: How the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It."

Science and Human Nature

It is a bit of a relief to be speaking to a group where it's possible to begin with science, and work my way around the "quad" later. It's also nice to be speaking to a group with such varied expertise. On the topic of human nature, when I set out to appraise myself of the history of these debates, I was very surprised *not* to be able to find any comprehensive history of the issues. The discussions in the various disciplines have remained remarkably well compartmentalized. Philosophers know the history from Plato and Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, through Descartes, Kant, and now the varieties of positions in the specialization of philosophy of mind.

I have not been able to find any history of these issues in Christian thought. Part of what is needed is the history of biblical interpretation and, especially, the history of the *re*-interpretation of biblical material that has taken place in the past century. Books on the history of doctrine seem *not* to have this as a category. This suggests that theories of human nature have tended to be assumed rather than expressed and argued throughout most of the history of theological development.

In my judgment, there have been three points where developments in the natural sciences have called then-current understandings of human nature into question: the introduction of atomism in early modern physics, the Darwinian revolution, and, finally, current developments in the cognitive neurosciences. A significant consequence of modern physics, which replaced Aristotle's account of matter, was to create what is now seen to be an insuperable problem for dualists: mind-body interaction. Evolutionary theory, with its emphasis on our continuity with animals, raised the question of how it could be that we have souls while the (other) animals do not. The significance of contemporary neuroscience is this: all of the capacities once attributed to the mind or soul now appear to be (largely) functions of the brain.

My title, of course, focuses on this last development in the cognitive neurosciences. I have what I think is a clever device for presenting the neuroscience. I start with Thomas Aquinas' list of the faculties attributed to the soul, noting that it is one of the most detailed in Christian history, and that he shows himself to be a pretty observant cognitive psychologist. Thomas attributed to the sensitive soul the part we share with animals, the capacity for locomotion, the five senses, and then four of what he called "interior senses." One of these is called the *sensus communis*, which is the ability to collate the deliverances of the five external senses in order to recognize a single object. This sounds remarkably like the neuroscientists' binding problem. Another is called the *vis aestimativa*, which is the ability to recognize something as useful (e.g., straw for building nests), or friendly or dangerous. Neuroscientist Joseph LeDoux is well-known for his investigations of emotion. What he writes about "emotional appraisal" is relevant to distinguishing this estimative power from the *sensus communis*:

When a certain region of the brain is damaged [namely, the temporal lobe], animals or humans lose the capacity to appraise the emotional significance of certain stimuli [but] without any loss in the capacity to perceive the stimuli as objects. The perceptual representation of an object and the evaluation of the significance of an object are separately processed in the brain. [In fact] the emotional meaning of a stimulus can begin to be appraised before the perceptual systems have fully processed the stimulus. It is, indeed, possible for your brain to know that something is good or bad before it knows exactly what it is.²

So, in Thomas' terms, the *vis aestimativa* is a separate faculty from the *sensus communis*, and it works faster.

The vast amount of such research appearing in the past few decades has had a significant impact on the philosophy of mind. There are still arguments for dualism, but the balance has certainly shifted from dualists to physicalists, and I would say that the burden of proof has shifted to the dualists to make sense of it all.

Human Nature in the Bible

It is certainly the case that most Christians throughout much of Christian history have been dualists of some sort, and have seen dualism

²Joseph LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 69.

(or a more elaborate tri-partite account) as the teaching of the Bible. One could say that the science I've referred to above calls Christians to re-evaluate their thinking. It has certainly brought this issue into public view. What most Christians in the pews do not know, though, is that dualism has been questioned by Christian scholars for over a century. Beginning a hundred years ago, biblical scholars came to recognize that the Old Testament has been badly translated. The Septuagint is a Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures, probably dating from around 250 BCE. This text translated Hebrew anthropological terminology into Greek, and it then contained the terms that could be understood in the way those terms were defined in Greek philosophy. The clearest instance of this is the Hebrew word *nephesh*, which was translated as *psyche* in the Septuagint and later translated into English as "soul." It is now widely agreed that *nephesh* did not mean what later Christians have meant by "soul." In most of these cases, it is simply a way of referring to the whole living person.

In the half of the Christian scholarly world that we might designate as liberal, there was a wide consensus by the middle of the twentieth century that interpretations of New Testament teaching had also been distorted by reading Greek philosophical conceptions back into them. However, this is still being debated among more conservative scholars. It is puzzling why the disputes cannot be easily settled. New Testament scholar Joel Green points to differences of interpretation being due to different readings of non-Canonical books from the intertestamental period—particularly regarding the question of the "intermediate state." Does the New Testament teach that there will be a period of conscious existence between death and bodily resurrection? If so, this would seem to require that we have souls to fill in that bodily gap. This leads me to ask: Do Christians really need to work through a long list of non-Canonical books in order to determine what the Bible teaches on this issue? The unlikelihood of an affirmative answer leads me to this conclusion: The New Testament authors are not intending to teach *anything* about humans' metaphysical composition. If they were, surely they could have done so much more clearly!

Helpful support for this conclusion comes from New Testament scholar James Dunn. Dunn distinguishes between what he calls "aspective" and "partitive" accounts of human nature. He writes:

. . . in simplified terms, while Greek thought tended to regard the human being as made up of distinct parts, Hebraic thought

saw the human being more as a whole person existing on different dimensions. As we might say, it was more characteristically Greek to conceive of the human person “partitively,” whereas it was more characteristically Hebrew to conceive of the human person “aspectively.” That is to say, we speak of a school having a gym (the gym is part of the school); but we say I am a Scot (my Scottishness is an aspect of my whole being).³

So the Greek philosophers were interested in the question: what are the essential parts that make up a human being? In contrast, for the biblical authors each “part” stands for the whole person thought of from a certain angle. For example, “spirit” stands for the whole person in relation to God. What the New Testament authors are concerned with, then, is human beings in relationship to the natural world, to the community, and to God. Paul’s distinction between spirit and flesh is not our later distinction between soul and body. Paul is concerned with two ways of living, one in conformity with the Spirit of God and the other in conformity to the old aeon before Christ.

So I conclude that there is no such thing as *the* biblical view of human nature *insofar as we are interested in a partitive account*. The biblical authors, especially the New Testament authors, wrote within the context of a wide variety of views, probably as diverse as in our own day, but did not take a clear stand on one theory or another. What the New Testament authors *do* attest is: first, that humans are psychophysical unities; second, that Christian hope for eternal life is staked on bodily resurrection rather than an immortal soul; and, third, that humans are to be understood in terms of their relationships—relationships to the community of believers and especially to God.

I believe that we can conclude, further, that this leaves contemporary Christians free to choose among several options. It would be very bold of me to say that dualism *per se* is ruled out, given that it has been so prominent in the tradition. However, the radical dualisms of Plato and Descartes, which take the body to be unnecessary for or even a hindrance to full human life, are clearly out of bounds. Equally unacceptable is any physicalist account that denies human ability to be in relationship with God. Thus, many reductionist forms of physicalism are also out of bounds.

³James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of the Apostle Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 54. Dunn attributes the aspective/partitive account to D. E. H. Whitely, *The Theology of St Paul* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1964).

Physicalism and Theology

I turn now to the question of what difference a physicalist anthropology might make to theology. All that physicalist anthropology strictly *requires*, it seems to me, are one or two adjustments. One needs to give up or finesse the doctrine of the intermediate state if that has been an important part of one's tradition. It can be finessed by calling into question the meaningfulness of putting the experiences of those who are with God on an earthly timeline. This is an important issue for Catholics and Calvinists; however, one of my colleagues in history just told me that Calvin says it is not a serious enough issue to split the church over. I'm a member of the Church of the Brethren. I tell my students, only partly tongue in cheek, that we Anabaptists don't have doctrines, but if we did, the intermediate state would not be one of them. One certainly needs also to understand resurrection differently, not re-clothing of a "naked" soul with a (new) body, but rather restoring the whole person to life—a new transformed kind of life.

Nonetheless, physicalism does raise interesting questions concerning a variety of theological topics. It is impossible to do justice to all of these here. The following reflections are meant only to be suggestive. First, the doctrine of God. Nicholas Lash, former professor of divinity at Cambridge, notes that a doctrine of God is always correlative to anthropology. For example, when the human person is identified with a solitary mind, God tends to be conceived as a *disembodied* mind, as in the case of so-called classical theism. Much of Lash's own writing argues for the recovery of an embodied and social anthropology in order to recapture a more authentic account of religious experience, but also of a thoroughly trinitarian concept of God.⁴

Consider, in contrast, the correlation between certain aspects of Hebraic anthropology and the doctrine of God. Aubrey Johnson emphasizes one important aspect of the Hebraic conception of personhood, which may be contrasted with modern individualism. For moderns, individuals are thought to be "self-contained" in two senses. The first is that they are what they are apart from their relationships. The second is the

⁴Nicholas Lash, *Easter in Ordinary: Reflections on Human Experience and the Knowledge of God* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1986), 95. Cf. Fergus Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: SPCK, 1997) for an account of the continuing role of Cartesian anthropology in theology, despite disavowals of Descartes's dualism.

idea that the real self—the soul or mind or ego—is somehow contained within the body. In contrast, Johnson argues, the Hebraic personality was thought to be extended in subtle ways throughout the community by means of speech and other forms of communication. This extension of personality is so strong that, in its entirety, it is regarded as a “psychical whole.”⁵ “Accordingly, in Israelite thought the individual, as a [*nephesh*] or centre of power capable of indefinite extension, is never a mere isolated unit. . . .”⁶

Johnson uses this conception of personhood to elucidate various modes of God’s presence. *Ruach*, Spirit, is an extension of Yahweh’s personality. Hence, God is *genuinely* present in God’s messengers (the angels), in God’s word, and in God’s prophets when they are moved by God’s Spirit. The prophet, “in functioning, was held to be more than Yahweh’s ‘representative’; for the time being he was an active ‘Extension’ of Yahweh’s Personality and, as such, *was* Yahweh ‘in Person.’”⁷ Johnson rightly points out that this understanding of God’s presence is crucial for understanding the later development of trinitarian conceptions of God. I suggest that it is equally important for Christology.

Early theologians working with a dualist account of humans and an account of Jesus as the pre-existent Son incarnate had problems relating all of the “parts.” The questions I am asked about Christology when I present a physicalist account of humans often suggest that the questioner is assuming that the divinity of Christ is somehow connected with his soul. Deny the existence of human souls in general and this is tantamount to denying Christ’s divinity. However, the assumption lurking behind this question conflicts with the Chalcedonian conclusion that Jesus is both fully divine and fully human.

Given that physicalist anthropology has been widely accepted among theologians for at least a half century, there is a wide array of Christologies developed in this light. I am in no position to do justice to them here.⁸ I make here two suggestions. First, rethinking Christology in

⁵Aubrey R. Johnson, *The One and the Many in the Israelite Conception of God*, 2nd ed. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1961), 4.

⁶Ibid, 7.

⁷Ibid, 33.

⁸See, for example, James Wm. McClendon, Jr.’s “two narratives” Christology, in *Doctrine: Systematic Theology, Volume 2* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), chap. 6.

light of a physicalist anthropology certainly requires Christians to pay adequate attention to incarnation—if humans are purely physical, then there is no getting around the scandal of “enfleshment.”

Second, there has always been a tension in trinitarian thought between those who emphasize the unity of God and those who emphasize the three-ness. In the eyes of one, the others appear to verge on tri-theism; in the eyes of the other, the danger is unitarianism. An alternative approach to the now-popular social trinitarianism emphasizes that the word “person” in formulations of the doctrine of the trinity has shifted its meaning over the centuries. Whereas it now refers to an individual rational agent, the Latin *persona* from which it was derived referred to masks worn by actors and, by extension, to the roles they played. Consequently, Robert Jenson argues that, in order to understand the origin of the triune understanding of God, Christians need to “attend to the plot of the biblical narrative turning on these two events [Exodus and Resurrection], and to the *dramatis personae* who appear in them and carry that plot. . . .”⁹ It is here, he says, that we see how we are led to speak of God as Father, Son, and Spirit. Throughout scripture “we encounter *personae* of God’s story with his people who are neither simply the same as the story’s Lord nor yet other than he. They are precisely *dramatis dei personae*, the personal carriers of a drama that is God’s own reality.”¹⁰

With this understanding, we can say that there is one God, Israel’s LORD. God at work in the world and in the human community is Spirit; the Hebrew word *ruach* suggests not a substance but an event.¹¹ God at work (as Spirit) in Jesus is the Messiah, the Incarnate Word, the Son of God.¹² Dunn is one of many who have contributed to the development of “Spirit Christology.”¹³ This is an approach to Christology that sees the

⁹Robert W. Jenson, “Trinity,” in Adrian Hastings, et al., eds., *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought: Intellectual, Spiritual, and Moral Horizons of Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 715-718; 16.

¹⁰Ibid. Cf. Aubrey Johnson’s account (above) of God’s genuine presence in the extensions of his personality, and McClendon’s reconciliation of the humanity and divinity of Christ in terms of the intersection of the narrative of human waywardness with the story, beginning in Genesis, of what God has been doing to make a place for his people with himself and thus with one another (*Doctrine*, 275f.).

¹¹McClendon, *Doctrine*, 290.

¹²Ibid., 291. Note that Paul sometimes fails to distinguish between the Spirit and the risen Christ; cf. Rom. 8:9-11.

¹³See James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975).

Holy Spirit as the divine aspect of the person of Christ. While Spirit Christology can, perhaps, be reconciled with a three-person account of the trinity,¹⁴ it is clear that it accords much more easily with a oneness trinitarianism, which we might at this point want to call an *aspective* account in light of Dunn's terminology.

An equally important doctrine to rethink in light of a physicalist account of human nature is the doctrine of salvation. What might theology be like today, and how might Christian history have gone differently if a physicalist anthropology had predominated rather than dualism? It seems clear that much of the Christian spiritual tradition would be different. There would be no notion of care of the soul as the point of Christian disciplines—certainly no concept of depriving the body in order that the soul might flourish. As some feminist thinkers have been saying for some time, dualist anthropology all too easily leads to disparagement of the body and all that goes along with being embodied.

Here are some questions: Without the Neoplatonic notion that the goal of life is to prepare the soul for its proper abode in heaven, would Christians through the centuries have devoted more of their attention to working for God's reign on earth? Would Jesus' teachings be regarded as a proper blueprint for that earthly society? Would the creeds *not* have skipped from his birth to his death, leaving out his teaching and faithful life? Would Christians see a broader, richer role for Jesus as Messiah than as facilitator of the forgiveness of their sins? If Christians had been focusing more, throughout all of these centuries, on following Jesus' teachings about sharing, and about loving our enemies, at least enough so as not to kill them, how different might world politics be today? What *would* Christians have been doing these past 2000 years if there were no such things as souls to save?

My reflections here grow out of two sources. One is my own long-standing puzzlement about how the different sorts of Christianity I have encountered can be so different, despite so much doctrinal agreement. For example, the forms of life of my church, the Church of the Brethren, are rather well summed up in the denomination's motto: "Continuing the work of Jesus, peacefully, simply, together." Yet at Fuller Seminary, while most of my students are in fact continuing the work of Jesus, their understanding is that Christianity is basically about something else—having one's

¹⁴Ralph Del Colle, *Christ and the Spirit: Spirit-Christology in Trinitarian Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 4.

sins forgiven and eternal life. The second source of my reflections is David Kelsey's book, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology*. He attributes differences among theologies and approaches to scriptural authority to different ideas about how to construe God's presence in the community. He says that a theologian attempts to "catch up what Christianity is basically all about in a single, synoptic, imaginative judgment."¹⁵

Now, at risk of oversimplification, I'm suggesting that the adoption of a dualist anthropology in the early centuries of the church was largely responsible for changing Christians' conception of what Christianity is basically all about. I am suggesting that original Christianity is better understood in socio-political terms than in terms of what is currently thought of as religious or metaphysical. The adoption of a dualist anthropology provided something different—different from socio-political and ethical concerns—with which Christians became primarily preoccupied.

This is not, of course, to deny the afterlife. It is rather to emphasize the importance of *bodily* resurrection. It is important to see how the contrasting accounts of life after death—resurrection versus immortality of the soul—lead to different attitudes toward kingdom work in this life. Lutheran theologian Ted Peters whimsically describes the dualist account of salvation as "soul-ectomy." If souls are saved *out of* this world, then nothing here matters ultimately. If, instead, it is our bodily selves that are saved and transformed, then bodies and all that go with them matter—families, history, and all of nature.

Jewish scholar Neil Gillman lends weight to my suggestion. His book, titled *The Death of Death*, argues that resurrection of the body, rather than immortality of the soul, is the only authentically Jewish conception of life after death. Why are physicalism and resurrection important to Jews? For many reasons, Gillman replies:

Because the notion of immortality tends to deny the reality of death, of God's power to take my life and to restore it; because the doctrine of immortality implies that my body is less precious, important, even "pure," while resurrection affirms that my body is no less God's creation and is both necessary and good; because the notion of a bodiless soul runs counter to my experience of myself and others. . . .¹⁶

¹⁵David Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), 159.

¹⁶Gillman, *The Death of Death*, 238.

It is indispensable for another reason. If my body inserts me into history and society, then the affirmation of bodily resurrection is also an affirmation of history and society. If my bodily existence is insignificant, then so are history and society. To affirm that God has the power to reconstitute me in my bodily existence is to affirm that God also cares deeply about history and society.¹⁷

Looking forward to the resurrection and transformation of our bodies leads naturally to the expectation that the entire cosmos will be similarly transformed. German theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg argues that in Jesus' resurrection we see the first fruits of the transformation for which the whole creation is longing.¹⁸ As Paul says:

The created universe is waiting with eager expectation for God's sons to be revealed. It was made subject to frustration, not of its own choice but by the will of him who subjected it, yet with the hope that the universe itself is to be freed from the shackles of mortality and is to enter upon the glorious liberty of the children of God. Up to the present, as we know, the whole created universe in all its parts groans as if in the pangs of childbirth. What is more, we also, to whom the Spirit is given as the first fruits of the harvest to come, are groaning inwardly while we look forward to our adoption, our liberation from mortality. (Rom. 8:19-23 [REB])

Questioning the Spiritual Quest

The change from a dualist to a physicalist anthropology also calls for serious reconsideration of traditional understandings of Christian spirituality. And I think that this reconsideration might be as relevant to Christian therapists as to spiritual directors. From Augustine to the present we have had a conception of the self that distinguishes the inner life from the outer, and spirituality has been associated largely with the inner.¹⁹

The distinction between inner and outer is not equivalent to the distinction between soul and body, but its historical origin was a result of

¹⁷Ibid, 262.

¹⁸Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1968).

¹⁹See Phillip Cary, *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self: The Legacy of a Christian Platonist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Augustine's dualism. The peculiar notion that one has an "inside," and that one's true self can "enter into" that inner space, arose from Augustine's reflections on the problem of the location of the soul. He came to conceive of it as a "space" of its own. The ancient rhetorical tradition, with its arts of memory and invention, had already connected the idea of chambers or rooms with the idea of memory. Orators memorized the order of subjects to be discussed in a speech by imagining themselves walking through the rooms of a familiar house and mentally marking each successive place with an image that would serve as a reminder of the next topic. The result was the introduction, in Augustine's *Confessions*, of the idea of memory as a capacious inner chamber, in which is found "innumerable images of all kinds . . . whatever we think about . . . all the skills acquired through the liberal arts . . . the principles of the laws of numbers. . ." and, most important of all, God.²⁰

The combination of the Neoplatonic emphasis on the care of the soul with Augustine's metaphor of entering into one's own self or soul in order to find God constituted a complex of ideas that has shaped the whole of Western spirituality from that point onward. Teresa of Avila's extended metaphor of the interior castle is one of its finest fruits.²¹ Teresa writes: ". . . we consider our soul to be like a castle made entirely out of a diamond or of very clear crystal, in which there are many rooms, just as in heaven there are many dwelling places. . . ." ²² This imagery is so familiar to us that we often fail to notice how strange it is: I, the *real* I, am somehow *inside* of *myself*. Teresa does note the oddity: "Well, getting back to our beautiful and delightful castle we must see how we can enter it. It seems I'm saying something foolish. For if this castle is the soul, clearly one doesn't have to enter it since it is within oneself."²³

Today there are a number of thoughtful critics of this tradition of inwardness. One is Nicholas Lash²⁴; another is Owen Thomas, emeritus professor of theology at the Episcopal Divinity School. I shall follow two

²⁰Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 10.

²¹Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*, written in 1577.

²²Teresa, *Interior Castle*, in *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, vol. 2, trans. and ed. Otilio Rodriguez and Kieran Kavanaugh (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1980), 283-284.

²³Ibid, 285.

²⁴Lash, *Easter in Ordinary*.

of Thomas's essays.²⁵ Here are the contemporary misunderstandings as Thomas sees them:

It is commonly assumed that spirituality is an optional matter, that some people are more spiritual than others and some not at all, that spirituality is essentially a good thing (the more the better), that while spirituality is somehow related to religion it should be sharply distinguished from religion as something superior to and more important than religion. . . .²⁶

Thomas argues his position on the basis of the very narrow meaning of the word "spirit" in English as compared with its translations in other languages—*Geist* in German, *esprit* in French, and *spirito* in Italian. The English word "spirit" is associated with emotion and will as opposed to intellect. In contrast, the German *Geist* refers to the totality of what defines humanity in its fullness. Consequently, Thomas believes that spirituality "is most fruitfully defined as the sum of all the uniquely human capacities and functions: self-awareness, self-transcendence, memory, anticipation, rationality (in its broadest sense), creativity, plus the moral, intellectual, social, political, aesthetic, and religious capacities, all understood as embodied."²⁷ If this is the case, then all humans are spiritual to some degree, and spirituality can be either good or bad.

This conception of spirituality cuts against the tendency to associate spirituality with the inner and religion with the outer life of institutions, practices, doctrines, and moral codes. The traditional notion of spirituality has assumed that the inner encounter with God is the *source* of the external forms of religious observance. However, a variety of philosophers and theologians have questioned this assumption. Instead, we need to recognize the ways in which language (which is necessarily public) and other social practices provide the individual with the resources for private, inner experience. To put it quite simply, the lone individual might indeed have an experience of God, but without any theological language would have no way of *knowing* what the experience was. The more linguistic resources and expectations provided by one's tradition the more nuanced one's experiences will be.

²⁵Owen Thomas, "Some Problems in Contemporary Christian Theology," *Anglican Theological Review* 82, no. 2 (Spring 2000), 267-281.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 267.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 268.

Thomas' embodied and wide-ranging account of spirituality is in sharp contrast to what a variety of commentators see as the predominant religious sensibilities of Americans. Literary critic Harold Bloom says that "the real American religion is and always has been in fact . . . gnosticism." It is "a knowing by and of an uncreated self, of self-within-the-world, and the knowledge leads to freedom . . . from nature, time, history, community, and other selves. . . ." ²⁸

It is one of the great paradoxes of Christian history, Thomas notes, that, on the one hand, the biblical tradition seems to emphasize the primacy of the outer—the body, speech, action—while, on the other hand, the Christian spiritual tradition from Augustine to today has emphasized the inner. It was not that the biblical authors did not know of the inner/outer distinction. In particular, Jesus' teaching distinguished the *heart* as the source of intellectual, emotional, and volitional energies from outward behavior.²⁹ Yet, in general,

from the call of Abraham and Moses to the Decalogue of the Sinai covenant, the covenants with David, the preaching of the eighth-century prophets, and Jesus' teaching about the reign of God, the biblical emphasis is on the outer: faith manifest and visible in obedience, sacrifice, and just action; repentance shown in the rending of garments and weeping; thanksgiving seen in dancing, singing, and feasting, and the reign of God perceived in preaching and healing and compared to buying a pearl, sowing seed, and holding a feast.³⁰

Thomas's prescription for restoring proper balance between inner and outer is as follows:

Within this reformulation there must be, first, a renewed emphasis in Christian formation on the significance of the body, the material, social, economic, political, and historical world rather than an exclusive focus on the soul or interior life. . . . Second, the reign of God must become central again in Christian spirituality. The reign of God is the fundamental theme of Jesus' mission: its inbreaking and manifestation in

²⁸Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 49.

²⁹Owen C. Thomas, "Interiority and Christian Spirituality," *Journal of Religion* 80, 1 (2000): 41-60; 51.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 52.

Jesus' presence, healing, and teaching. To be a follower of Jesus means to repent and open oneself to the presence of this reign, to look for and point to signs of the reign, and to participate in it by manifesting its signs in active love of the neighbor and in the struggle for justice and peace. The presence of the reign of God is manifest primarily in outer life and public life, as well as in inner life and private life, and it is the former which has been largely ignored in recent Christian formation.³¹

Earlier I pointed out that the inner-outer distinction is not the same as the distinction between soul and body. So presumably one could be a body-soul dualist while avoiding an excessively inward-looking spirituality. In fact, some of the greatest writers on inwardness did so. Teresa of Avila spent years traveling, reforming convents, and founding new ones. It is also possible for someone with a physicalist anthropology to flee from the responsibilities of kingdom work by turning to solitude, self-examination, and contemplation. So the strongest point I can make here is to claim that physicalism—along with an eschatological hope for resurrection of the body—leads more *naturally* to a concern for the physical world and its transformation than does dualism.

Conclusion

I have tried to address issues of social concern and politics by taking a tour through the variety of disciplines represented here, from neuropsychology through philosophical anthropology, biblical studies, and theology, both doctrinal and practical. I am arguing for an understanding of human nature as physical through and through, but without denying our capacities for morality and relationship with God. In what I think is good Wesleyan style, I'm relying on the fact that this position can be made resonant with a variety of sources.

I have suggested, further, that adoption of a physicalist understanding of human nature provides a critical opportunity to evaluate and perhaps reject many of the ways we Christians have sought to encounter God in the privacy of our closets, rather than in the messy world of poverty-fighting, healing, justice-seeking, and peace-making.

³¹Thomas, "Some Problems," 278.

³²The metaphor of resonance is Warren Brown's.

TOWARD A DISTINCTIVELY WESLEYAN RECOVERY OF THE CHURCH'S CANONICAL HERITAGE

by

Douglas M. Koskela

Some forty-five years ago, Colin Williams described Methodism as “a society in search of the church.”¹ He was one of many over the years who have intimated an ecclesiological poverty in the Wesleyan tradition. Perhaps the most pointed suggestion along these lines was made by Albert Outler in his 1964 essay “Do Methodists have a Doctrine of the Church?”² He noted that the Methodist movement originated as an “evangelical order” or society intended to function within the context of the Church of England. As Methodism transitioned from society to church in the American context, it developed its ecclesiology somewhat haphazardly on the basis of practical need and expediency. In that light—and to some extent based in Wesley’s own thought and practice—ecclesiology in the Wesleyan tradition has been aptly characterized as *functional*.

¹Colin W. Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1960), 216.

²Albert C. Outler, “Do Methodists Have a Doctrine of the Church?,” in *The Doctrine of the Church*, ed. Dow Kirkpatrick, 11-28 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1964). Reprint in *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage: Essays of Albert C. Outler*, ed. Thomas C. Oden and Leicester R. Longden (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), 211-226. Page numbers are from the reprint edition. For an example of a similar argument regarding British Methodism, see J. Ernest Rattenbury, *Wesley's Legacy to the World: Six Studies in the Permanent Values of the Evangelical Revival* (Nashville, TN: Cokesbury, 1929), 198.

I propose that this ecclesiological vision, which is centered essentially in mission, has had significant consequences for Wesleyan communities of faith. While mission is a crucial dimension of the essence and life of the church, it is not the only dimension. My thesis is that the *ad hoc* ecclesiology of American Methodism has prevented Wesleyan communities from embracing the fullness of the canonical heritage of the church catholic. The diminished catholicity³ appears in three particular senses: (1) the doxological dimension of the church has been subordinated to the evangelistic and formative dimensions; (2) the communal aspect of the faith—while always important to the Wesleyan tradition—has been oriented toward the needs of the individual; and (3) the canonical heritage has been appropriated selectively in the various branches of the Wesleyan tradition. Despite these developments, I suggest that these communities can at least begin to recover that fullness in a distinctively Wesleyan manner.

The Ecclesiological Detachment of American Methodism

To begin, it is worth recounting the role that the Methodist movement was originally intended to play within its Anglican context. It is well known that John Wesley did not set out to establish a church, and that he resisted recurring moves toward that end. Rather, the movement aimed to revitalize the Church of England from within. The requirement for membership in the United Societies was “a desire to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins.”⁴ There was no ecclesiological element in this requirement, and that was quite intentionally the case.⁵ Wesley expected members of the societies to worship and receive the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper in their parishes as often as possible.⁶ To that end, Outler suggests, “Wesley deliberately designed the pattern of Methodist preaching services so that they would be liturgically insufficient, leaving the Methodist people still dependent on the priests of the national church

³By “catholicity” I mean the fullness of the church throughout space, throughout time, and in proclaiming and living the fullness of the faith.

⁴John Wesley, *The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design*, ed. Rupert E. Davies, vol. 9 in *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1976-), 70.

⁵Outler, “Do Methodists Have a Doctrine of the Church?,” 213.

⁶Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1995), 140.

for the sacraments and the full round of Christian corporate life.”⁷ The Methodist connection was not intended to be a church; rather, it was intended to serve the church.

A delicate balance existed, at least in principle, between the respective roles of the Methodist movement and the Church of England. In order to illustrate that balance, let me propose three essential dimensions of the church’s life: the doxological, the formative, and the evangelistic. The doxological dimension addresses the church’s sacramental and liturgical life. To recognize the church as a doxological community is to recognize all of those elements that foster the corporate communion with and worship of God. The formative dimension refers to the role of the church in nurturing believers toward growth in grace.⁸ Finally, the evangelistic dimension refers to the church’s proclamation of the gospel in word and deed. Using this schema, we can understand the particular function that Wesley understood the Methodist connection to play. Since he felt that the evangelistic and the formative dimensions were being neglected by the mother church, the Methodists were oriented primarily toward proclaiming the gospel and nurturing believers in the faith. Thus, the distinct mission of the Methodists was “not to form any new sect; but to reform the nation, particularly the Church; and to spread scriptural holiness across the land.”⁹

The doxological dimension and certain elements of the formative dimension were expressed primarily in the regular worship of the Anglican Church. It must be acknowledged that it is difficult to draw entirely clear lines between the doxological and formative dimensions in Wesley’s thought. While worship certainly took place in society meetings and Methodist preaching services, it was understood as a means to Christian nurture—not as an end in itself.¹⁰ The Methodist meetings were directed

⁷Outler, “Do Methodists Have a Doctrine of the Church?,” 214.

⁸From a Wesleyan perspective, works of mercy and concrete expressions of the “love of neighbor” are probably best understood within the nurturing dimension, insofar as they cultivate holy tempers in the one doing them. Still, there is an undeniably doxological element to such works. See Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood, 1994), 215.

⁹John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872; reprint ed., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979), 8:299.

¹⁰See Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 205-09.

toward the singular aim of salvation, and the practices of the people called Methodists were intended to foster that result. Through and through, the connection was understood by Wesley as a ministry for—if not entirely of—the Church of England.

When Wesley finally took it upon himself to perform ordinations and give his hesitant blessing to the formation of a Methodist church in America, he was not giving up his ecclesiological convictions. Rather, he felt that the situation had left him no choice, and he was convinced that his actions were legitimate, if extreme, from the perspective of Anglican ecclesiology. Wesley had been convinced long ago by reading Lord Peter King's *Account of the Primitive Church* that presbyters have the same right as bishops to ordain.¹¹ Still, he had refrained from exercising that right so as not to upset the order of the Church of England. In the case of the American Methodists, he felt that the "uncommon train of providences" that led to American independence forced his hand to take this extraordinary (though rightful) measure.

The famous letter he sent to the "brethren in North America" reveals Wesley's perplexity over the unusual situation, as well as his recognition of the shaky ecclesiological ground that the new church would have to tread:

I have accordingly appointed Dr. Coke and Mr. Francis Asbury, to be joint Superintendents over our Brethren in North America: As also Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey, to act as Elders among them, by baptizing and administering the Lord's Supper. And I have prepared a Liturgy little differing from that of the Church of England (I think, the best constituted national Church in the World) which I advise all the Travelling-Preachers to use, on the Lord's Day, in all their Congregations, reading the Litany only on Wednesdays and Fridays, and praying extempore on all other days. I also advise the Elders to administer the Supper of the Lord on every Lord's Day. If any one will point out, more rational and scriptural way, of feeding and guiding those poor sheep in the wilderness, I will gladly embrace it. At present I cannot see any better method than that I have taken. . . . They are now at

¹¹John Wesley, *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, ed. John Telford (London: Epworth, 1931), 7:238. The writings of Edward Stillingfleet were also influential in Wesley's rationale: see Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 286.

full liberty simply to follow the Scriptures and the Primitive Church. And we judge it best that they should stand fast in that Liberty, wherewith God has so strangely made them free.¹²

Wesley had no option but to provide the Americans with the best resources he could and to trust these “poor sheep” to the strange hand of providence. If he worried that the cords connecting this new church to the church catholic were perhaps too few, he nonetheless endeavored to make them as strong as possible.

If one would expect a strong ecclesiological sensibility to emerge from this situation, one would surely be disappointed. The American Methodists developed the basic elements of an ecclesial community at the Christmas Conference and in the succeeding years. But they were too occupied with what had always been the primary task of Methodists—“the saving of souls”¹³—to reflect extensively on the nature of the church. Frederick Norwood describes the situation of the young church:

The Christmas Conference of 1784 marks the matriculation of the Methodist Episcopal Church, not its graduation. The church had been created, but it was almost without form. Its great need was to be raised up in the ways of being a church, not a “society.” One is amazed to discover how very little Methodism in America after the organizing conference differed from its former state. . . . Only gradually, like a conservative man trying to adjust to a sudden and unexpected change of fortune, did American Methodists begin to realize that a society was not yet a church. The story of the transformation of the Wesleyan “connection” into an institution capable of sharing in the life of the universal church of the ages identifies a major theme in the history of American Methodism. In many ways that history has been marked by the struggle of an erstwhile sect for self-understanding as a church.¹⁴

As the Methodists struggled toward this ecclesiological understanding, they did not abandon their identity as “society.” This invited a tension that has continued to characterize the ecclesial experience of Wesleyan

¹²Wesley, *Letters*, 7:238-39.

¹³Wesley, *Works* (Jackson), 8:310.

¹⁴Frederick A. Norwood, “The Church Takes Shape,” in *The History of American Methodism*, gen. ed. Emory Stevens Bucke (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1964), 1:419-420.

bodies. Norwood elsewhere contends that Methodists continued to think of themselves as members of a voluntary society while they organized themselves as a church. "This lack of resolution between two related, but not identical concepts [society and church] has left a permanent mark on the Methodist tradition."¹⁵ Thus the church—and the implicit ecclesiology—which developed in America retained the marks of the early Methodist movement.

We should not be surprised by the ambiguity that marked the transition to ecclesiality—or at least some measure of ecclesiality. Methodism had lost the broader context in which it was meant to operate. This was problematic, as Outler noted, because the unique pattern of the Methodists "was really designed to function best *within* an encompassing environment of *catholicity*."¹⁶ The challenge for the budding church was to forge—and to understand—its identity now that it was on its own. Geoffrey Wainwright has called attention to the ecclesiological notion of "a part, but not the whole" that was utilized by Wesley in dialogue with other traditions. The concept was deployed to challenge exclusive claims to ecclesiality on the part of any one tradition. Wainwright adopts this idea to press the key question of Methodist ecclesial identity: "As far as Methodism is concerned, our question must be: *What kind* of part did, does, and might Methodism constitute in *what kind* of whole?"¹⁷ For the most part, that question was addressed infrequently and unsystematically.

At least one leader in the Methodist Episcopal Church was uneasy with what he saw as the tenuous status of the new ecclesial body. In a remarkable letter dated April 24, 1791, Bishop Thomas Coke wrote to Bishop William White of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the hopes of initiating talks toward reunion. Coke suggests that the Methodists in America had realized an unexpected degree of independence, and that Wesley regretted this as much as Coke did. He writes:

In consequence of this, I am not sure but I went further in the separation of our Church in America, than Mr. Wesley, from whom I had received my commission, did intend. He did

¹⁵Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1974), 119.

¹⁶Outler, "Do Methodists Have a Doctrine of the Church?," 225, author's emphasis.

¹⁷Geoffrey Wainwright, *The Ecumenical Moment: Crisis and Opportunity for the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 192, author's emphasis.

indeed solemnly invest me, as far as he had a right so to do, with Episcopal authority, but did not intend, I think, that an entire separation should take place. He, being pressed by our friends on this side of the water for ministers to administer the sacraments to them, (there being very few clergy of the Church of England then in the states), went farther, I am sure, than he would have gone if he had foreseen some events which followed. And this I am certain of—that he is now sorry for the separation.¹⁸

Even if we account for overstatement in service of Coke's desire for union with the Episcopal Church,¹⁹ the sense of ecclesiological inadequacy implicit in the letter is striking.

Of course, Coke's partner in the episcopacy was of a very different mind. Coke knew that "Mr. Asbury, whose influence is very capital, will not easily comply [with efforts toward reunion]: nay, I know he will be exceedingly averse to it."²⁰ Because of this, Coke pleaded with White to keep the correspondence a secret. Indeed, Asbury's reaction upon discovering the letter has been described as "furious."²¹ As it turns out, Coke's flirtations with the Episcopal Church did not lead anywhere. By the time Bishop White's favorable reply arrived, Coke had just been informed of Wesley's death and had thus left for England. Coke's letter does imply that at least one prominent Methodist was uncomfortable with the ecclesial situation of the young church, and that he felt the cords of catholicity were being stretched beyond his liking. His gradual disconnection from the life and leadership of the church in America—especially in comparison to the role enjoyed by Asbury—was perhaps indicative of the direction the American Methodists would continue to travel.

It was not the case that the early Methodist Episcopal Church lacked *any* doctrine of the church. But it would be fair to characterize the ecclesiology that emerged as minimalist and essentially "functional." In this vein, Outler writes: "Typically, when Methodists have felt a lack in mat-

¹⁸Thomas Coke to William White, Richmond, VA, 24 April, 1791, in *The Methodist Experience in America: A Sourcebook*, ed. Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2000), 2:103.

¹⁹John Vickers, *Thomas Coke: Apostle of Methodism* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1969), 180.

²⁰Thomas Coke to William White, *The Methodist Experience in America*, 2:104.

²¹Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism*, 121.

ters ecclesiological, they have looked about for whatever seemed handy and truly useful—and then proceeded to adapt it to their own uses and purposes (often quite different from the original).”²² To a significant extent, the seeds of an essentially pragmatic doctrine of the church were found in the thought of John Wesley himself.

In his important work *John Wesley and the Church of England*, Frank Baker traced the development of Wesley’s own ecclesiology within its Anglican context. He writes, “already by 1746 Wesley saw the essence of the church and its ministry as functional rather than institutional.”²³ But the broader Anglican sensibilities that rounded out Wesley’s conception of the church were short-lived on the other side of the Atlantic. In the words of Paul Bassett, “what American Methodism picked up from Wesley was precisely the essence of his functional view of the church. But the American Revolution had wiped away the larger, more catholic context of the Church of England.”²⁴ The ecclesiology that emerged among the Methodists in America was centered almost entirely on the *mission* of the church. Evangelism and nurture constituted the *raison d’être* of the nascent church, and the identity and structures of the community were oriented toward those ends.

The Consequences of Purely Functional Ecclesiology

There is no denying that generations of earnest Christians have been welcomed into and nurtured in the Christian life as heirs of this legacy.

²²Outler, “Do Methodists Have a Doctrine of the Church?,” 220. He proceeds to give four products of this functional approach in the American Methodist context: (1) episcopal polity, (2) the scheme of representation and delegation in the conference system, (3) the written constitution of 1808, and (4) the patterns of frontier expansion and settlement.

²³Frank Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1970), 149. It is worth noting that Baker is contrasting a “functional” understanding of the church with an “institutional” view. As will become clear, my primary concern is not that Wesleyan ecclesiology develops or recovers an institutional ecclesiology. Rather, my question is whether “ecclesiology as mission” adequately maintains catholicity or “fullness” in the community of faith. On Wesley’s functional ecclesiology, see also Clarence Bence, “Salvation and the Church: The Ecclesiology of John Wesley,” in *The Church: An Inquiry into Ecclesiology from a Biblical Theological Perspective*, ed. Melvin E. Dieter and Daniel N. Berg (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1984), 297-317.

²⁴Paul M. Bassett, “A Response to Jeffrey Gros,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 39 (2004): 49.

Wesleyan communities of faith have aimed to fulfill their mission faithfully, with countless stories of success. Yet all is far from perfect in the various branches of the tradition. In both “mainline Methodist” and Wesleyan/Holiness spheres, questions about communal identity persistently arise.²⁵ The discerning interpreter of these conversations might recognize a fundamental ecclesiological question being pressed: what is the reality that *grounds* the mission of the church? If we grant that it is ultimately God who calls, equips, and empowers believers to fulfill their distinct mission, we still must ask: is there a reality pertaining to the church catholic that transcends—and through which God sustains—the mission of the church? If this is the case, then we would expect significant consequences to result from the patterns we have traced in American Methodism thus far. Perhaps their essentially functional ecclesiology and their detachment from a broader ecclesial context have tended to disconnect Wesleyan communities from the full resources of the church catholic—the very resources that fund its mission. I want to suggest that just such a tendency has characterized the communities of the Wesleyan tradition, as reflected in three key developments.

Consequence #1. First, there has been a tendency to reduce the doxological dimension of the church to means that serve particular ends—and those ends are centered in the formative and evangelistic dimensions. I want to make it clear that I am *not* arguing that worship has not been an important and valued part of the experience of churches throughout the Wesleyan tradition. The rich hymnody of the tradition is just one example of the crucial place of worship in the Christian life. What I *am* arguing is that the practices of worship are valued primarily for the salvific ends that they cultivate. Worship and the means of grace have commonly been conceived as instruments which help to bring forth holiness in the believer (and, of course, they ultimately help to bring the believer closer to God). The seeds of this orientation can be seen in Wesley himself. For example, we may recall the letter that he sent to America with Coke. In that letter, he regarded the liturgical resources that he was sending as a “way of feeding and guiding these poor sheep in the wilder-

²⁵For one example, note the challenges over the past few decades in identifying the doctrinal standards of the United Methodist Church. See William J. Abraham, *Waking from Doctrinal Amnesia: The Healing of Doctrine in the United Methodist Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1995).

ness.” Furthermore, as Howard Snyder has demonstrated, Wesley was concerned that the sacraments and other means of grace should be regarded as means rather than ends.²⁶

I do not suggest that such an understanding is inherently problematic; indeed, the conviction that there are crucial formative benefits to be found in the practices of worship is a cherished Wesleyan emphasis. The concern I am raising involves the ecclesiological consequence of this emphasis when an evangelical order makes the transition to church. Specifically, the notion of a worshipping community as an end in itself—and *doxology as part of the essence of the church*—is notably rare in Wesleyan ecclesiology. We see little if any equivalent of the idea, common to Eastern Orthodox ecclesiology, that the church shares in the life of the triune God in its doxological practice (and particularly in the eucharist).²⁷ Or one could point to the concept of *koinonia*, so central in recent ecumenical ecclesiology, whereby the common sacramental life of the church is a reflection of the communion of the Holy Trinity. In his striking discussion of *koinonia* from a Wesleyan perspective, Brian E. Beck presses the importance of the “Godward dimension” of the church’s life: “until that Godward dimension becomes central to our reflection on what the church is and our ordering of its life, our vision will remain distorted.”²⁸ Creating essential—rather than merely instrumental—space for the doxological dimension would not only be compatible with the distinctive mission that has centered Wesleyan ecclesiology. It would also reorient the community of faith toward the God that empowers it to fulfill that mission.

Consequence #2. A second development in Wesleyan ecclesiology, deeply related to the first, has been that the primary importance of the community is grounded in service to the individual. It is well known that Wesley placed a deep emphasis on the *communal* context of the Christian life. He sought to demonstrate that “Christianity is essentially a

²⁶Howard A. Snyder, *The Radical Wesley and Patterns for Church Renewal* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1980), 102.

²⁷See, for example, John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985).

²⁸Brian E. Beck, “Connexion and Koinonia: Wesley’s Legacy and the Ecumenical Ideal,” in *Rethinking Wesley’s Theology for Contemporary Methodism*, ed. Randy L. Maddox (Nashville, TN: Kingswood, 1998), 137.

social religion, and that to turn it into a solitary religion is indeed to destroy it.”²⁹ As American Methodism found its way from society to church, generally speaking, this communal emphasis continued. If we ask *why* Christian community is essential, however, we discover that its primary importance is *for the development of the individual*. The shape and structures of the community are largely determined by the salvific need of believers. Beck recognizes this as one difference between the notions of “connexion” and “*koinonia*”:

If there is a difference between *koinonia* and connexion on these issues, apart from the language, it might be the starting point. Wesley began at the micro-level, with the needs and relationships of individual believers, and worked outward from them via the local church to the wider connexion. *Koinonia*, because the setting for the discussion is worldwide ecumenical relations, begins at the macro-level and works inward toward the local church.³⁰

In Wesley’s case, he never lost sight of the broader context of catholicity in which the needs of believers were met. As Outler notes, “significantly, and at every point, Wesley defined the church as *act*, as mission, as the enterprise of saving and maturing souls in the Christian life. This vision of the church as mission was to be realized and implemented within the Anglican perspective of the church as form and institution.”³¹

When the Methodist movement was forced to develop its own form as an ecclesial community, the salvific enterprise gave fundamental shape to that form. The communal expression of the Christian faith was the norm, but the essential purpose of the community was the formation of the individual. In the contemporary setting, this is perhaps more characteristic of Wesleyan/Holiness communities than it is of mainline Methodism (although there are indications that at least some Wesleyan/Holiness bodies are flirting with more “catholic” ecclesiological statements).³² The functional ecclesiology characteristic of American Methodism has thus cast the primary importance of the community of faith as directed toward

²⁹Wesley, *Sermons*, ed. Albert C. Outler, vol. 1 in *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1976-), 533.

³⁰Beck, “Connexion and Koinonia,” 138.

³¹Outler, “Do Methodists Have a Doctrine of the Church?,” 219.

³²See the fascinating discussion of these developments in Bassett, “A Response to Jeffrey Gros,” 46-53.

the individual.³³ The idea of the church as a visible community of worship is subordinated to the fundamental notion that the church is the context of salvation for individual believers.

Consequence #3. A third and final consequence of the Methodists' unique ecclesial narrative is the selective embrace of the canonical heritage. The term "canonical heritage" is employed by William J. Abraham to refer to the vast treasures of ecclesial life shared by the church catholic. Abraham notes that the Christian church did not just canonize a collection of biblical texts. Rather,

Ecclesial canons comprise materials, persons, and practices officially or semi-officially identified and set apart as a means of grace and salvation by the Christian community. They are represented by such entities as creed, Scripture, liturgy, iconography, the Fathers, and sacraments.³⁴

The tendency of a functional ecclesiology is to take only what is needed (or what one thinks is needed) from this wide range of canons. Such selectivity is precisely what has occurred in the churches of the Wesleyan tradition.

While Scripture has been embraced across the board as a central feature of Methodist life, the rest of the canonical heritage has been utilized as needed. To be sure, different branches of the tradition have embraced—and neglected—different elements. A rich sacramental and liturgical life, for example, is wanting in some parts of the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition. The challenge of mainline Methodism to find its doctrinal bearings can be understood largely in light of the failure to embrace the church's rule of faith as normative for belief and practice. It is difficult to find substantial utilization of the iconographic heritage of the church anywhere in the Wesleyan tradition. Many resources that could potentially sustain and revitalize the distinct mission of Methodists await

³³To recognize that this is typical of Protestant ecclesiology is not to eliminate the distinctiveness of the Methodist situation. In the transition from order to church, the heirs of Wesley lost something of the *via media* ecclesiology of their Anglican parent. In other words, unlike many other Protestant traditions, the Methodists have resources for a broader ecclesiological vision in their roots.

³⁴William J. Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology: From the Fathers to Feminism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 1.

rediscovery.³⁵ These elements of the canonical heritage need not subvert or threaten the unique identities of the various communities of the Wesleyan tradition. Rather, they could be embraced in a manner that is consistent with the distinctive emphases of each community. The aim would be ecclesial enrichment, not the loss or distortion of identity.

Rather than imagining the full canonical heritage being drawn outward to discrete traditions, however, it might be preferable to envision the various traditions seeking to draw closer to catholicity. This need not weaken the passion for mission or evangelism; in fact, the geographical fullness implied in the notion of catholicity indicates an evangelistic imperative. Catholicity also implies the full resources of the *Una Sancta* by which such a mission can be sustained. The image that might best illuminate such a recovery is drawn—admittedly out of context—from Catherine of Siena. In addressing the relation between receiving a neighbor’s love and receiving God’s love, Catherine writes:

If you have received my love sincerely without self-interest, you will drink your neighbor’s love sincerely. It is just like a vessel that you fill at the fountain. If you take it out of the fountain to drink, the vessel is soon empty. But if you hold your vessel in the fountain while you drink, it will not get empty. Indeed, it will always be full.³⁶

While Catherine clearly had individuals in mind, the image translates nicely to ecclesial communities.

If we imagine the water not as a neighbor’s love, but rather as the nourishing resources of the canonical heritage, the point comes clearly into view. When we remove these resources from context of catholicity, the vessels (which can be conceived as the apparatus of the church’s mission) can run dry. When we remain in (or return to) the fountain, whose essence is fundamentally *doxological*, the resources that sustain that mission flow freely. The more that Wesleyan communities of faith can draw from this “fountain,” the better equipped they will be to pursue their mission.

³⁵One should not read into this suggestion the argument that merely connecting churches in the Wesleyan tradition to some other body, such as the Anglican communion, would ensure such vitality—history confirms no such easy solution. It does imply a very particular hazard in trying to “go it alone,” which is presumably one reason why Wesley resisted separation for so long.

³⁶Catherine of Siena, *The Dialogue*, trans. Suzanne Noffke (New York: Paulist, 1980), 120-21.

Proposals for Ecclesiological Enrichment

In exploring these developments, I would not want to suggest that the Methodist pursuit of its vocation has been a failure. As already noted, stories of faithfulness and success abound in its history. We can account for this by appealing to a robust pneumatology. The Holy Spirit moves and works even when the church is wanting for the fullness of catholicity. Given the prevalent divisions within and between the traditions of the Christian faith, this is especially reassuring. Yet, if we recognize the current quest for self-understanding among various Wesleyan communities, as well as the (somewhat) favorable ecumenical climate at the beginning of the 21st century, it seems that the current moment holds promise for a fuller embrace of catholicity. To that end, I offer three proposals for such a “return to the fountain.”

Proposal #1. First, broader ecclesiological reflection is needed in all corners of the Wesleyan world. In particular, the question must be addressed directly: is a purely functional ecclesiology sufficient? Or is it the case that the essence of the church is something more than just mission? As I have already suggested, this “something more” might well provide fruitful resources to enable the church to fulfill its mission more effectively. I want to be cautious at this point, however, lest the proposal be understood as yet another functional ecclesiology on a broader scale. Sharply stated, the church *is* more than what the church *does*.

One direction in which this kind of ecclesiological reflection might move is eschatology. For example, the church as a sign of the kingdom of God begins to capture this sense of “something more.”³⁷ It is crucial that the eschatology engaged is sufficiently nuanced, so that the living experience of the kingdom is not thrust entirely into the future. Another potentially rich arena for reflection on the church is Trinitarian theology. One example to be found outside of the Wesleyan context is Miroslav Volf’s *After Our Likeness*, which explores Trinitarian ecclesiology in ecumenical conversation.³⁸ In that work, Volf develops a free church ecclesiology that includes a substantial doxological dimension. Perhaps this work can serve

³⁷For an illuminating discussion of the relationship between the church and the kingdom of God in the Wesleyan context, see Howard A. Snyder, *The Community of the King* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1977, rev. ed. 2004).

³⁸Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

as a model for Wesleyan ecclesiology, the kind of engagement that might lead beyond a purely functional conception of the church.

Proposal #2. The ecumenical approach taken by Volf leads to a second proposal for Wesleyan communities: ecumenical engagement for the purpose of recovering and sharing elements of the canonical heritage. It is true that this is a much more modest proposal than Outler's vision that Methodism would lead the way to visible union.³⁹ Despite the significant gains in the ecumenical movement over the past few decades, the divided churches do not appear much closer to that goal than when his essay appeared in 1964. Yet there is a great deal to be gleaned from serious and honest dialogue with other traditions, even if that dialogue falls short of visible union.

Each tradition has embraced particular elements of the canonical heritage in a distinct pattern. Thus, genuine engagement between traditions can lead to an "ecumenical gift exchange."⁴⁰ This involves not only *drawing* from other traditions, but also *sharing* with others the distinctives that have shaped a given tradition. Geoffrey Wainwright has captured nicely this notion of sharing gifts: "while it [Methodist holiness] may serve as a 'leaven' (one of Wesley's favorite images in connection with the spread of holiness) in the ecumenical movement, a more catholic environment will in turn restore to it the sacramental dimension which the Wesleys' teaching and practice never lacked."⁴¹ Furthermore, while mainline Methodism has long been active in the ecumenical movement, there is increasing attention being given to the place of the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition in ecumenism.⁴² The time appears ripe for the communities of the Wesleyan tradition to draw closer to the fountain of catholicity, both for its own good and for the good of other traditions.

³⁹Outler, "Do Methodists Have a Doctrine of the Church?," 226.

⁴⁰The language is drawn from Margaret O'Gara, *The Ecumenical Gift Exchange* (Collegetown, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998).

⁴¹Wainwright, *The Ecumenical Moment*, 199.

⁴²Barry L. Callen and James B. North, *Coming Together in Christ: Pioneering a Way to Christian Unity* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1997); David L. Cubie, "A Wesleyan Perspective on Christian Unity," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 33 (1998): 198-229; Donald W. Dayton, "The Holiness Witness in the Ecumenical Church," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 23 (1988): 92-106; James Earl Massey, *Concerning Christian Unity: A Study of the Relational Imperative of Agape Love* (Anderson, IN: Warner, 1979); Elizabeth H. Mellen, "An Ecumenical Vocation for the Wesleyan/Holiness Tradition?," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 34 (1999): 101-125.

Proposal #3. A third and final proposal is that the resources of the canonical heritage should be appropriated by Wesleyan communities of faith in a distinctively *Wesleyan* manner. Recovered catholicity need not—and I would argue that it should not—entail “the end of the Wesleyan”⁴³ or a loss of Wesleyan identity. Rather, the reception of the gifts of other traditions should be oriented by decidedly Wesleyan theological criteria.

I suggest that the central thematic of “responsible grace,” demonstrated by Randy Maddox to be an orienting concern of Wesley’s overall theology, should come to the fore of any such criteria.⁴⁴ Wesleyans should also be suspicious of practices or materials that would compromise other distinctive dialectics. Such dialectics would include a notion of salvation as both forgiveness and healing, as well as an understanding of Christian formation as engaging both the affections and the mind.⁴⁵ The particular set of concerns that have shaped Wesleyan communities, therefore, would guide the appropriation of (for example) the writings of the saints or iconography. Approached from this angle, the move toward catholicity could actually strengthen, deepen, and enrich the Wesleyan identity of these churches. The encounter with new or forgotten treasures would revitalize ecclesial life, enabling communities to understand themselves as Wesleyan *and* as part of the *Una Sancta*. The mission of evangelism and Christian nurture that have given shape to Wesleyan ecclesiology could thus emerge afresh out of a visible community of worship, equipped with the full resources of the canonical heritage.

⁴³The language is drawn from John W. Wright and J. Douglas Harrison, “The Ecclesial Practice of Reconciliation and the End of the ‘Wesleyan,’” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 37 (2002): 194-214.

⁴⁴Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 18-19.

⁴⁵For a helpful discussion of “heart and head” and other distinctive Wesleyan “conjunctions,” see Paul Wesley Chilcote, *Recapturing the Wesleys’ Vision: An Introduction to the Faith of John and Charles Wesley* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004).

POLITICAL CRITIQUE: CHURCH PRAxis FROM THE FRAMEWORK OF THE BOOK OF AMOS

by

Brad E. Kelle

“If he does not love the King, he cannot love God.”¹

“For thus Amos has said, ‘[King] Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from his land’ ”
(Amos 7:11; NRSV).

“Political image . . . is a corporate concept that pertains to the whole of humankind collectively, not simply to particular individuals, classes, or offices. Nothing human is excluded from the political imaging of God.”²

Defining a church’s identity and praxis is a complex task. Churches in the Wesleyan tradition stand in the unique position of attempting to construct this definition in dialogue with two literary corpses: the biblical texts and John Wesley’s writings. The intersection of these two sources rarely creates more difficulty than in the area of the church’s desired involvement in politics. How and how much, if at all, should the church be involved in political critique and/or advocacy in relation to the state?

¹John Wesley, “A Word to a Freeholder,” in *The Works of John Wesley* (3d ed; 14 vols; Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1986), XI: 197.

²Theodore Weber, *Politics in the Order of Salvation: New Directions in Wesleyan Political Ethics* (Nashville: Kingwood, 2001), 399; italics original.

Biblical texts of various genres frequently speak of things that are political in nature. Likewise, while Wesley is perhaps better known for his social critique and advocacy on behalf of the poor, his writings contain much that concerns politics. Yet difficulty on this point arises because a tension exists within Wesley's writings over the question of political involvement.³ On one hand, Wesley himself frequently addresses political concerns and engages in critique of political leaders, even if espousing a conservative and, at times, reactionary political ethic. On the other hand, he equally as often excludes political engagement from the praxis of the church and admonishes his preachers to avoid such activity. This tension leaves the churches in Wesley's tradition without a developed political language and in need of means to connect the elements in their founder's own identity and praxis. Moreover, as this paper will argue, Wesley contributes to this tension by overlooking certain biblical writings that commend themselves as significant resources for the church in this regard.

The purpose of this paper is to explore how the intersection of Wesley's writings and one body of biblical material can offer a means of explaining the tension in Wesley's thought and moving beyond the tension in church praxis.⁴ The biblical writing I have chosen is the canonical form of the book of Amos. Recent scholarship on Amos has moved from a near-exclusive concentration on the book's historical development and editorial layers to an appreciation of the canonical composition's literary coherence and structural features. Seen in this way, the book of Amos contains a literary framework that is explicitly political in nature and provides an interpretive lens for the book's often-noted emphases on social justice.

Amos provides a specifically political voice that can disclose some resources in Wesley's thought—largely underappreciated by Wesley himself—and help construct the church's reflection on political engagement. To anticipate the conclusion: the structural framework of the book of

³Several recent works on Wesley take up this issue, explain his positions, and explore new directions. See T. Jennings, *Good News to the Poor: John Wesley's Evangelical Economics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990); G. Maddox, ed., *Political Writings of John Wesley* (Primary Sources in Political Thought; Durham: University of Durham Press, 1998); and Weber, *Politics*.

⁴To use Weber's articulation, the goal here is to contribute to the development of a "Wesleyan political language that remains Wesleyan in its theology while transcending the limitations of Wesley's political thought" (*Politics*, 416).

Amos emphasizes political critique as a central part of the prophetic “office” within the people of God. This emphasis, when combined with some aspects of Wesley’s thought, transforms political involvement from a particular “office” within God’s people to a democratized task that includes all participants in the community of faith.

Wesley on Politics: Tension and Contradiction

The starting point for this exploration is a set of tensions over political engagement present in John Wesley’s writings. At various moments in his career, Wesley insists that he has no interest in politics: “I am no politician; politics lie quite outside of my province. Neither have I any acquaintance, at least no intimacy, with *any* that bear that character.”⁵ Even while making these assertions, however, he repeatedly engages in political dialogue and thereby complicates both his self-representation and his positions.⁶ On these occasions, one encounters a tension between Wesley’s social ethics of concern for the poor and his consistently reactionary and conservative political views. For example, in each of the major political conflicts of his time in which he becomes involved, including the American colonies’ moves for independence, Wesley articulates a quietist position.⁷ Even when he criticizes the government’s sins in

⁵“Free Thoughts on the Present State of Public Affairs: In a Letter to a Friend,” in *Works* XI:14.

⁶Weber, *Politics*, 41, 125. As Hynson observes, Wesley “disclaimed any political competence or interest. Yet he continually contradicted that stance by political action, appeals to leaders, and [gives] advice to citizens . . . so that many would say of him, ‘What right does a minister have to mix religion and politics?’” (Leon Hynson, *To Reform the Nation: Theological Foundations of Wesley’s Ethics* [Grand Rapids: Francis and Taylor, 1984], 30). For examples of Wesley engaging in critique of political leaders and policies, see “Free Thoughts on the Present State of Public Affairs: In a Letter to a Friend,” in *Works* XI: 14-33, “A Calm Address to Our American Colonies,” in *Works* XI: 80-89, and “An Estimate of the Manners of the Present Times” in *Works* XI: 156-63.

⁷See for example, Hynson, *To Reform the Nation*, 29 and Jennings, *Good News*, 199. Wesley became most explicitly involved in three political controversies of his time: (1) Wesley supported King George II against the Jacobite rebellion of 1745, (2) Wesley argued against democratic reforms in England in the 1760s, and (3) Wesley largely opposed the American colonies’ moves for independence in the 1770s. For his responses to the Revolutionary War, see “A Calm Address to Our American Colonies,” in *Works* XI: 80-89 and “National Sins and Miseries,” in *Works* VII: 403.

the areas of religious and civil liberties,⁸ Wesley articulates views that predominantly defend the English monarchy, oppose democracy, and advocate passive obedience. While calling on the government to legislate some of his social convictions, like the elimination of the slave trade, or enjoining politicians to help establish his “Scriptural Christianity” in the world, Wesley defends the English monarchy in Tory-like fashion.⁹ Wesley does eventually come to the conclusion that a person is justified, in certain cases, in distinguishing between obedience to God and obedience to government officials who possess a discretionary authority, but, in keeping with the Church of England, he remains steadfast in his advocacy of obedience to the established authorities and offers the litmus test of a follower with the phrase, “If he does not love the King, he cannot love God.”¹⁰

For consideration of Wesleyan church praxis, however, the most profound tension over politics appears in the contrast between Wesley’s own participation in political critique and his consistent exclusion of such involvement from the praxis of his churches. In his writings, Wesley

⁸E.g., Wesley’s “National Sins and Miseries” in *Works* VII: 400-408 and various political tracts from 1768 to 1782 in which he criticized the kings of England on issues of religious and civil liberty (cf. Hynson, *To Reform the Nation*, 49).

⁹For his comments on the slave trade, see “A Seasonable Address to the More Serious Part of the Inhabitants of Great Britain,” in *Works* XI: 126. Cf. Jennings, *Good News*, 91 and Maddox, *Political Writings*, 33. For his comments on “Scriptural Christianity,” see the sermon “Scriptural Christianity” (A. Outler and R. Heitzenrater, eds., *John Wesley’s Sermons: An Anthology* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1991], 107).

¹⁰“A Word to a Freeholder,” in *Works* XI: 197. Wesley’s allowance for occasional disobedience came from his combination of Rom. 13:1 and Acts 5:29. Weber (*Politics*, 234-46) has demonstrated that Wesley’s political thought underwent a shift as a result of increasing reliance on Acts 5:29, “But Peter and the apostles answered, ‘We must obey God rather than any human authority’” (NRSV). Wesley, it is argued, gave this text priority over Rom. 13:1 so that the primary obligation of the Christian was active obedience to God rather than passive obedience to human authority. Thus, in essential matters related to the Gospel, Wesley felt free to criticize and disobey lesser magistrates. See, for example, Wesley’s comments to the mayor of Shaftesbury in 1750, “While King George gives me leave to preach, I shall not ask leave of the Mayor of Shaftesbury” (*Journal*, Sept. 3, 1750; quoted in *ibid.*, 241). Weber’s observations seem sound. Nonetheless, in the majority of cases, Wesley’s political writings preserve the language and emphasis of Rom. 13:1. Note the reference to the authority of the king in Wesley’s rebuttal to the mayor of Shaftesbury.

repeatedly admonishes his preachers to avoid political engagement at local and national levels. As Maddox observes, Wesley's desire that the church be active in reforming society, especially on behalf of the poor, has significant implications for political change, but he consistently urges his followers to pursue a quietist path in politics.¹¹ The aptly-named address, "How Far Is It the Duty of a Christian Minister to Preach Politics?" clearly gives his view that a preacher is to enter the realm of politics only to refute slander of the king:

Generally, therefore, it behooves us to be silent, as we may suppose they know their own business best; but when they are censured without any colour of reason and when an odium is cast on the King by that means, we ought to preach politics in this sense also; we ought publicly to confute those unjust censures: Only remembering still, that this is rarely to be done, and only when fit occasion offers; it being our main business to preach "repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ."¹²

Another expression of this tension appears in the sermon "The More Excellent Way" in which Wesley describes the "higher order" of the Christian life as marked by an intentional avoidance of political critique: "For what have you to do with courts and kings? It is not your business to fight o'er the wars, reform the state, unless when some remarkable event calls for the acknowledgment of God."¹³ Similarly, in a series of letters concerning the Revolutionary War, he uses the analogy of Atticus in the Roman civil wars to suggest that the church should maintain neutrality in the conflict.¹⁴ He even proposes that American preachers should take their ministry to rural areas, where they will have more response because "they know little and talk little about politics. Their hearts are engaged with something better, and they let the dead bury their dead."¹⁵ Indeed, one of the long-standing rules of Wesley's United Societies is the prohibition of "unprofitable" conversation in which he includes criticism of

¹¹Maddox, *Political Writings*, 42, f.n. 1; cf. Jennings, *Good News*, 221.

¹²*Works* XI: 155.

¹³Quoted in Outler and Heitzenrater, *Sermons*, 517.

¹⁴"Letters to Mr. Thomas Rankin," in *Works* XII: 329.

¹⁵*Ibid.* In this same context, Wesley alludes to taking personal action if he gets the chance to speak to a "great man," but he does not call for action by the church (*ibid.*, 330).

political authorities.¹⁶ As Maddox concludes, “Wesley ever sought to keep politics out of religion, except in so far as he taught that it was right for good Christians to obey the powers that be.”¹⁷

The Source(s) of Wesley’s Tension and Its Lingering Effects

In a previous publication, I explored the possible reasons why Wesley vigorously espoused conservative political views and actively discouraged political involvement by his churches.¹⁸ The most frequent explanation offered is that Wesley’s conservative political ethics are the result of his historical and social context.¹⁹ Since he was closely tied to the Church of England, Wesley saw himself as having an obligation to the King. Wesley also believed that the stable institution of the monarchy provided the best protection for the human rights and religious liberties to which he was committed. Experiences of the early Methodists, in which they suffered persecution due to their work among the poor but received the intervention of monarchs like King George II that stopped the persecution and ensured their religious freedom, helped to shape these convictions.²⁰ Although the establishment was open to critique on various

¹⁶On the basis of these positions, it appears that Wesley defined the church’s role and function in the world without reference to political action and solely on the basis of a spiritual emphasis with social dimensions. For example, he affirmed the Church of England’s article that defines the church as a congregation characterized by a “living faith,” “preaching,” and “due administration of the sacraments” (“An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion,” in *Works* VIII: 31; cf. Hynson, *To Reform the Nation*, 132). Drawing upon these conclusions, Elie Halevy has suggested the disputed thesis that the Wesleyan revival took away the momentum of citizens from political and social action by its focus on spiritual goals (*The Birth of Methodism in England* [ed. B. Semmel; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971]). For responses and rebuttals, see Hynson, *To Reform the Nation*, 142, 172, f.n. 3.

¹⁷Maddox, *Political Writings*, 35.

¹⁸Brad Kelle, “Fear God and Honour the King? The Political Thought of John Wesley in Prophetic Perspective,” in *It’s All About Grace: Wesleyan Essays in Honor of Herbert L. Prince* (ed. S. Powell; San Diego: Point Loma Press, 2004), 56-65.

¹⁹Jennings, *Good News*, 200, 209-210; Weber, *Politics*, 14, 21.

²⁰For example, in the 1740s, Methodist work among the poor was seen as stirring up the masses and threatening the interests of the political and religious aristocracy. This perception led to persecution within that decade, apparently including a campaign to round up preachers to be put on ships as slaves (for a description of one such incident, see “Modern Christianity Exemplified at Wednesbury,” in *Works* XIII: 169-93). In the midst of this crisis, King George II interceded to stop the persecution (see Wesley’s summary of this intervention in “On God’s Vineyard,” in *Works* VII: 210). In light of these incidents, Jennings (*Good News*, 207, 210; cf. Weber, *Politics*, 21) suggests that Wesley’s support of the status quo may have been a defensive posture directly tied to such accusations against Methodists.

points, Wesley's political conservatism and passive obedience, it has been suggested, were forged in a social situation where the powers that he had saved the Methodists from persecution and given Wesley reason to believe in the general worth of the present system.

While there can be no doubt that Wesley's social context was very influential on his views, my previous investigation suggested that there is another, often under-appreciated, aspect of Wesley's thought that also shaped his positions. Wesley repeatedly appealed directly and indirectly to particular biblical texts in the formation of his political ethic. He employed, however, only a limited range of biblical texts and read them in a way that was heavily influenced by his social context.²¹ For example, the majority of Wesley's political comments cited directly or relied indirectly on his understanding of Rom. 13:1, "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God" (NRSV).²² Wesley connected Rom. 13 to the political ideas of eighteenth-century Britain, in which the sovereign was understood to be authorized by divine right. Political authorities, who were established by divine right, should be obeyed as one would obey God.²³ Wesley's own immediate tradition, the Church of England, supported the notion of hereditary divine right for English kings and so reinforced this ethic of passive obedience. Thus Wesley claimed, "It is my *religion* which obliges me 'to put men in mind to be subject to principalities and powers' . . . the *selfsame authority* enjoining me to 'fear God,' and to 'honour the King.'"²⁴ While Wesley made allowance for critiquing political leaders and even for placing obedience to God over obedience to lesser magistrates, he maintained the

²¹See Kelle, "Fear God," 58-62.

²²The interpretation of this verse has played the major role in the history of Christian political thought and has often been linked with the admonition, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:21; NRSV; cf. Mark 12:17; Luke 20:25). See Weber, *Politics*, 233.

²³See Wesley's comments on Rom. 13:1 in *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (repr.; Naperville, IL: Alec Allenson, 1958), 572, where he calls governmental authorities God's "viceregents."

²⁴"Letter to Walter Churchey" (June 25, 1777) quoted in Weber, *Politics*, 235; emphases added. For other expressions of the biblical grounding of Wesley's ethic, see "Thoughts Concerning the Origin of Power," in *Works* XI: 47 and "A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion," in *Works* VIII: 114, 238.

general rule of passive obedience to political authorities and never considered the possibility of calling for the overthrow of the governmental system or the king at its head.

The above observations suggest that Wesley's choices of which biblical texts to read and the social location in which he read them combined to produce his political views and the tensions therein. The effects of this tension on churches in the Wesleyan tradition have been far-reaching. Throughout the 1800s, Methodist leaders in England continued to promote a political ethic of passive obedience and to emphasize the virtue of political non-participation.²⁵ Wesley's spiritual descendants lived up to their founder's terse characterization of them: "We do nothing in defiance of government: We reverence Magistrates, as the Ministers of God."²⁶ Most important for our consideration, the heritage of this tension has left Wesley's churches without a coherent political language. Wesley's political statements and the ways of reading Scripture that accompanied them were contextual and historical and so lack a universal applicability to changing political situations. As Weber observes, unlike the situation with Wesley's social commitments, there is no "common Wesleyan political language," no "common symbols of discourse" with which to "speak *as Wesleyans* about the meaning of political reality and responsibility."²⁷

The construction of such a new Wesleyan language/ethic lies outside the scope of this article and, indeed, any one article.²⁸ Yet my previous investigation concludes by suggesting that extended considerations of the biblical texts that Wesley does *not* engage, considerations that read those texts in different social contexts and with different cultural assumptions, may provide initial resources for a way forward. Wesley's political writings show a particular lack of engagement with the Old Testament prophetic literature, which explicitly addresses political events, personages, and realities. While Wesley employs the prophetic literature on other topics, his writing rarely enters into discussion of the church's political engagement.

Wesley's use of Amos illustrates well his interpretive tendencies. He uses various texts from this book to emphasize positive and negative spir-

²⁵Weber, *Politics*, 20, 252.

²⁶"A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion" in *Works* VIII:114.

²⁷Weber, *Politics*, 17.

²⁸For one such book-length constructive attempt, see *ibid.*

itual practices of individuals and the church. For example, Wesley's comments on Amos 7:10-14, arguably the most explicitly political text in the book, discuss Amaziah's upbraiding of Amos for calling for the overthrow of King Jeroboam (7:9). Wesley notes the critique of the king that Amos makes, but attempts to distinguish between Amos's call for the "house" of Jeroboam to be destroyed (7:9) and Amaziah's accusation that Amos has called for the death of Jeroboam himself. Wesley gives most of his attention, however, to verse 14's allusion to the background and call of Amos.²⁹ Similarly, in his sermon on "The Ministerial Office," he cites Amos's response to Amaziah in 7:14-15 to show that some ministers receive an extraordinary call from God.³⁰ The sermon "A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion" uses several references to Amos to illustrate that some in the church engage in worldly practices and refuse to listen to sound doctrine.³¹ Wesley similarly reads Amos 4:6-11 (a list of natural disasters sent by God on Israel), Amos 5:10 (an accusation that Israelites despise judges who offer judgments), and Amos 7:10, 12, 13 (Amaziah's condemnation of Amos at Bethel), to present the Jews as an example of those who are hardened against God's signs of judgment and refuse to listen to right teaching.³²

These citations represent only a sample of Wesley's readings of the prophets. In his sermons and letters, he predominantly offers readings of prophetic texts that emphasize messianic, eschatological, and spiritual meanings. For example, even when appealing to prophetic texts to call for the end of violence and establishment of peace, Wesley elevates eschatological texts that push realization into the future.³³ These spiritual and

²⁹John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the Old Testament* (repr. William Pine; Salem, OH: Schmul, 1975), 3:2518-2519 and *Works* VII: 275.

³⁰*Works* VII: 275.

³¹For example, Wesley cites Amos 2:7, which condemns Israel for trampling "the head of the poor into the dust of the earth," and Amos 6:1, 4-6, which refers to those who are "at ease in Zion," in order to condemn Christians of his own day who focused on earthly things and engaged in drunkenness and sloth (in *Works* VIII: 139, 141). This sermon also employs Amos 6:1, 3 to say that God condemned the "outside religion" of the Jews that was now being practiced by the church (*ibid.*, 142).

³²*Ibid.*, 143-144.

³³For example, in his sermon "Scriptural Christianity," he offers a picture of a "Christian world" free of violence by citing Isa. 2:2-4 and 11:6, 9. Between these two references, however, he places a citation of Isa. 11:10-12, an eschatological vision that looks forward to a day when all nations will stream to Zion

messianic readings of the prophets are in line with the dominant modes of interpretation of his day.³⁴ Before the nineteenth century, prophets were primarily interpreted as teachers of the Mosaic Law or foretellers of Christ and not as advocates of political critique.

On occasion, however, Wesley reads the prophetic texts in ways that connect with issues of historical reconstruction and social justice.³⁵ In fact, one finds comments on the *political* critique of the prophets in his explanatory notes. Any use of Wesley's *Explanatory Notes Upon the Old Testament* must take account of the fact that they are heavily dependent on Wesley's sources, Matthew Henry and Matthew Poole.³⁶ Yet this characteristic of Wesley's comments on the prophets displays his views more readily. He offers historical and political readings of prophetic texts in his explanatory notes, where he is dependent on Henry and Poole. In his sermons and letters that address political involvement, however, contexts in which he is less dependent on others, he does not make use of prophetic texts. Thus, Wesley remains dependent upon a very limited range of biblical texts for his political ethics and misses the possible implications of the prophetic books for informing church praxis. Particularly to readers in contemporary social locations, Wesley's readings underemphasize the political engagements that the prophetic books contain.

(see Outler and Heitzenrater, *Sermons*, 104). The placement of this middle reference casts Wesley's words as a vision to be fulfilled only in the future and effectively undercuts their power for the present reform of the nation's political and social structures. In this interpretive practice, as often in his writings, Wesley follows the common seventeenth- and eighteenth-century practice of comparing parallel texts, a practice emphasized by his father, Samuel Wesley. For discussion, see Robert Casto, "Exegetical Method in John Wesley's *Explanatory Notes Upon the Old Testament: A Description of His Approach, Use of Sources, and Practice*" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1977), 162, 166.

³⁴Casto ("Exegetical Method") offers an extensive discussion of how Wesley's exegetical methods were generally in line with the contemporary methods of his day.

³⁵For example, see Wesley's explanatory notes on Isa. 8:18; 32:1; Amos 8:6; Mic. 3:10 in G. R. Shoenhals, ed., *John Wesley's Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury, 1990), 324, 378, 383.

³⁶For example, Casto ("Exegetical Method," 215) calculates that only 0.83% of the *Explanatory Notes* are Wesley's own additions to Poole and Henry. Moreover, Wesley relied almost exclusively on Poole for his comments on prophetic books, with the exceptions of Ezekiel, Hosea, and Micah. His notes on Obadiah, Haggai, and Nahum are completely taken from either Poole or Henry (*ibid.*, 216-217).

Given these characteristics of Wesley's writings and the Wesleyan tradition's ongoing effort to construct its praxis in dialogue with both Wesley's writings and biblical texts, what effects might result from the inclusion of the Old Testament prophetic texts in the consideration of political involvement and church praxis? If the book of Amos, for example, can be shown to have a predominantly political dimension, what are the implications that might arise from an extended engagement between that kind of prophetic book and the whole of Wesley's thought? Might this prophetic book provide a resource for the construction of a "different political ethic" based on a "broader biblical foundation than the one Wesley was able to embrace in eighteenth-century England"?³⁷

The Framework of the Book of Amos

Throughout the past century, scholarship has predominantly interpreted the book of Amos through the lens of social justice.³⁸ As Donald Gowan observed, "In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Amos has been appealed to regularly as the Old Testament's classic statement concerning social justice."³⁹ Commentaries, monographs, and articles have proposed that the book's central message is the announcement of judgment for Israel and the primary reason is various kinds of immorality, hypocrisy, and corruption specifically in matters related to the treatment of the needy members of society.⁴⁰ Interpreters have recognized that

³⁷Jennings, *Good News*, 222.

³⁸See J. H. Hayes, *Amos the Eighth-Century Prophet: His Times and His Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988), 13; M. D. Carroll, *Amos—The Prophet and His Oracles: Research on the Book of Amos* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002); R. Melugin, "Amos in Recent Research," *CurBS* 6 (1998): 65-101.

³⁹D. Gowan, "The Book of Amos," in vol. 7 of *The New Interpreter's Bible* (12 vols.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 339.

⁴⁰Some of these types of wrongdoing are particularly located in legal procedures and the cult (see H. W. Wolff, *Joel and Amos* [Hermeneia: Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977], 104). J. Jeremias (*The Book of Amos* [OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998], 3) identifies Amos's condemnations as focusing on three primary areas: (1) luxury from violence against the weak, (2) corrupt judicial practices, and (3) corrupt worship (cf. R. Cripps, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Amos* [New York; Toronto: Macmillan, 1929], 22). For this basic interpretive position on Amos see also J. L. Mays, *Amos* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 10; G. Hasel, *Understanding the Book of Amos: Basic Issues in Current Interpretations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991); P. Kelley, *The Book of Amos: A Study Manual* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1966), 17-18; J. Limburg, *Hosea-Micah* (IBC; Atlanta: John Knox, 1988), 79.

between the opening and closing texts, the book repeatedly addresses issues such as robbery and violence and stringently condemns those who “oppress the poor” and “crush the needy” (4:1; NRSV; cf. 2:6-7; 3:10; 5:7, 10-13, 15, 24; 6:4-8, 11-12; 8:4-7).

This emphasis on social justice, however, has not always been the dominant interpretation of Amos and represents an interpretation forged in particular social locations. The social justice interpretation, which has now become a standard scholarly assumption, was rarely mentioned before the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁴¹ One of the effects of this way of reading Amos has been a general underappreciation of the *political* critique at work in the book. Unlike Hosea, Amos, it has been suggested, may have condemned political rulers, but he did not assign guilt to their foreign policies, attempt to exert political influence, or advocate political reform. Any political critique at work in the book was secondary and to be understood within the book’s primary focus on social justice.⁴²

Yet there is a significant feature of this book that raises another possibility.⁴³ As noted above, contemporary scholarship increasingly stresses engaging the structure and rhetoric of the canonical form of the prophetic books rather than attempting to reconstruct historical backgrounds and retrace editorial processes.⁴⁴ Seen in this way, the final canonical form of Amos contains a literary framework that begins and ends the book in sim-

⁴¹See Gowan, “Amos,” 339. Commentary by early Christian writers on Amos almost never mentions social justice. Similarly, the two NT passages that cite Amos do not do so in contexts concerned with social justice. Acts 7:42-43 quotes Amos 5:25-27, and Acts 15:16-17 quotes Amos 9:11-12.

⁴²For example, see F.I. Andersen and D.N. Freedman, *Amos: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 24A; New York; London: Doubleday, 1989), 20 and W.R. Harper, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936), cxxvii.

⁴³As an example of the possible political interpretations of Amos, the book’s emphasis on oppression and injustice plays a role in liberation theology within the Two-Thirds World. In this context, the prophet’s words provide a catalyst for action that is more political in nature and challenges institutions, power-structures, and even governments. See Carroll, *Amos*, 27-29 and 53-72. For example, Carroll notes that Milton Schwantes correlates the message of Amos with the “total terror” experienced by the poor in Latin America. See M. Schwantes, *Amós: Meditações e Estudos* (São Leopoldo: Sinodal; Petrópolis: Voces, 1987).

⁴⁴See Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 1. Contrast Harper, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*.

ilar fashion and suggests a reconsideration of the importance of political critique for the book as a whole. The framework consists of the book's opening collection of oracles in 1:2-2:16 and closing speech of judgment followed by restoration in 9:7-15. Unlike the rest of the book, both the opening and concluding sections view Israel within an international context and focus on political realities like dynasties, treaties, and warfare. In comparison to the other prophetic books in the canon, the political framework around Amos is unique. While other prophetic books take an interest in international politics and events, Amos alone emphasizes this concern at both the beginning and ending of the book.⁴⁵

This outer frame thus provides the larger context within which the prophet's speeches concerning social justice unfold. The theme of social justice might be seen as an inner frame that stands within the outer frame's theme of politics. In a significant move for the book's rhetoric, however, these inner and outer frames overlap, so that the themes of politics and social justice are intertwined. In the final section of the opening framework, the oracle against Israel in 2:6-16 turns to social justice. Similarly, immediately before the closing of the outer frame in 9:7-15, the final accusation directly addressed to Israel in 8:4-8 highlights mistreatment of the "needy" and "poor."⁴⁶

Framework Part One: Amos 1:2-2:16. The political character of Amos 1:2-2:16 is apparent; the setting is international and the issues are political.⁴⁷ The prophet's words in this opening section represent the genre of "Oracles Against the Nations," a common prophetic genre that calls down judgment on foreign nations for a variety of wicked acts (cf. Isa. 13-23; Jer. 46-51; Ezek. 25-32).⁴⁸ Amos 1-2 describe military atroci-

⁴⁵Isaiah, Ezekiel, and the LXX of Jeremiah place oracles against the nations in the middle of the book while the MT of Jeremiah places them at the end. Obadiah begins with a focus on Edom but then carries that focus through the entire book. See A. G. Auld, *Amos* (OTG; repr.; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 41; Gowan, "Amos," 347; Jeremias, *Amos*, 19.

⁴⁶Jeremias (*Amos*, 6) similarly suggests the presence of a frame in the final form of Amos, but does so from a redaction-critical perspective. He concludes that the "oldest book" of Amos was framed by the oracles against the nations in chs. 1-2 and the series of visions in chs. 7-9, which both contain five strophes and are linked thematically. He omits, however, the political oracles at the end of ch.9, which he sees as later additions.

⁴⁷Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 231.

⁴⁸For a survey of approaches to this genre, see Hasel, *Understanding the Book of Amos*, 57-69.

ties and violations of treaties, portray Yahweh as a god whose activity extends to the whole world, and depict divine judgment by using imagery of military destruction where a nation's political leaders and infrastructures are destroyed. For example, in condemning the nation of Ammon, the prophet, speaking for Yahweh, declares, "For three transgressions of the Ammonites, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they have ripped open pregnant women in Gilead in order to enlarge their territory. So I will kindle a fire against the wall of Rabbah, fire that shall devour its strongholds . . ." (Amos 1:13-14; NRSV).⁴⁹

Several possibilities may explain the nature of these critiques and why these nations stand condemned before Yahweh in the prophet's view. It does not appear, however, that the prophet operates here with an implicit monotheism in which all nations are subject to Yahweh's laws even without knowing them, since there is no clear ethical system that underlies the condemnations.⁵⁰ Neither do these oracles rely on a simplistic Israelite nationalism, since they include the ironic oracles against Israel and Judah.⁵¹ Rather, Amos here picks up on generally accepted international codes of conduct in warfare and offers a theological critique of recent political events affecting Israel and Judah in his time.⁵²

⁴⁹Although this article deals with the final form of Amos, there has been much scholarly discussion over redactional issues and the integrity of this opening sequence of oracles. It is often suggested that the oracles against Tyre, Edom, and Judah (and perhaps Israel and Philistia) are later additions since the structure of these three oracles differs from that of the others, the vocabulary contains some unique elements, and the historical situations may reflect the experiences of the exilic and postexilic period (see Gowan, "Amos," 353; Mays, *Amos*, 41; Jeremias, *Amos*, 29; Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 112). Others have argued, however, that the rhetoric of all eight oracles in Amos 1-2 possesses certain similarities and variations that do not preclude their originality (see Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 206, 344; Hayes, *Amos*, 50-55; Paul, *Amos*, 17-27).

⁵⁰E.g., Cripps, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 24; contra Jeremias, *Amos*, 31. But cf. Gowan's ("Amos," 357-358) proposal that Yahweh is cast in the role of a forceful advocate for the suffering, who will intervene wherever oppression exists. For a survey of various views on this issue, see Hayes, *Amos*, 59-61.

⁵¹E.g., A. Kapelrud, *Central Ideas in Amos* (repr.; Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1961), 22. Furthermore, the political misdeeds in these texts do not all reflect revolts against treaties with Israel, since several of the oracles do not include crimes against Israel (so Paul, *Amos*, 45).

⁵²So Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 27; Hayes, *Amos* 58, 61; Mays, *Amos*, 28.

Even more explicitly political than the genre are the key terms and themes that run throughout all of the oracles in Amos 1-2. As Andersen and Freedman observe, the same basic accusation appears against all the nations.⁵³ This accusation is represented by the Hebrew root of “to rebel, transgress,” a word that stands in the second line of each oracle. This root can have a variety of connotations depending on the context in which it is used. When used in conjunction with analogous terms for sin and iniquity, it can carry a moral-ethical meaning (cf. Exod. 34:7; Num. 14:18), while when used in contexts discussing worship legislation it can refer to cultic sin (Lev. 16:16, 21). In the context of Amos 1-2, to rebel or transgress functions as part of the language of politics and carries the meaning “to revolt, rebel, cast off allegiance to authority.”⁵⁴ The verbal form of this word appears elsewhere in parallel with explicitly political terms for “to revolt” (cf. Ezek. 20:38; Lam. 3:42). Thus, Amos begins his condemnation of each nation, including Israel and Judah, with this overtly political term. Similar political terminology runs through several other oracles in chapters 1 and 2. The oracle against Phoenicia (1:9-10), for example, employs the term “brothers,” which is used in Akkadian texts to refer to a political relationship between two equal parties, and the verb “remember,” which appears as a technical term for observing a treaty in Mesopotamian texts.⁵⁵

The above evidence indicates the political nature of the speeches in Amos 1:2-2:3. Even the Judah oracle in 2:4-5, however, an oracle often seen as dealing with religious issues, may be read as continuing the political critique. Although this oracle refers to the people’s rejection of the “law of the LORD” (2:4), the statements of wrongdoing remain at the general level. Additionally, verse 4 identifies the source of the people’s problems as the “lies” after which they have walked. This term is not used elsewhere in the Old Testament to refer to false gods, but does occur in contexts that are political in meaning (cf. Isa. 28:15-17; Hos. 7:13; 12:1).⁵⁶ Given the context of Amos 1-2, these observations suggest that one might think of the condemnation of Judah as entailing various, unspecified violations of Yahweh’s will with regard to the political course of the nation.

⁵³Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 26.

⁵⁴Paul, *Amos*, 45. Cf. Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 26-27; Jeremias, *Amos*, 20; Mays, *Amos*, 28.

⁵⁵Paul, *Amos*, 61-62.

⁵⁶Hayes, *Amos*, 103; contra Jeremias, *Amos*, 44.

With Amos's oracle against Israel in 2:6-16, however, the focus of the rhetoric seems to change to social injustice. This oracle differs only slightly in form from the preceding condemnations. It contains a lengthy statement of offenses (2:6b-12) and a lengthy pronouncement of disaster (2:13-16) with two attributive formulas ("says the LORD;" 2:11, 16). Although some of the transgressive acts detailed relate to legal ("garments taken in pledge," 2:8) and worship ("lay themselves down beside every altar," 2:8) institutions of ancient Israel, the oracle clearly directs the prophet's accusations "inward" toward the Israelites themselves rather than foreign rulers.⁵⁷ The focus of the indictments is social injustice: "they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals—they who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and push the afflicted out of the way" (2:6-7; NRSV). Unlike the preceding oracles, 2:6-16 does not involve war crimes and does not name any political leaders who are held responsible. As Mays observes, Israel's accusations are from the realm of social order rather than international relations.⁵⁸

When placed into the context of the opening section of the book of Amos, the Israel oracle is a hinge that links the political oracles against the nations in chapters 1 and 2 with the more-pointedly social critiques that begin to appear in chapters 3 through 6. By the end of Amos 3 and the beginning of Amos 4, for instance, the book focuses on groups within Israel whose unjust actions are worsening the situation of looming catastrophe that surrounds Israel: "They do not know how to do right, says the LORD, those who store up violence and robbery in their strongholds. . . . Hear this word, you cows of Bashan who are on Mount Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy . . ." (3:10; 4:1; NRSV). Standing just prior to the middle section of the book, the Israel oracle in Amos 2 employs the basic *form* of the preceding oracles against the nations in the service of a social critique that anticipates the refrain of the book's middle chapters. Thus, even the social critiques of the Israel oracle and the following chapters are framed in terms of the international political relations with which the book opens. The oracles against the nations in Amos 1-2 are no mere attention-attracting ploys designed to gather an audience for

⁵⁷Hayes, *Amos*, 50; Jeremias, *Amos*, 34. Andersen and Freedman (*Amos*, 321) note, however, that, although the whole nation is seen as being at risk, the accusation finds particular fault with only a section of the people.

⁵⁸Mays, *Amos*, 47; cf. Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 164-165 and Paul, *Amos*, 76.

the real purpose of offering social criticism.⁵⁹ They offer political criticism as a starting point for the prophetic word and intertwine political actions and policies with critiques of Israel in all realms of life.

Framework Part Two: Amos 9:7-15. The book of Amos ends with a complex section in 9:7-15 that is clearly delineated from the preceding material. The opening part of chapter 9 consists of the last in a series of five prophetic vision reports in 9:1-4 (cf. 7:1-9; 8:1-3) followed by the last of three doxologies that appear in various transitional places throughout the book in 9:5-6 (cf. 4:13; 5:8-9). Following the doxology, which speaks of God in the third person, 9:7-15 concludes the book with a first-person speech of judgment and restoration by God. This speech constitutes a surprisingly optimistic word about the future that has not characterized the ending of any previous rhetorical unit in the book.⁶⁰ As a result of the unit's demarcation and optimism, scholars suggest various editorial schemes that see part or all of 9:7-15 as the product of one or several later additions to the original preaching of Amos. For example, Jeremias argues that 9:7-11 and 14-15 are post-exilic, but 9:12-13 are even later additions made to link Amos with Joel and Obadiah in the Book of the Twelve.⁶¹

⁵⁹See Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 173. Cf. Jeremias (*Amos*, 164), who argues that only Amos 7:10-17 shows any concern that the political state is the cause of the people's sin and Kapelrud (*Central Ideas*, 63), who argues that the oracles against the nations in Amos 1-2 serve only to highlight Israel's social sins through comparison with other types of sins by other nations.

⁶⁰Hayes, *Amos*, 199.

⁶¹Jeremias, *Amos*, 162. For a survey of issues regarding the authenticity of Amos 9, see Hasel, *Understanding the Book of Amos*, 116-120. For the view that the majority of 9:7-10 is a later addition, see Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 109, and Jeremias, *Amos*, 162. Verses 11-15, the promises of restoration to Judah, are often seen as later additions because their emphasis on the southern kingdom is thematically different from the rest of the book and the reference to Edom in 9:12 fits better after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. (see J. Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel* [rev. and enl.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996], 77; Gowan, "Amos," 426; Harper, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 193; Mays, *Amos*, 164-66; Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 113, 135, 139). For a survey of reasons why some scholars take 9:11-15 as late, see Cripps, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 67-68, and Hayes, *Amos*, 223. On the other hand, several commentators make strong arguments for the authenticity of some or all of 9:7-15 (see Hayes, *Amos*, 220-223; Paul, *Amos*, 288-295; S. N. Rosenbaum, *Amos of Israel: A New Interpretation* [Macon, GA.: Mercer University Press, 1990], 73-75). For example, Hayes (*Amos* 226-228) observes that the terminology in 9:11-12 is not consistent with any other late source, even deuteronomistic language, and 9:13-15 does not refer to a return from exile or a messianic figure as one would expect from an exilic or post-exilic composition.

When viewed in the context of the book's canonical form, 9:7-15 appears as another statement of God's sovereignty and judgment over a series of foreign nations. Chapter 9 as a whole contains several literary links with the language of the opening oracles against the nations in chapters 1 and 2.⁶² But the speech in verses 7-12 emphasizes a political dimension more explicitly. The text ironically takes away Israel's sacred status as God's chosen people by proclaiming that God has acted in the same manner with other foreign nations like Ethiopia, Philistia, and Aram. The central judgment proclamation in verse 8 then proclaims, "The eyes of the Lord GOD are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the face of the earth—except that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, says the LORD" (NRSV). At first blush, it is not clear whether "sinful kingdom" is a general term for the whole people and thus represents the same entity as "the house of Jacob." The normal structure of Hebrew parallelism suggests that the two entities may be identical. As several commentators have noticed, however, throughout the book as a whole the target of the predicted destruction has been the ruling political powers and the economic aristocracy attached to them rather than the whole population (see 3:11, 12, 14-15; 4:1-3; 5:2, 4-5, 27; 6:7-11; 7:9; 9:1-4).

Additionally, different designations within the book serve to distinguish between the general Israelite population and the specific political rulers.⁶³ Titles like "House of Jacob" and "Jacob" occur as designations for the general population (3:13; 7:2, 5; 9:8), whereas "Israel" and "House of Israel" occur as references to the specific entity of the ruling house (3:12; 5:9; 7:11, 16).⁶⁴ If this distinction is correct, the condemnation in verse 8 is specifically directed against the political elite: the ruling house constitutes a "sinful kingdom" that will be destroyed while the larger entity of the "house of Jacob" will not be totally destroyed. Similarly, verses 9 and 10 proclaim that, while the whole "house of Israel" will be "shaken," the shaking will serve only to sift out the "sinners of my people," who will be destroyed.

⁶²For example, references to "Carmel" occur only in Amos 1:2 and 9:3. For further examples, see Rosenbaum, *Amos of Israel*, 81.

⁶³Hayes, *Amos*, 221, and Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 98-99, 126.

⁶⁴So Hayes, *Amos*, 221 but compare Andersen and Freedman (*Amos*, 126), who argue that "Israel" and "Jacob" used in isolation refer to the whole of the northern kingdom while "Israel" used with qualifiers refers to the larger Israel including north and south.

In any case, verses 11-12 solidify the political dimension of the book's closing judgment speech. These verses refer to the historical-political situation of the southern kingdom of Judah and cast their vision for the future in terms of the established political realities of ancient Israel: enemies like Edom and institutions like the monarchy.⁶⁵ Verse 12 specifically describes the restoration as entailing the subjugation of "the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by name" (NRSV). These words form a matching *inclusio* to the political oracles that began the book in Amos 1-2, specifically sounding the name of one of the initial foreign nations (see 1:11-12). The final words of future restoration in verses 13-15 proceed to depict ideal conditions to come for the nation after destruction. While these verses, unlike verses 11-12, do not focus on the Davidic kingdom, they emphasize the renewal of divine favor in light of the theology of the land as a gift of God to Israel.⁶⁶

The Implications of the Framework of Amos. The implications of recognizing the political framework of the book of Amos operate on at least two levels. On the level of the book itself, a first implication, which cannot be pursued in detail here, calls into question the standard scholarly axiom that Amos's primary concern was social justice, especially inequities in the Israelite judicial system. The prominent place afforded to political events and commentary in the book suggests that Amos's primary concern may have been the current political situation and that the social concerns addressed may represent symptoms of what Amos saw as the more crucial political state of affairs.⁶⁷

Several places in the book, for example, seem to indicate that the northern kingdom of Israel in the time of Amos was racked by political division between opposing groups and policies within a geographical region becoming increasingly dominated by the kingdom of Damascus.⁶⁸ According to Amos, Israel was surrounded by an adversary (3:11), had

⁶⁵As Andersen and Freedman (*Amos*, 865) state, "It is no more than a restoration of the old way of life for Israel and Edom and of the old monarchy with all of the best features of city and country life" (cf. Mays, *Amos*, 165).

⁶⁶So Mays, *Amos*, 166. Cf. Hayes, *Amos*, 227, and Harper, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 197.

⁶⁷For an attempt to explore this interpretation in detail, see Hayes, *Amos*.

⁶⁸Notice, for example, Damascus's place at the head of the oracles against the nations in Amos 1-2 and the reference to Damascus in the Hebrew of Amos 3:12 (contra NRSV).

suffered defeats in recent battles (4:11), and would accurately be described as “so small” (7:2, 5). The political and economic elite, who were accustomed to the prosperity recently experienced during the reign of Jeroboam II, must therefore maintain that prosperity by abusing the poor and misusing social and legal institutions in ways condemned by the book’s oracles. The prophet could condemn even the people’s worship as hypocritical in the face of the political division and accompanying social inequities of the people.

Blenkinsopp is correct in observing that the social and political domains are intertwined within the morality of the prophets, but the ruling political elite in Samaria hold first place in Amos’s condemnations.⁶⁹ The political rulers and their policies may lie at the heart of Amos’s critiques of corrupt legal and social practices. Amos’s proclamations of coming destruction in 3:11-15, for example, speak of places of worship and homes of affluence (“winter house” and “summer house”) but do so in a context that specifically directs them against the people “who live in Samaria” (NRSV). Similarly, the prophetic condemnations of oppression of the poor and needy in 4:1 are directed specifically against the aristocratic women in the capital city, the “cows of Bashan who are on Mount Samaria” (NRSV). As Hayes concludes,

Amos’s distinctiveness probably lies in his proclamation of a rapidly approaching disaster that would serve as the judgment of God on the social strife and *oppressive rule* that characterized the period. His critique of the religion of his day was part of his critique of cultural and *political* conditions at large.⁷⁰

The framework of Amos, in conversation with texts from other prophetic literature, implies the presence of political engagement as a central element in the book. Thus, on the topic of political engagement, texts like Amos invite contemporary Wesleyans to consider not only the interaction among Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience, but also the interaction among the diverse voices within Scripture itself on the issue of politics. In contrast with Rom. 13, the prophetic texts are heavily involved in political critiques of authorities, alliances, and policies. While never calling for the overthrow of the Israelite monarchy in its entirety, the prophets frequently pass judgment on and call for the overthrow of

⁶⁹Blenkinsopp, *History*, 81.

⁷⁰Hayes, *Amos*, 38; emphases added.

particular rulers (cf. Amos 7). At the very least, the consideration of texts like Amos suggests that God is invested in engaging and even rebuking political authorities.

The political dimension of Amos, however, allows something more specific to be said. In contrast to Wesley's rejection of political involvement, the rhetoric of Amos creates the image of a prophetic "office" that relativizes that of the king and other political forces.⁷¹ The rhetoric that envisions this office performs the function of turning the notion of the divine authorization of kings, an idea attested in Wesley's use of Rom. 13, on its head. Prophetic texts maintain the notion that God has raised up and authorized Israelite kings.⁷² At the same time, the prophets employ this tradition not to defend the king but to critique the king and to hold him to the standards that they believe God has established (see Isa. 28:14-18; 32:1; 36-37; Mic. 6:9-16). Implicit within their acknowledgment of the divine authorization of the king, therefore, is a warning that failure to uphold God's demands as presented by the prophets will result in the removal of such authorization.

In their reversal of divine authorization, prophets like Amos take the role of God in relation to the king. In contrast to Rom. 13, where only God stands in authority over kings, books like Amos elevate the prophet and his words into authority over all political powers. Prophetic messages represent authoritative words to which kings must submit or face judgment. Perhaps the best illustration of this dynamic is the prophetic use of "reported divine speech" like that in the book of Amos. Amos regularly presents the words of God in first-person, as if God were speaking directly to the king (e.g. Amos 3:1-11). By employing this type of speech, the prophets are not simply taking the position of an intermediary between God and humans. They are rhetorically taking the position of God to whom all political authorities, even the king who is authorized by God, must submit. While Wesley's writings only maintain the divine authorization of political authorities, the prophetic texts make those authorities contingent upon and open to theological critique from within the people of God. The prophetic "office" created by the rhetoric of books like Amos functions within the people of God to engage political authori-

⁷¹This discussion is drawn from Kelle, "Fear God," 62-64.

⁷²For example, see Isaiah's use of the Davidic theology that was at home in the Jerusalem court and proclaimed God's choice of David's line to rule perpetually in Jerusalem (Isa. 9:6-7; 11:1-5).

ties and structures and subordinate them to a perceived divine word that can be introduced into a given situation.

There is, however, a limitation that arises from the vision of the prophetic rhetoric. While Amos and the other prophets undertake a political critique of their own, they do not democratize this task to the entire community. While the performative rhetoric of Amos moves beyond Wesley in placing political involvement as a task within the people of God, that rhetoric does not call for the community as a whole to confront the king or engage in political critique. The rhetoric gives the impression that political involvement is the task of one particular office within the community. Taken on their own, then, the prophetic texts do not seem to provide an adequate model for Wesleyan church praxis, a praxis that stresses the social nature of the church and the involvement of all members of the community of faith in God's redemptive action. The church remains in need of a perspective that is a development from both Wesley's theology and the biblical texts, yet does not simply reproduce his politics or their perspectives.⁷³

Placing the book of Amos and its political emphasis into dialogue with a particular, often under-represented, aspect of Wesley's soteriology may open a path forward.⁷⁴ That aspect is one part of Wesley's three-fold image of God in which humanity shares, namely, the political image. Weber has recently explored in detail this concept and its relationship to Wesleyan political language, yet, in comparison with the natural and moral images, Wesley's concept of the political image receives little attention.⁷⁵ Wesley uses this image to affirm that human beings share in God's governance and care over creation. As Weber observes, the political image implies the agency of humanity as it acts on God's behalf and shares God's governing responsibility for the world.⁷⁶ For Wesley, humankind collectively, and not simply certain individuals, shares a political vocation concerning the world and its governance.

⁷³Weber, *Politics*, 38.

⁷⁴As Weber (*ibid.*, 27) states, "It is possible because there are resources in John Wesley's theology—largely unnoticed by Wesley himself—that allow and enable the transcending of the limits of his eighteenth-century politics in the formulation of a political ethic and method dependent mainly on Wesleyan theology itself and not on the contingencies of political currents and conditions."

⁷⁵*Ibid.*

⁷⁶See *ibid.*, 36, 230, 391.

On one level, Wesley's notion of the political image of God serves as a corrective from within his own theology to his exclusion of the church from political engagement. The concept of God in Wesley's political writings surveyed above, Weber notes, is inconsistent with the concept of God in Wesley's *ordo salutis*, an *ordo* in which God emphasizes human participation and response through grace. While Wesley seemingly overlooked the implications of his full doctrine of the image of God within his own soteriology, the political image draws politics into the order of salvation and thereby changes the concept of salvation to a more this-worldly concept than Wesley would allow. This image unifies "the God of politics and the God of the *ordo salutis* . . . for the political vocation of humankind."⁷⁷

On a broader level, Wesley's political image provides a way to democratize the prophetic "office" envisioned in the rhetoric of the book of Amos. This book initially corrects Wesley's perspectives and elevates political engagement to an important place within the people of God. Yet, placing Amos into dialogue with Wesley's political image expands the political involvement envisioned from a particular "office" within God's people to a democratized task that includes all participants in the community of faith. Governing responsibility extends to the whole of humanity. The political image implies that there is no distinction between a political and nonpolitical class, but all humanity, not just particular individuals or offices, is called to participate in politics.⁷⁸ While modern conceptions see the church and state as separate, independent entities, the political image enhances the prophetic vision of a state that exists within and answers to the whole people of God. When read through the lens of Wesley's three-fold image of God, the prophetic office envisioned by the book of Amos becomes a democratized task that includes all participants in the community of faith.

The implications of this call for the church's engagement in politics remain to be worked out in specific ecclesial and social contexts. At the very least, the combined Wesleyan and prophetic vision that draws politics into the order of salvation suggests, as Weber argues, that the church must engage political systems in their historical actualities and work to turn them in the direction of the divine intention for redemption.⁷⁹ But

⁷⁷Ibid., 392.

⁷⁸Ibid., 399-400.

⁷⁹Ibid., 408.

will such action need to take the form of fostering opposition to and restraints upon power? Or, will it include simply working to monitor and enhance a government's care and equality? Will the church view the state as part of the sanctified divine order and take a stance of qualified support toward it?⁸⁰ Or, will the church function primarily as a force of moral criticism that exists to challenge the authority of the state? Wesley's descendants are left to ponder the implications for church praxis that arise from the intersection of Wesley's theology and prophetic rhetoric. However these contingencies are worked out, it seems clear that even *Wesleyan* church praxis can include political engagement and, to use Wesley's own words against him, that such engagement should be considered part of the "higher order" of the Christian life.⁸¹

⁸⁰Hynson, *To Reform the Nation*, 51.

⁸¹"The More Excellent Way," in Outler and Heizenrater, *Sermons*, 511-521.

KEEPING THE CHURCH IN ITS PLACE: REVISITING THE CHURCH(ES) IN ACTS

by

Richard P. Thompson

It may not be too much to suggest that the ecclesial practices of today's churches in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition (and other traditions as well) too frequently are derived from sources other than those that are associated with serious theological reflection. That is to say, such ecclesial practices too often have little to do with theologically reflective practices, with regard for either the Scriptures themselves or the theological and ecclesial traditions in which those churches are found. For instance, debates over worship styles seldom include discussions about the theology of worship, as understood within the context of us Wesleyans who are engaging with the scriptural witness and with the tradition that has shaped us.

Questions about what kinds of ministries and services we should have or eliminate typically do not raise issues of what we as Wesleyans might see as the nature of the church. Little if anything in such discussions directly relates to understandings about the church that have been shaped by our corporate wrestling with the biblical texts and by a theological heritage that proclaims an optimistic understanding of God's grace that transforms and creates the church as God's holy people. To be sure, there are those who suggest that the small groups that so many churches include as part of their ministries parallel practices both in the earliest churches and in the classes promoted by the Wesleys and the early Methodists.¹ But one

¹E.g., see D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel, 1997).

may seriously wonder whether we adopt such practices because we actually see such practices to be biblical and Wesleyan, or whether we adopt them because the latest mega-church model promotes their effectiveness and pragmatic value. In other words, one must wonder what role, if any, a Wesleyan understanding of the church has in the current shaping our church practices—an understanding of the church arising out of a careful and reflective reading of the Scriptures within a Wesleyan theological context.

It may be easy for someone whose life's work focuses on the study of Scripture to make brash and sweeping declarations like these! And yet, if the truth would be told, we may have to admit that the adoption of a "return-to-the-Bible" stance may *itself* not provide adequate resolution to the problems before us anytime soon. After all, it appears at first glance as though the biblical materials *themselves* do not convey clear understandings of the church. Certainly we want to take at face value those wonderful, utopian descriptions of the Jerusalem church in the first few chapters of Acts. We wish to declare, "Yes, *this* is what it means to be the church!" All the while, we recognize the distance between what we so quickly see in those images and what we also see right before our eyes in the realities of the contemporary church. But even in the book of Acts, we find serious problems over issues of table fellowship, separation of Jew and Gentile, and the place of the Jewish law that muddy the waters about what Luke might have us see. And in Acts 21, we find Paul dragged from the temple and about to be killed by a mob that probably included the Jewish believers, if we take seriously the hyperbolic Lukan descriptions about the reactions of "all Jerusalem."² So the disparity between what we initially find in Acts and what we find later on in the narrative makes the interpretive task a bit more complicated than merely finding out what the Lukan narrator tells us about the church. Thus, any call to return to and reflect on the biblical witness, like Acts, also forces us to keep the church in its narrative place(s), meaning that we must assess not only how the church is *described*, but how such descriptions *function* within the larger narrative framework and trajectories of the book.

The purpose of this paper is to explore possible Lukan contributions to our conversations as Wesleyans about the church by revisiting selected

²See Richard P. Thompson, "'Say it ain't so, Paul!' The Accusations against Paul in Acts 21 in Light of His Ministry in Acts 16–20," *Biblical Research* 45 (2000):41-42. Cf. Stanley E. Porter, *Paul in Acts*, Library of Pauline Studies (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 172-186.

descriptions of churches and their functions within the developing narrative of Acts. This study has three parts: (1) a delineation of some key narrative components to the Lukan depiction of the church in Acts; (2) an assessment of the role of that Lukan depiction of the church within the larger narrative framework of Acts; and (3) some brief suggestions about how such an interpretation might contribute to the self-understanding and practices of those churches who look to John Wesley as their theological parent.

1. Some Key Narrative Components to the Lukan Depiction of the Church in Acts

A quick perusal of Acts readily indicates that groups of believers or churches in a more localized sense have more than a negligible role in the narrative. We find such groups from the opening chapter until Paul's arrest in chapter 21. Sometimes, the believers only receive a brief mention.³ At other times, the church appears to be the center of attention.⁴ Some of these groups were mainly Jewish (i.e., the Jerusalem church); others included both Jewish and non-Jewish persons (e.g., the church in Antioch of Syria). And these groups were scattered across the terrain of the eastern Mediterranean world. The ethnic and geographical diversity of these churches cannot be ignored and must be considered carefully in any reading of Acts.

I wish to contend that there is a consistency in the Lukan description of these churches that seems to relate the different churches together. That is to say, the Lukan narrator seems to draw from a common palate of images and themes in painting the different pictures of the various local churches, usually in a good light, but sometimes in less-than-flattering ways. The point to be made is this: the commonality of description or key narrative components may lead the reader to understanding something about the church (in the singular) by encountering the churches (in the plural) throughout Acts.⁵ While one may identify numerous common elements in these different descriptions, two components to these descriptions of the churches are critical for our consideration.

³See, e.g., Acts 14:20; 16:40; 17:4, 34.

⁴See, e.g., Acts 4:32–5:16; 6:1–7; 11:1–18, 19–30; 20:17–38.

⁵See Karl Ludwig Schmidt, “*ekklesia*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols., ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–1974), 3:504–5.

A. The activity and presence of God. The first component includes the activity and presence of God. In other words, something like the fingerprints of God is found all over the narrative landscape and even the window through which the Lukan narrator invites the reader to gaze. While the narrator presents numerous scenes in which persons act and react in ways that oppose the workings of God, the focus still remains on God's doings and God's purposes. For instance, in the early chapters of Acts one finds that God's activity is repeatedly linked to the resurrection of Jesus, whose death Peter blames on either the Jewish inhabitants or religious leaders of Jerusalem.⁶ At the same time, Peter in his Pentecost speech makes it clear that God's purposes were accomplished through that death.⁷ Even the outpouring of the Spirit as recounted in Acts 2 is explained in Peter's subsequent speech in *theological* terms: that the promised Holy Spirit had been received by the risen Jesus from *God* (i.e., the Father; Acts 2:33).⁸ Subsequent descriptions of believers being "filled with the Spirit" (e.g., 4:8, 31; 6:5; 7:55; 13:9) link the believers' actions with God's empowering activity.⁹ In other words, within the descriptions of the extraordinary events surrounding the believers in Jerusalem in those early chapters are interwoven implicit commentary from reliable characters or speakers like Peter and also the mention of the Spirit's presence or activity in such a way that the reader cannot help but recognize the hand of God in what transpires among those believers.

⁶E.g., see Acts 2:23-24 ("this one . . . you crucified and killed, whom God raised up," 2:32 ("this Jesus God raised up"), 3:13-15 ("God . . . has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected. . . . You rejected the holy and righteous one . . . and killed the author of life, whom God raised from the dead"), 4:10 (" . . . let it be known to you all and all the people of Israel: it is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, that this one stands healthily before you"), and 5:30-31 ("The God of our ancestors raised Jesus whom you killed by handing him on a tree; this one God exalted at his right hand as author and savior").

⁷See Acts 2:23-24: "this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised him up. . . ." See Jirair S. Tashjian, "The Death of Jesus: Historically Contingent or Divinely Foreordained?" *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 36/1 (Spring 2001): 191-192.

⁸Cf. Acts 1:4, which speaks of the "promise of the Father," with the genitive *tou patros* functioning probably as a genitive of source.

⁹Whether or not one interprets the expression *pneuma hagion* in trinitarian ways, the narrative points the reader to God as the source of their abilities and boldness.

The central role of God's presence and activity is not limited to the opening chapters of Acts. One of the most significant turning points in the narrative involves the movement of the gospel to contexts that were other than Jewish. A predominant scene focuses on Peter's proclamation of the gospel at the home of the Gentile Cornelius. The narrator's initial depictions of both Cornelius's and Peter's divine encounters, along with the subsequent telling and retelling of the story by these two main characters, make it clear that *God* had initiated and provoked Peter's controversial visit to Caesarea. On the one hand, an angel visited Cornelius while he was praying, a common Lukan image. And the angel did what the Greek word *angelos* suggests: delivered a message, albeit a rather simple one. But the initial description of that scene (Acts 10:1-8) and the two subsequent descriptions by Cornelius (10:30-33) and his messengers to Peter (10:22) all have one thing in common: that the divine message delivered by the angel set the subsequent chain of events in motion.

On the other hand, the divine vision that Paul encountered while *he* was praying functions in a dual sense: (a) to provide the context within which Peter received instructions from the Spirit to accompany Cornelius's messengers back to Caesarea and Cornelius's house (10:17-22), and (b) to provide implicit commentary by which Peter's actions at Caesarea may be evaluated, both by the reader and by those among the Jerusalem believers who questioned those actions (11:1-18). Peter's concluding comments to the Jerusalem believers in chapter 11 underscore God's role: "Who was I that I could hinder *God*?" (11:18; emphasis added). And the Jerusalem believers similarly affirmed, "Then even to the Gentiles *God* has given the repentance for life" (11:18; emphasis added). The narrator continually draws attention to God's role in other places as well, particularly in the calling and ministry of Paul. Thus, Paul encountered the risen Lord on the Damascus road (9:1-19).¹⁰ The Holy Spirit commissioned Barnabas and Saul in the context of the church's worship in Antioch of Syria (13:1-3). After Paul's vision of the Macedonian man during his so-called "second missionary journey" (16:6-10), the narrator inserts direct commentary that this vision was none other than God's call to take the gospel to Macedonia. Later on, the Lord appeared directly to Paul in Corinth (18:9-10) and in Jerusalem during his incarceration there

¹⁰All three accounts of Paul's so-called conversion (Acts 9:1-19; 22:1-16; 26:12-23) emphasize God's role in the ministry of Paul.

(23:11). Over and over again, the narrator directs and redirects our attention as readers to what God had done.

One might suppose that what has just been described is merely a restatement of the obvious. After all, who could come away from a reading of Acts and conclude that all that had transpired was the direct result of something *other* than the purposes and activity of God? Yet, throughout Acts one encounters all kinds of persons who *themselves* doubted that God had anything to do with what was happening among the Christian believers.¹¹ So there must be something to this narrative association of, on the one hand, God's purposes and actions, and, on the other hand, what was happening in and through these Christian believers.

The importance of these repeated descriptions may be linked to the terminology used to describe these believers. More often than not, the Lukan narrator employs non-technical wording that describes something about the church. Often, such terminology focuses on believing and faith (i.e., that they were believers)¹² or on communal aspects.¹³ For instance, on two occasions (15:14; 18:10) the term *laos* or "people" is employed to describe the church, a term that is almost exclusively associated in Acts with the Jewish people as "the people of God."

The term that is most frequently incorporated within the narrative is the term *ekklêsia*, which of course is translated as "church." However, this poses something of a problem because neither is *ekklêsia* a technical term nor is it etymologically related to the translation that we give it. One cannot ignore the fact that the term *ekklêsia* was widely used in the Greek-speaking world to refer to the assembly of the *dêmos* or *polis*.

¹¹Some expressions of doubt are rather obvious: Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11); Gamaliel [whose advice to the Jewish council in Acts 5 does not reflect sympathy for the apostles but doubt; see John Darr, "Irenic or Ironic? Another Look at Gamaliel before the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:33-42)," in *Literary Studies in Luke-Acts: Essays in Honor of Joseph B. Tyson*, ed. Richard P. Thompson and Thomas E. Phillips (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 121-140], and Saul (8:3; 9:1-2) are but three examples. Other expressions of doubt are subtler: one example is the initial response of the Jerusalem believers to Peter after the Cornelius incident (11:1-18).

¹²See, e.g., Acts 2:44; 4:32; 5:14; 11:21; and 15:5, where Christians are described as "believers."

¹³See, e.g., Acts 4:23, where Peter and John went "to their own" (*tous idios*) and reported what had happened to them; see also the Lukan use of the term *adelphos* to speak of the believers in 6:3; 9:30; 10:23; 11:1, 29; 12:17; 15:1, 22, 23, 36, 40; 17:10, 14; and 21:7.

Thus, the citizens were the *ekklêtoi*, those who had been summoned or called together by the herald.¹⁴ In Acts, the term *ekklêsia* is used three times to describe this general kind of assembly (see Acts 19:32, 39-40). Thus, *ekklêsia* does not refer to a specifically religious assembly at all, let alone what is implied by its association with the church.¹⁵ What becomes more significant is that the Septuagint consistently uses both nominative and verbal forms from the same word family to refer to the “assembly” of Israel or the people of God.¹⁶ It is highly doubtful that this Septuagintal usage means that the term was a *distinctive* one naming or describing the people of God; the name *Israel* already functioned in that way. Nevertheless, the rather common usage of the term *ekklêsia* and its verbal forms in the Septuagint suggests that the term itself may have taken on some of the “sacred history” with which it was linked in Jewish circles.¹⁷ In other words, the Lukan narrator has drawn from the Septuagint’s reservoir of language for the people of God to depict the Christian believers or the church. Common cultic practice of that era would have suggested that one employ or create some kind of specialized title or term that would have directly associated the believers with the name of Jesus as the Messiah or Christ (like the term “Christian” or *christianos*, which only appears twice in Acts: 11:26 and 26:28).¹⁸ In Acts, the narrator has chosen a word with common understandings in both Jewish and Greco-Roman contexts, yet incorporates the term with little if any additional modification that would somehow “christianize” it.

I wish to contend here that this choice of terminology with its accompanying lack of descriptive material is related to the Lukan emphasis of the activity and presence of God. As has already been suggested, the basic components of the term *ekklêsia* describe a “calling out.” The root of the word is derived from the verb *kalein* and conveys this sense of a calling. The prefix that is added to the root is *ek*, which usually connotes the idea of “from” or “out of.” Thus, together the two parts of the word convey the sense of a “calling out.” Often, persons draw from the etymol-

¹⁴Cf. Schmidt, “*ekklêsia*,” *TDNT* 3:513.

¹⁵This is not to state that there are no religious overtones, given the interrelated nature of politics and religion in the Greco-Roman world. However, the term is not explicitly a religious one.

¹⁶See also Acts 7:38, which uses the term *ekklêsia* in this Septuagintal sense.

¹⁷See Schmidt, “*ekklêsia*,” *TDNT* 3:513-18.

¹⁸See Schmidt, “*ekklêsia*,” *TDNT* 3:516.

ogy of the term to describe the church as “the called out ones,” those who have been called out from the world to be separate from it.¹⁹ To be sure, there is something to this understanding that should be affirmed, but it may fail to recognize that the preposition *ek* frequently functions to identify origin or source.²⁰ In other words, the prefix *ek* in the term *ekklêsia* may convey not only the idea of separation from the world but also the origin or source of the calling. That may refer, then, to the believers as being called out of their human existence to live a higher calling, if you will. But the word itself, without modification, leaves unanswered the question of the *source* of the calling, which the prefix *ek* suggests.

The Lukan narrator could have simply added the genitive *tou theou* so that there would be no question about this *ekklêsia* (such as one finds in Acts 20:28). In other words, the church could have simply been called *ekklêsia tou theou*, “the church/assembly of God.” Instead, the term is employed in a narrative context where God’s actions and presence take prominence. While the ordinary use of the term only points to the assembling of people, the Acts context suggests that God alone had called or gathered these together. *These* belonged to God, and their call had its source in *this* God. In this manner, Acts draws significantly from what the term conveys in the Septuagint. One finds that God had done similar kinds of things in both Acts and in the Jewish Scriptures: gathering together a people of God. As one readily identifies in the Pentecost events, the God who was at work in Acts was fulfilling God’s promises to *Israel*, God’s people. Thus, a key component to the Lukan descriptions of the church focuses on the activity and presence of God, which the narrator does not locate apart from the context of the Jewish people, but inclusive of that context.

B. The Activity and Practices of the Believers. The second component of the Lukan descriptions of the church is concerned with the activity and practices of the believers or the church. As I have argued elsewhere, the narrator consistently draws from or alludes to a number of images used to describe the believers in the first seven chapters of Acts to

¹⁹See Paul’s quotation of Isa. 52:11 in 2 Cor. 6:17: “Therefore come out from them, and be separate from them says the Lord.”

²⁰See Herbert Weir Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1920), §1688. Cf. Schmidt, “*ekklêsia*,” 3:531.

portray the believers throughout the rest of the narrative.²¹ These images include but are not limited to the following:

- The unanimity and unity of the believers;
- The dynamic of fellowship and sharing;
- The unselfish provision for human need; and
- The unstoppable proclamation of the gospel message.

Throughout the narrative, such images are both directly and indirectly employed in the description of groups of believers. But it must be noted that these descriptions are always linked to the activity and presence of God. In other words, the Lukan narrator characterizes the church and her practices in ways that are inseparable from the creative and salvific workings of God.

One passage that illustrates this connection is the summary statement about the believers in Acts 2:42-47. It is noteworthy that the narrator precedes this summary section and then concludes it by referring to those who were added to the believers. In both verse 41 and 47, the same verb *prostithêmi* appears. In verse 41 the one responsible for the action is not named, whereas in verse 47 the actor is explicitly stated as “the Lord” (*ho kurios*). Thus, what one finds regarding the practices of the believers is framed by the activity of God.²² This *inclusio* suggests that the existence and practices of this group of believers were due to the activity and presence of God and must be evaluated accordingly.

The first statement in this narrative section provides the initial depiction of those who now constituted the ones who had responded to the Christian message. Luke states in Acts 2:42 that the believers “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers.” Just as the first description of the apostles

²¹See Richard P. Thompson, “Christian Community and Characterization in the Book of Acts: A Literary Study of the Lukan Concept of the Church” (Ph.D. dissertation, Southern Methodist University, 1996); also “Believers and Religious Leaders in Jerusalem: Contrasting Portraits of Jews in Acts 1-7,” in *Literary Studies in Luke-Acts: Essays in Honor of Joseph B. Tyson*, ed. Richard P. Thompson and Thomas E. Phillips (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 327-44.

²²Cf. Luke T. Johnson, *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts*, SBL Dissertation Series 39 (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1977), 185 n2; and Walter Schmithals, *Die Apostelgeschichte des Lukas* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1982), 38.

and some others immediately after Jesus' ascension emphasizes their continual devotion to prayer (1:14), this description emphasizes the continual devotion of this larger group of believers, among whom were Jewish people who had responded positively to the Pentecost speech.²³ By using the same imperfect periphrastic construction (*ésan proskarterountes*) in depicting both groups, the narrator links the two descriptions together, suggesting that the audience should positively perceive this expanded group, now numbering more than three thousand, as similar to the smaller group in the first chapter that *together* had been obedient and devoted to prayer.²⁴

In this statement (Acts 2:42), however, the narrator expands the description of that to which this large group was devoted by providing two pairs of elements in the believers' activity and practice. It is composed of parallel grammatical constructions that may be seen in the following literal translation: ". . . to the teaching of the apostles and to the fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers." The overwhelming scholarly consensus is that Luke provides a list of the four basic elements of early Christian practice or of early Christian liturgy.²⁵ The parallel construction of these two phrases, however, suggests a different conclusion. Because of the grammatical structure, one might perceive the close association of *two* general kinds of corporate activities: those related to *worship* practices toward God, and those related to *social* practices among believers.²⁶

²³The imperfect tense indicates the continuing activity of the group. Cf. Schmithals, *Die Apostelgeschichte des Lukas*, 38, who suggests that Luke is stressing the unanimity of the Christians and the Jews.

²⁴However, the "togetherness" emphasis is not duplicated in the phrase of 2:42. See Paul Zingg, *Das Wachsen der Kirche: Beiträge zur Frage der lukanischen Redaktion und Theologie*, *Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974), 147, who points to this repeated description as an expression of an intensive community experience.

²⁵See, e.g., M. É. Boismard and A. Lamouille, *Les Actes des Deux Apôtres*, 3 vols. *Études bibliques* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1990), 2:152; I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 83; Gottfried Schille, *Die Apostelgeschichte des Lukas*, *Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1983), 115; and David John Williams, *Acts*, *New International Biblical Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990), 59.

²⁶Cf. Gerhard Schneider, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 2 vols., *Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament* (Freiburg: Herder, 1980-1982), 1:286.

The first phrase indicates such an association. On the one hand, these believers were devoted to “the apostles’ teaching,” which refers to their ongoing practice of reflection on the testimony concerning Jesus’ ministry and resurrection (cf. 1:21-22; 2:32).²⁷ On the other hand, these believers were devoted at the same time to “the fellowship,” which is a term that had a wide range of meaning in the Greco-Roman world, referring to the relation between two or more individuals. The term *koinônia* was itself associated with, among other contexts, Greco-Roman political thought, economics, and the concept of friendship, in which certain friendships were described as “partnerships” between friends.²⁸ Here, the articular form of *koinônia* seems to refer not only to the bond between a few persons but to the bond that held the entire group together.²⁹ In this first phrase, then, Luke joins the implications of this reflective activity with a bond created among the believers, suggesting that such a positive, social bond developed in the context of such reflective and worshipful activity.

²⁷Cf., e.g., F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 73; Gerhard Krodel, *Acts*, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 92; and Williams, *Acts*, 59.

²⁸Scholars have acknowledged an apparent Lukan appeal to Greco-Roman traditions on friendship. Cf. esp. Alan C. Mitchell, “The Social Function of Friendship in Acts 2:44-47 and 4:32-37,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111 (Summer 1992): 255-72; and Gregory E. Sterling, “‘Athletes of Virtue’: An Analysis of the Summaries in Acts (2:41-47; 4:32-35; 5:12-16).” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 113 (Winter 1994): 679-96. Cf. also Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, trans. A. Thomas Kraabel, James Lumburg, and Donald H. Juel, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 23-24, 36; Jacques Dupont, “La communauté des biens aux premiers jours de l’Eglise (Actes 2,42.44-45; 4,32.34-35),” in *Études sur les Actes des Apôtres*, Lectio divina (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1967), 503-19; idem, “L’union entre les premiers Chrétiens dans les Actes des Apôtres,” 296-318; Luke T. Johnson, *Sharing Possessions: Mandate and Symbol of Faith*, Overtures to Biblical Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 119-27; Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia and Minneapolis: Fortress, 1986-1990), 2:45; and Alfons Weiser, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 2 vols., Ökumenischer Taschenbuchkommentar zum Neuen Testament (Würzburg: Echter, 1986), 1:104.

²⁹Cf. Dupont, “L’union entre les premiers Chrétiens dans les Actes des Apôtres,” 298-99; and Luke T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1992), 58. Contra Williams, *Acts*, 59, who understands *koinônia* to occur between God and the believers.

If the first phrase joins the activities of worship and community, the second parallel construction may also emphasize similar points. Whereas there is a general consensus concerning the connection of their devotion “to the prayers” with other descriptions of the believers in prayer (Acts 1:14; 3:1),³⁰ there is disagreement concerning the expression, “the breaking of bread.” More specifically, one must consider whether “the breaking of bread” is a Lukan description of an early eucharistic activity,³¹ or whether the expression refers to persons eating a meal together.³² Considering the Lukan association of worship and social activities, along with the subsequent reference to people breaking bread from house to house (2:46), the “breaking of bread” seems to refer to the eating of meals together as having both social and religious overtones. That is to say, Luke does not make a concrete distinction here, which seems to suggest that the meals together among the believers were characterized by the same gospel enacted by the eucharistic ritual.³³ Luke’s summary does not lend itself to detailed description concerning these so-called elements of early Christian activity, thereby creating difficulties in making definite conclusions on this issue. However, the text *does* suggest that the activity and presence of God resulted in a communal bond among the believers that was evident in a close relationship between worship and social practices. In other words, this initial description of the Christian believers after the Pentecost event, therefore, emphasizes a direct correlation between the divine activity and presence among the believers and the positive, communal ties among them. One may then conclude that the other activities mentioned in this summary are linked in worship to the God who had created this communal context.

³⁰Cf. Boismard and Lamouille, *Les Actes des deux Apôtres*, 2:151. The inclusion of the article before the term *proseuchais* may connote the practice of regular prayers associated with the Jewish temple.

³¹See, e.g., Boismard and Lamouille, *Les Actes des deux Apôtres*, 2:152; Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 73; Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, trans. Bernard Noble and Gerald Shinn (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 191; Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 58; Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 83; and Williams, *Acts*, 60.

³²See, e.g., Erwin R. Goodenough, “The Perspective of Acts,” in *Studies in Luke-Acts*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 52; and Schille, *Die Apostelgeschichte des Lukas*, 116.

³³Cf. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, 23.

2. An Assessment of the Role of the Lukan Depiction of the Church Within the Larger Narrative Framework of Acts

This look at the practices and activities of the believers offers only a mere glimpse into the Lukan description of the church in Acts. While the narrator portrays the believers in positive ways in the early chapters of Acts, one must still assess the role of the Lukan depiction of the church in the context of the whole narrative. In addition, one must also consider why the narrator describes the church in *these* ways and not others. At the risk of offering conclusions without the necessary supporting evidence, I would suggest that we briefly examine the Lukan depiction of the church in each of the major sections of Acts.

The first narrative unit (Acts 1:1–8:3) generally presents the believers in Jerusalem with ideal imagery. They were blessed by God, unanimous in spirit, caring toward one another, and earnest in proclaiming the gospel (cf. 2:42-47; 4:32-37). Initially, the huge numbers of those accepting the gospel and the excitement in Jerusalem among the Jewish people implicitly present a picture of oneness between Judaism and the Christian gospel (cf. 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7). These positive images of the believers provide a literary paradigm or an ideal model that assists in the evaluation of the Christian community in subsequent portraits. Alongside these positive descriptions of the believers, the Lukan narrator places increasingly contrasting images of the Jewish leaders and some of the Jewish people.³⁴ That these characters increasingly and contrastingly interacted throughout that first unit, leading to the death of Stephen and the scattering of the believers from Jerusalem, reflects one of the ancient literary conventions used to present and emphasize important narrative elements vividly.³⁵

³⁴Cf. Beverly Roberts Gaventa, "Toward a Theology of Acts: Reading and Rereading," *Interpretation* 42 (1988): 154, who stresses the growth of hostility that correlated with the growth of the Christian community; and Daniel Marguerat, "La mort d'Ananias et Saphira (Ac 5.1-11) dans la stratégie narrative de Luc," *New Testament Studies* 39 (1993): 215.

³⁵See Dionysius, *On the Style of Demosthenes* 21: "He [Demosthenes] does not set out each separate pair of actions in finicky detail, old and new, and compare them, but carries the whole antithesis through the whole theme by arranging the items in two contrasting groups. . . . He has deployed more force and more powerful emphasis, and avoided the frigid and juvenile figures which adorn the other's style to excess." Cf. Johnson, *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts*, 107-11, 115-17, who notes the use of the division imagery in relation to the people in the Gospel of Luke.

Considering that Luke also applies the term *ekklêsia* to the believers (5:11), the same term used in the Septuagint with reference to Israel as the people or the assembly of God, it appears that these two contrasting groups present two opposing views or understandings of what one might call “the people of God.” On the one hand, the narrative presents the believers as those in whom God was at work and among whom was unanimity. On the other hand, the narrative presents the Jews, the historic “people of God,” as increasingly becoming God’s *opponents* (cf. Acts 5:39) and divisive in their actions against those believers. This is not an image simply of God creating the church apart from the historic people of God. Rather, the Lukan narrator depicts the unbelieving Jews as the ones who rejected God’s fulfilled promise and whose divisive actions implicitly placed *them* outside the realm of God’s salvific activity and purpose.³⁶ In other words, the Lukan depiction of the believers as the *ekklêsia* of God does not distinguish the Jewish believers as a separate group or as God’s people apart from the Jewish people, but as those faithful to what God had been doing all along. These contrasting images in this first narrative unit merely affirm that the Jewish believers in Jerusalem were the people who belonged to and were called by God.³⁷

The second narrative unit (Acts 8:4–12:25) presents various episodes in relation to the spreading of the gospel to other regions surrounding Jerusalem. Intricately tied to the geographical movement in the narrative are the associated ethnic and cultic changes.³⁸ As the narrative

³⁶See especially “The Divided People of God” in Jacob Jervell, *Luke and the People of God: A New Look at Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972), 41-74, where Jervell argues that Israel has not rejected the gospel, but has become divided over it (49); idem, “Retrospect and Prospect in Luke-Acts Interpretation,” in *Society of Biblical Literature 1991 Seminar Papers*, ed. Eugene H. Lovering, Jr. (Atlanta: Scholars, 1991), 391; Johnson, *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts*, 122; and Gerhard Lohfink, *Die Sammlung Israels: Eine Untersuchung zur lukanischen Ekklesiologie* Studien zum Alten und Neuen Testament (München: Kösel, 1975), 58.

³⁷The negative portrayal of the Jewish people functions specifically in the narrative as the antithesis to the Lukan portrayal of the church, and, when considered with other descriptions of Jews, does not reflect a negative perspective of *all* Jews. Contra, e.g., Jack T. Sanders, “Who is a Jew and Who is a Gentile in the Book of Acts?” *New Testament Studies* 37 (1991):436-38; and Dixon Slingerland, “‘The Jews’ in the Pauline Portion of Acts,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 54 (1986): 305-21.

³⁸Cf. Joseph B. Tyson, “The Emerging Church and the Problem of Authority in Acts,” *Interpretation* 42 (1988): 134-35.

progresses, the plot thickens to include another line of action. Along with the continuing Jewish opposition that became commonplace in Acts (cf. 9:23-25, 29),³⁹ the narrator describes the tensions that arose when the gospel message was accepted not only by Jews but also Gentiles. While unanimity was a characteristic among *Jewish* believers, such a quality was quite another matter among Jewish and *Gentile* believers (cf. 10:44-48; 11:1-18). Through the selection of included elements in the narrative, the narrator depicts explicitly that God, not the believers themselves, instigated the proclamation of the gospel to non-Jews. God was also working salvifically among the Gentiles, which implied that they too were included as a part of those who were the called people of God.

The ideal description of the Antioch church (11:19-30), composed of both Jewish and Gentile believers, offers a similar and yet distinctive portrait of a *third* possible understanding of the designation “the people of God.”⁴⁰ The juxtaposition in Acts 11 of the ideal, positive portrait of the Antioch believers with the mounting questions of the Jerusalem believers suggests that the unanimity that transcended ethnic and cultic boundaries was characteristic of the Christian church, or those who belonged to and were called by God.

The last narrative unit, Acts 13:1–28:31, focuses on the spread of the gospel to various parts of the Roman Empire, due to the obedience of the church in Antioch. Interspersed within the narrative account of the rapidly growing Christian “movement,” which the narrator presents as including both Jews and Gentiles among those who responded as believers to the gospel message, is a deteriorating picture of the Jewish believers in Jerusalem. Whereas the gospel message continued to gain acceptance from Jews and non-Jews in Paul’s travels, the Lukan portrait of the Jerusalem church becomes increasingly negative, as this Jewish group of believers continued to focus on ethnic, social, and religious issues for their identity as a “people of God” rather than the presence and activity of God (cf. 15:1-5; 21:17-26). The depictions of groups of believers other than the Jerusalem

³⁹Cf. Robert C. Tannehill, “Israel in Luke-Acts: A Tragic Story,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104 (March 1985): 72.

⁴⁰I.e., the two possible understandings of what might be called the “people of God” in the first narrative unit—the historical understanding that included all the Jewish people, and the understanding that included all Jewish *believers*—are joined by a third understanding, which depicts both Jewish and Gentile believers as gathered together in unity, as blessed by God, and as the center of gospel proclamation.

church allude to ideal images found in the early narrative scenes of the Jerusalem church. In the midst of opposition and in those specific contexts where the Christian believers were separated from the Jewish synagogue, the Lukan narrator inserts through a reliable character the identification of the Christian community as God's *laos* (18:10) or *ekklêsia* (20:28). However, the ugly scenes of Paul's visit to Jerusalem in Acts 21–22 stand in sharp contrast, as Luke implicitly presents the Jewish believers of that city in a negative way. These narrative episodes do not present a Lukan understanding of the church that is negative, but present the failure of one believing group to identify the nature of the Christian community with divine activity and unanimity rather than historical Jewish distinctions.

The narrative progression of the book of Acts includes a distinctive arrangement of episodes and images of the Christian community. In this arrangement, the Lukan author presents in progressive fashion three different understandings of what one might designate "the people of God": Israel or the Jewish people as the historic people of God, repentant or believing Israel, and those Jewish *and* non-Jewish believers of the gospel. In the Lukan presentation of these differing views, the identification of those who truly belonged to God was not through traditional Jewish distinctions but through the working of God as demonstrated primarily by unanimity, worship and the caring for one another's needs through the fellowship, and the proclamation of the gospel. In the initial episodes, the contrasting portraits of the Jewish believers in Jerusalem and the growing opposition by unbelieving Jewish leaders and others function to present vividly that the believers *among* the Jewish people, not Israel itself or *all* the Jewish people, represent a valid understanding of the people of God. This juxtaposition of similar contrasting pictures continues throughout the remainder of the Acts narrative, as Luke presents the Christian church, which evolved into a group consisting of both Jews and Gentiles, in sharp contrast to the general Jewish population.⁴¹

⁴¹One is reminded that the Lukan narrator does not present the Pauline mission as a mission to the Gentiles. Rather, the acceptance and rejection of the gospel occur among both the Jews and the Gentiles. Cf. François Bovon, "Israel, die Kirche und die Völker im lukanischen Doppelwerk," *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 108 (1983): 405; and Jervell, *Luke and the People of God*, 41–48. Nonetheless, the picture of the Jews is not positive [cf. Karl Löning, "Das Verhältnis zum Judentum als Identitätsproblem der Kirche nach der Apostelgeschichte," in "*Ihr alle aber seid Brüder*": *Festschrift für A. Th. Khoury zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Ludwig Hagemann and Ernst Pulsfort (Würzburg: Echter, 1990), 304; and Lawrence M. Wills, "The Depiction of the Jews in Acts," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110 (December 1991): 644ff.].

The Lukan view of the church or the Christian believers as the people of God, however, must consider the place of non-Jewish believers. The question that Luke presents is not whether the Gentile believers were Christians or part of the church or the “people of God.” The narrative presentation suggests that the proclamation of the gospel to the Gentiles and the acceptance of that message by some of them was all God’s plan and was evidence of God’s blessing. Rather, the question is whether the *Jewish* believers would respond to the *Gentile* believers as equal partners in the church, with actions demonstrating unanimity or division. If the Jewish believers responded in ways that affirmed what God was doing, they would also acknowledge their identity together with non-Jewish believers as those who belonged to and were called by God. If the Jewish believers responded divisively against those in whom God had worked and whom God blessed, they would deny that divine presence and activity as the basis of their identity as the people of God. More importantly, this latter possibility would identify the Jewish believers with the Jews in general, whom the narrative presents as God’s opponents, rather than with those whom the narrative presents as the people of God, the ones in whom one finds the divine presence and blessing.

The contrasting images and the narrative interactions among the various groups of believers and the Jews in general all seem to identify the church as the people of God that is not distinguished by traditional Jewish boundaries but by divine activity, worship, and a strong, communal bond among those who are believers in the gospel message.⁴² These issues concerning the nature of the church or Christian community, therefore, are not minor themes or insignificant elements in Acts, but stand as integral parts of the narrative.⁴³

One of the debates in contemporary scholarship has focused on the Lukan understanding of the church and Israel. For many scholars, the Lukan understanding of the church is of the “new” Israel or that which replaces the historical people of God. For others such as Jacob Jervell and Gerhard Lohfink, the church is the “true” Israel or the “restored” Israel,

⁴²Contra I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970), 212-15, who sees no Lukan concern for relational issues, but only sees a concern for institutional issues.

⁴³Contra Gerhard Schneider, *Lukas, Theologe der Heilsgeschichte: Aufsätze zum Lukanischen Doppelwerk*, Bonner Biblische Beiträge (Königstein: Peter Hanstein, 1985), 207-8, who stresses that the increase of the word of God, not the church, is the object of Luke-Acts.

that which represents the repentant ones among the historical people of God.⁴⁴ The Gentile Christians, in this latter understanding, are included as an “associate” people of God, due to the acceptance of God’s promises by repentant and faithful Israel.⁴⁵ However, while the Lukan narrator emphasizes the continuity of the church with the historical understanding of God’s people, such interpretations do not adequately account for the dynamic quality of the church as a character in Acts.

On the one hand, these current interpretations do not consider the rhetorical nature of the contrasting portrayals of the church and of the Jewish people. Narrative texts do not lend themselves to precision in definition, but to the creation of an effect in an audience that is invited to participate in the narrative world of the text.⁴⁶ On the other hand, the progressive nature of the Acts narrative indicates that the replacement of the Jewish people is *not* the critical issue; rather, it assists the implied readers in wrestling with the issue of *their* identity as a church. That is to say, the Acts narrative does not define precisely the relation between God and the Jewish people. What the narrative *does* present, however, is an understanding of the church, not in Jewish or Gentile terms, but as those who belong to God, as those who are God’s *laos*, as those who are God’s *ekklēsia*. Thus, in Acts, the focus is on the church as the group that belongs to God and in which God’s blessing and activity are found.⁴⁷ This divine presence, which identifies and creates the people of God, is thereby linked to the church’s practices: worship, the continuing proclamation of the gospel message, and the communal bond among the believers.

3. Some Possible Contributions of Acts to the Self-Understanding and Practices of Those Churches Who Look To John Wesley As Their Theological Parent

What, then, do we as Wesleyans see regarding the church as we engage with texts such as Acts? If Scripture among the four components

⁴⁴See, e.g., Jervell, *Luke and the People of God*, 41-74; and Lohfink, *Die Sammlung Israels*.

⁴⁵See Jacob Jervell, “The Law in Luke-Acts,” *Harvard Theological Review* 64 (1971): 32; and idem, “The Acts of the Apostles and the History of Early Christianity,” *Studia Theologica* 37 (1983): 19.

⁴⁶Cf. Lohfink, *Die Sammlung Israels*, 97, who correctly notes that Luke does not provide a systematic concept or “ecclesiology;” rather, Luke portrays or tells about the church; and Johannes Panagopoulos, “Zur Theologie der Apostelgeschichte,” *Novum Testamentum* 14 (April 1972):152.

⁴⁷Cf. Panagopoulos, “Zur Theologie der Apostelgeschichte,” 152-53.

of the so-called Wesleyan quadrilateral is the foundation of theological reflection, then how might the narrative of Acts shape our self-understanding and practices? And what are those areas that we affirm as Wesleyans that intersect with what we have seen here in this cursory examination of the church in Acts? I would like to offer up three brief suggestions.

First, what should distinguish a Wesleyan understanding of the church should be characterized by a vision of God's presence and grace, not by a focus on specific ecclesial practices. It is this vision of what God intends and seeks to do in sanctifying a people to Godself that should be a distinguishing mark of Wesleyan ecclesiology. Specific practices and methods are not what make us Wesleyan or biblical. Rather, we begin with an understanding of what a holy God has and is doing to create a holy people—a people sanctified, a people shaped and created in the image of this same God. Ecclesial practices come out of this shared understanding of God's purposes, presence, and grace. In other words, church practices are linked to God's sanctifying work of the church.

Second, as Wesleyans we should see worship as *the* distinctive element of the church that links the salvific and sanctifying workings of God to the practices of the church. In the earliest communities of Christian faith, worship was inseparable from what God was doing and it is what tied together all the other practices that distinguished them. Central to John Wesley's understanding of worship were the sacraments. Worship for Wesley was not an obligation but a matter of sustenance, of spiritual nurture. In the Lord's Supper or communion, the worshiper both receives and offers gratitude for that eucharistic grace, offering the self in grateful response.⁴⁸ Through the use of the lectionary, worshipers would benefit from, in Maddox's words, "the empowering and patterning potential of the *whole* of Scripture."⁴⁹ But perhaps what is most important to see is that the communal or ecclesial practices that Wesley advocated came out of this worshiping context; he did not see these practices as separate from worship but as supporting and cultivating what the church has declared and affirmed and embraced and received in worship. In other words, one may contend that the practices that are often seen as distinctive to the

⁴⁸Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon/Kingswood, 1994), 205.

⁴⁹Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 207.

early Methodist societies⁵⁰ or even to the earliest Christians in Acts have their theological roots that run deep in the soil of the church's worship of this God who graces them. These church practices did not make them distinctive; it was the grateful response *together* of a worshipping people to God that moved them in such ecclesial ways—ways that responded in grace because of a God who had already graced them.

Third, both God's workings and these ecclesial practices remind us as Wesleyans that God has called for Godself a people, not merely a collection of individuals. The practices of the earliest Christians in Acts *together* point to God's creation of a community of faith. The general tendency in the book of Acts is to depict the workings of God with reference to the community of faith. In other words, we find God's working, empowering, and direction in the context of the groups of believers. In Acts, the believers worshiped together, shared life together, and cared for the needs of one another, all in a context of a community of faith that God had created and graced by God's presence. In no sense do we find in that narrative the pursuit of the holy life in an individualized way. Similarly, as Wesley noted, holiness "cannot subsist at all without society, without living and conversing with [others]."⁵¹ It is this people as God's people that not only experiences God's grace but is shaped together by God's character, love, justice, and mercy. And in this way the church's practices are the church's embodiment of God's grace.

⁵⁰For a brief description of some of these practices, see Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 209-13.

⁵¹Quoted in Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 209.

“CHRISTIANIZING CHRISTIANITY”: THE HOLINESS MOVEMENT AS A CHURCH, THE CHURCH, OR NO CHURCH AT ALL?

by

Harold E. Raser

Just a year after the end of the American Civil War, a casual conversation between a northern Methodist minister and a wealthy northern Methodist laywoman led to a plan to pump new life into the “holiness revival.” This revival, emphasizing the spiritually “perfecting,” “fully sanctifying,” empowering, and “victoriously overcoming” possibilities of divine grace, had reached its apex on the very eve of the Civil War. Spreading to many American denominations (mainly in the North), the revival had inspired its true believers to hope that Christian perfection might carry America and its churches into a millennium of righteousness, justice, and peace.¹ Of course, the hoped-for “righteous millennium” had instead turned out to be a four-year holocaust of vicious conflict, death, and destruction on an appalling scale. Spiritual perfection, perfect love, “fully sanctifying grace”—these appeared to be hollow, even mocking

¹The standard account of the pre-war revival is Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform in Mid-Nineteenth Century America* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1957). A more recent study, influenced by Smith’s work, that focuses on the connection between Christian perfection and “radical” political movements prior to the Civil War, especially abolitionism, is Douglas M. Strong, *Perfectionist Politics: Abolitionism and the Religious Tensions of American Democracy* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999). A general overview of the pre-war and post-war holiness movement is Melvin E. Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1980).

concepts in the wake of the war. The “holiness revival” had been shattered, it seemed, along with everything else good and hopeful in the “divided” states of America.

Yet, Christians whose lives had been transformed by the gospel of Christian holiness in pre-war years were not prepared to give up quite so easily; they longed to see the power of the pre-war revival rekindled. Thus it was that the Methodist minister, John A. Wood, and the wealthy Methodist laywoman, Mrs. Harriet Drake, traveling to a Pennsylvania Methodist camp meeting in the summer of 1866, chatted about the state of holiness preaching and teaching. The two were especially concerned that many Methodist camp meetings no longer gave special attention to the “doctrine and distinctive experience of entire sanctification.” Together they decided that what was needed were camp meetings *especially* devoted to the promotion of Christian holiness. Mrs. Drake volunteered to contribute half the cost of such a “holiness camp meeting,” should one be held.²

Drake’s generous offer helped to galvanize those who shared her interest in reviving the “holiness revival.” Within a year a group of ministers had made plans for a camp meeting especially for the promotion of Christian holiness. Announcements were quickly printed and distributed to churches and published in religious papers and magazines. There would be a special camp meeting of the “friends of holiness” at Vineland, Cumberland County, New Jersey. It would be open to “all, irrespective of denominational ties, interested in the subject of the ‘higher Christian life.’” It would be distinct from the usual camp meetings held by Methodists and other Protestants in that “the *special* objects of this meeting will be to offer united and continued prayer for the revival of the work of holiness in the Church” and to “help any who would enter into this rest of faith and love.” The meeting would also aim to “strengthen the hands of those who feel themselves comparatively isolated in their profession of holiness.” And it would seek “the descent of the Spirit [of God] upon our-

²Cited in Delbert Roy Rose, *A Theology of Christian Experience: Interpreting the Historic Wesleyan Message* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1956), 36. This book provides an account of the development of the National Holiness Association (now Christian Holiness Partnership), an organization that was originally founded to sponsor and promote holiness camp meetings. See also Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 79-116, and Charles E. Jones, *Perfectionist Persuasion: The Holiness Movement and American Methodism, 1867-1936* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1974), 16-78.

selves, the church, the nation, and the world.” All would be “with a view to increased usefulness in the churches of which we are members.”³

Even though somewhat quickly planned and hastily advertised, the meeting at Vineland found a ready response. Several thousand people attended, and the organizers declared it a success. It appeared that there was still a great interest in and yearning after Christian perfection. And it appeared that special camp meetings for the promotion of holiness just might be a divinely blessed means of encouraging and responding to that interest. The organizers decided to form an ongoing committee to plan and conduct more holiness camp meetings—the National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness. Although it is unlikely that anyone involved recognized it at the time, this decision had results that literally changed the course of the holiness movement in the years following 1867.⁴

Beginning with a very modest and restricted agenda—organizing and promoting one “general” (i.e., national) holiness camp meeting per year—the National Camp Meeting Association quickly expanded its efforts. One annual camp meeting soon became two, then three, then more. By 1871 the eastern United States-based National Camp Meeting Association was active as far west as the Pacific Coast, holding three of five “national camp meetings” that year in California.⁵ These camp meetings drew tens of thousands of participants. Many attendees testified to experiencing a mighty baptism with the Holy Ghost and to being perfected in love. It seemed that the flagging interest of Americans in the doctrine and experience of “full sanctification” was indeed being

³From an insert with the heading “General Camp-Meeting” carried in *The Guide to Holiness*, July 1867. Eyewitness accounts of the Vineland camp meeting and several subsequent holiness camp meetings are contained in Alexander McLean and J. W. Eaton, editors, *Penuel, or Face to Face With God* (New York, NY: W. C. Palmer, Jr., Publisher, 1870) and George Hughes, *Days of Power in the Forest Temple: A Review of the Wonderful Work of God at Fourteen National Camp Meetings, from 1867-1872* (Boston, MA: John Bent and Company, 1873).

⁴For an account of early events and leaders of the National Camp Meeting Association, see Kenneth O. Brown, *Inskip, McDonald, Fowler: “Wholly and Forever Thine,” Early Leadership in the National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness* (Hazleton, PA: Holiness Archives, 1999).

⁵For these developments see McLean and Eaton, *Penuel: or Face to Face With God* and Hughes, *Days of Power in the Forest Temple*. Also see William McDonald and John E. Searles, *The Life of Rev. John S. Inskip* (Boston, MA: McDonald and Gill, 1885), 146-184.

reignited. For some this brought back into view the millennium. One minister attending the third “national” holiness camp meeting at Round Lake, New York in 1869 exulted, “This meeting has rolled the world a hundred years toward the millennium! We are coming into Isaiah’s holy visions.”⁶

Multiple camp meetings and growing interest led to expanded activities on the part of the National Camp Meeting Association. Using the name the National Publishing Association for the Promotion of Holiness, it issued a holiness paper in 1869 called *The Christian Standard and Home Journal*. The editor was Rev. John S. Inskip of New York City, the president of the Association. This was followed in 1870 by a second paper, *The Advocate of Christian Holiness*. Eventually the two were merged into one and renamed *The Christian Witness*. This publishing arm of the Association also published books and inexpensive holiness literature of all kinds.⁷ Somewhat later, following the growing American Protestant passion for “foreign missions,” the popular interdenominational Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions (which sought “the evangelization of the world in this generation”) was organized in 1876. The Association also formed the Missionary Society of the National Association for the Promotion of Holiness (later renamed the National Holiness Missionary Society) to support the work of missionaries committed to propagating Christian holiness abroad.⁸

⁶McLean and Eaton, *Penuel: or Face to Face With God*, 381. It is interesting to note that the “millennial” theme is present—albeit in muted form—in the announcement of the first “national holiness camp meeting” at Vineland, NJ—where participants will make “supplication for the descent of the Spirit upon ourselves, the church, the nation, and the world”—see p. 3 above.

⁷See Rose, *A Theology of Christian Experience*, 43-47; Jones, *Perfectionist Persuasion*, 22-23. It is worth noting that the name of the second publication, *The Advocate of Christian Holiness*, could be interpreted as “provocative” within the context of Episcopal Methodism. A number of regional papers published by both the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church South carried the name *The Christian Advocate*. The Association’s paper *could* be seen as implying that these papers of official Methodism were not sufficiently advocating Christian holiness.

⁸This organization eventually became the World Gospel Mission (WGM). The history of the organization is recounted in William Walter Cary, *Story of the National Holiness Missionary Society* (Chicago, IL: National Holiness Missionary Society, 1940); Laura Trachsel, *Kindled Fires in Africa* (Marion, IN: World Gospel Mission, 1960); Laura Trachsel, *Kindled Fires in Asia* (Marion, IN: World Gospel Mission, 1960); Laura Trachsel, *Kindled Fires in Latin America* (Marion, IN: World Gospel Mission, 1961).

The most significant development of all, however, in the constantly expanding activities of the National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness after the Civil War was the formation of local and regional holiness associations. These were grass-roots organizations that began to sprout early in the 1870s. By 1880 or so they had become widespread throughout the United States, with their greatest strength being in the Midwest, South, and Southwest. Some were local in focus and had names like the South Providence Holiness Association of Providence, Rhode Island (organized in 1886). Others were regional in scope, with names like the Western Holiness Association of Illinois (organized in 1872), or the Southwestern Holiness Association (representing parts of Missouri and Kansas and organized in 1879). All such groups were interdenominational, although the largest percentage of members was almost always Methodist.

These holiness associations served several purposes. One was to aid the National Camp Meeting Association in its efforts to promote holiness evangelism through holiness camp meetings. The local and regional associations usually began with a handful of people who organized to bring holiness camp meetings to their communities. Another purpose was to provide fellowship and a strong sense of identity for “holiness folks” who might find little support for their commitment to the doctrine and experience of entire sanctification in their local congregations. This concern had been hinted at in the advertising for the first “national” holiness camp meeting in 1867: the meeting intended “to strengthen the hands of those who feel themselves comparatively isolated in their profession of holiness.”

Another purpose of the holiness associations was to give their members opportunities for Christian service in an environment where the Wesleyan-Holiness understanding of Christian perfection was honored and explicitly proclaimed. Very often this kind of service took the form of “compassionate ministry” or holiness social work. In the tradition of Phoebe Palmer, and John Wesley before her, many holiness believers sought out prostitutes, orphans, prisoners, the unemployed, and other oppressed and powerless people in order to offer them a gospel of both material aid and spiritual transformation. Through city “rescue missions,” orphanages, “rescue homes,” prison visitation, and other means, Christians supportive of the holiness movement attempted to give “perfect love” practical expression.

Taken together, all these developments after 1867 led to a national, and even to some extent international, network of “holiness” associations, organizations, and ministries. Prior to the Civil War, the holiness movement had had no organizational structure at all. It had been a broad movement that had touched many American churches, but it had mostly flowed within the existing channels of the various denominations. The formation of the National Camp Meeting Association changed that. The Association gave an organizational focus to the movement that it had never had before; it came to stand at the center of an extensive web of “organized holiness” institutions that conducted evangelistic work of various kinds (including missionary work overseas), published religious literature, carried on “compassionate ministries,” and even sponsored holiness schools.⁹

These various arms of “organized holiness” gave a breadth and visibility to the holiness movement that it had not had before. They also drew Christians who were committed to the doctrine of Christian perfection into small bodies of believers that were separate and distinct from any denomination. These holiness associations did not intend to be “churches,” but their local activities (which sometimes included forms of public worship), together with their obvious connection to a larger national body (the National Camp Meeting Association), gave them the strong *appearance* of being churches. At the very least they seemed to be “churches-in-the-making.” As such, they presented a challenge to the existing denominations.

Methodists in particular, both North and South (since the largest percentage of members of most holiness associations were Methodist), began to react strongly to the rapid spread of “organized holiness” after the Civil War. Daniel Whedon, editor of the respected journal, *The Methodist Quarterly Review*, charged in 1878 that, “The holiness association, the holiness periodical, the holiness prayer-meeting, the holiness preacher, are all modern novelties. They are not Wesleyan. We believe that a living Wesley would never admit them into the Methodist system.”¹⁰ W. D. Kirkland, editor of the *Southern Christian Advocate* declared that, “No self-constituted and irresponsible ‘association’ with its many objection-

⁹For an account of the proliferation of local and regional holiness associations and “bands,” see Jones, *Perfectionist Persuasion*, 47-77.

¹⁰Quoted in John L. Peters, *Christian Perfection and American Methodism* (New York and Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956), 139.

able features, must be allowed to stand forth before the world as the only, or even as the chief, exponent of holiness. . . .”¹¹ And *The Christian Advocate and Journal*, the official voice of Northern Methodism, made the point so clear that no one could miss it. In an editorial in 1875, after mentioning and criticizing some of the activities of the National Camp Meeting Association, the *Advocate* maintained that the Association (and presumably its local and regional partners) is “an irresponsible agency, the outcome of which will be another and mischievous secession.”¹² This was perhaps self-fulfilling prophecy. Within five years independent holiness churches were indeed forming, drawing many Methodists into their ranks.

By the final two decades of the nineteenth century, both holiness believers and those who opposed the “special means” of “organized holiness” could see the handwriting on the wall. Things were moving toward a decisive culmination. The “Church Question” had to be faced head-on. Would “holiness people” remain loyal members of their denominations and yield to denominational authority—which they believed by this time to be increasingly hostile to them – or would they leave their denominations in order to form independent holiness churches?¹³

The leaders of the National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness generally opposed “come-outism,” as the movement away from the established denominations was called. They urged believers in entire sanctification and Christian perfection to remain in their denominations and to work within them to promote holiness teaching and general spiritual vitality. The National Association leaders intended for the National Association and the local and regional holiness associations

¹¹Quoted in Peters, *Christian Perfection and American Methodism*, 139.

¹²Cited in Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 177. The writer no doubt was referring to several earlier schisms in American Methodism, including the formation of the Methodist Protestant Church (1830), the Wesleyan Methodist Church (1843), and the Free Methodist Church (1860). Methodism had also divided along regional lines prior to the Civil War with southern Methodists forming the Methodist Episcopal Church South in 1845. In addition, the church had experienced the loss of African-American members through the formation of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (1816) and the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Zion (1821). The doctrine of Christian Perfection had not been the major issue in any of these divisions, although it did play some role in the formation of the Wesleyan and Free Methodist Churches.

¹³The term is used by Timothy L. Smith in *Called Unto Holiness, the Story of the Nazarenes: the Formative Years* (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 1962). See chapter II, “The Church Question, 1880-1900,” 27-53.

to be interdenominational, and to supplement—not duplicate or replace—the work of the existing churches. They vigorously denied that the network of holiness associations and ministries was or should become a launching pad for an independent holiness church or churches. Nevertheless, at the grass-roots level of the holiness movement, in the growing number of small bands, missions, and holiness associations, support for “come-outism” was growing. More and more holiness believers were concluding that God intended the holiness movement to have its primary home outside the existing denominations.

The issue of “come-outism” hung darkly over a series of national holiness conventions that were held during the last quarter of the nineteenth century.¹⁴ In these conventions National Association leaders tried to avoid discussion of come-outism and to discourage the growing come-outer tide, while at the same time encouraging those believers that had become supporters of “organized holiness” to “stay the course” in their denominations, even in the face of growing opposition. This was a losing battle, however. This was clear by the time the last national holiness convention met in 1901. By then at least a dozen separate independent groups of churches and religious associations with entire sanctification as their distinguishing doctrine had been formed. A significant exodus of holiness believers from the American churches was now in full swing.¹⁵

“Come Out From Their Midst, and Be Separate, Says the Lord”

The exodus of holiness “come-outers” from the American denominations was by no means a carefully orchestrated, coherent movement. It was, in fact, anything *but* this. Individuals and groups of people made the fateful decision to abandon their spiritual homes and join in the formation

¹⁴See *Proceedings of Holiness Conferences Held at Cincinnati, November 26th, 1877, and at New York, December 17th, 1877* (Philadelphia, PA: National Publishing Association for the Promotion of Holiness, 1878); S. B. Shaw, editor, *Proceedings of the General Holiness Assembly Held in the Park Ave. M. E. Church in Chicago, May 20-26, 1885* (Grand Rapids, MI: S. B. Shaw, 1885); S.B. Shaw, editor, *Echoes of the General Holiness Assembly Held in Chicago, May 3-13, 1901* (Chicago, IL: S. B. Shaw, 1901).

¹⁵Peters, *Christian Perfection and American Methodism*, 148-149, lists ten groups, but his list is incomplete. It does not, for example, list the Church of God movement associated with D. S. Warner, or similar restoration groups that claimed not to be “churches” or denominations at all, but were nevertheless independent holiness religious bodies.

of new and independent holiness churches for a variety of reasons. And, they held to a variety of ideas about what it was that they were doing; they entertained different ideas about the nature of the church and the meaning of the “holiness movement.” We must not forget that a sizeable group of fervent supporters of “organized holiness” decided to stay right where they were—they refused to be swayed by the “come-outer” tide.

While it is beyond the scope of this present study to examine every variety of “come-outism” and to probe the consciences of all “holiness people” that “stayed put” in their denominational homes, it is possible to uncover and analyze some central theological convictions and practical considerations that influenced how “holiness people” responded to the “Church Question.”

More than forty years ago now, Sidney E. Mead published his classic collection of essays, *The Lively Experiment: the Shaping of Christianity in America*.¹⁶ In the very first essay, “The American People: Their Space, Time, and Religion,” Mead reflects on the profound psychic toll taken on European-Americans in the process of “subduing” a continent. Looking below the surface of American pioneer “hero” mythology, Mead touches on the fears, reluctance, and regret that dogged at least some of those caught up in the great American westward migration. He then suggests that we might divide the “pioneers” into three separate categories, which he calls: the “eager beavers” (doers, lusty extroverts, largely without nostalgia for the home left behind); the “reluctant pioneers” (swept on with the stream, dragging feet and eyes turned back toward home); and the “settlers” (followed on the heels of the “eager beavers,” the true builders and stabilizers).¹⁷ Although our topic is a different one from Mead’s, I would like to suggest that these same categories are helpful in understanding how “holiness people” dealt with the “Church Question” at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century.

The “Eager Beavers”

The first independent (i.e., “come-outer”) holiness “church” or religious body to emerge from the holiness movement emerged in 1881. This

¹⁶Sidney E. Mead, *The Lively Experiment: the Shaping of Christianity in America* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1963).

¹⁷Mead, *The Lively Experiment*, 1-15.

was the Church of God (now Church of God, Anderson, Indiana), with Daniel Sidney Warner (1842-1925) as the primary pioneer. The Church of God formed less than fifteen years after the establishment of the National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness had initiated “organized holiness.” Warner’s group was followed in a few years (1883) by a similar group, also using the “Church of God” name (Church of God, Holiness), and known as well as the “Independent Holiness People.”

These first “independent” holiness bodies were on the cusp of the “come-outer” movement. They led the way, showed that “independency” could work, and absorbed the heat of opposition from those both outside and within the holiness movement who were distressed about its increasingly “sectarian” direction. In addition, these earliest independent “come-outer” groups espoused a “restorationist” ecclesiology that enabled them to separate from the established denominations with little regret, and to zealously go about the task of “setting in order” congregations of true “New Testament believers.” Thus, the Church of God and “Independent Holiness” people served as the “eager beavers” among holiness come-outers.

The story of the Church of God movement is quite well known.¹⁸ The story of the Church of God (Holiness)/“Independent Holiness People” is perhaps less well known. This latter group was a direct outgrowth of one of the many Midwestern holiness associations that formed after the Civil War. This was the Southwestern Holiness Association, founded in 1879 at Bismark Grove (near Lawrence), Kansas, and active in eastern Kansas and western Missouri. In 1882 six of the leading ministers of this Association decided to withdraw from their denominations (five were ministers in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and one was a Congregationalist). The next year several small groups of holiness believers affiliated with the Association began “setting in order” independent congregations that they were convinced faithfully duplicated (in contrast to those of the existing denominations) the New Testament pattern for the “true church.” Controversial in the Association at first, this “restorationist” ecclesiology—which became known as the “One New Testament Church Idea”—eventually carried the day. It led to the dismantling of the

¹⁸See John W.V. Smith, *Quest for Holiness and Unity: A Centennial History of the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana)* (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1980) and Barry L. Callen, *It’s God’s Church!: The Life and Legacy of Daniel S. Warner* (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1995).

Southwestern Holiness Association and to the creation of the Church of God (Holiness).¹⁹ Thus, the “Independent Holiness People” of Missouri and Kansas quickly adopted the same sort of “restorationist” or “primitivist” understanding of the church that had led Daniel Sidney Warner and his followers into independence.²⁰

The chief theologian of the “One New Testament Church Idea” among the “Independent Holiness People”/Church of God (Holiness) was John Petit Brooks (1826-1915). Brooks was a minister of the Methodist Episcopal Church for thirty years (1850-1880) and a part of the Church of God (Holiness) movement and its antecedent groups for the last thirty years of his life (1885-1915).²¹ Brooks was an influential figure in the Midwestern holiness movement, editing a widely-circulated holiness paper, *The Banner of Holiness*, for twelve years, and serving as one of the chief organizers of three national holiness conventions between 1877 and 1885. However, during this time, Brooks’ ideas about the nature of the church and the meaning of the holiness movement were gradually growing more “radical,” and he was relieved of his editorial duties at *The Banner* in 1883. He soon moved from Bloomington, Illinois, to Mound City, Missouri, where he became active in the emerging Church of God (Holiness) and edited several of its official publications.

¹⁹See Arthur M. Kiergan, *Historical Sketches of the Revival of True Holiness and Local Church Polity, 1865-1916* (Overland Park, KS: Board of Publication of the Church Advocate and Good Way, 1972); Clarence Eugene Cowen, *A History of the Church of God (Holiness)* (Overland Park, KS: Herald and Banner Press, 1949).

²⁰There are many books that examine the Restorationist Movement (sometimes also called Christian “Primitivism”) in the United States. Among them are Richard T. Hughes, editor, *The American Quest for the Primitive Church* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988) and Richard T. Hughes and C. Leonard Allen, *Illusions of Innocence: Protestant Primitivism in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). Also see Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), which analyzes several of the elements in Restorationist or Primitivist thought and practice. For the wedding of Restorationist and Holiness ideals, see Melvin E. Dieter, “Primitivism in the Holiness Tradition,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 30, no. 1 (Spring 1995), 78-91; Steven Ware, “Restorationism in the Holiness Movement, Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 34, no. 1 (Spring 1999), 200-219.

²¹On Brooks, see J. Prescott Johnson, *John Petit Brooks* (unpublished manuscript, 2001) and “John Petit Brooks,” in William C. Kostlevy, editor, *Historical Dictionary of the Holiness Movement* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2001), 32-33.

In 1891 Brooks published a full statement of his ecclesiology, *The Divine Church: A Treatise on the Origin, Constitution, Order, and Ordinances of the Church*.²² In this book he set out in detail the “One New Testament Church Idea” that had inspired the earliest independent holiness groups to “come out” from the established denominations.

Just how Brooks had come to this position is not clear. His thirty years of Methodist ministry were all in central and southern Illinois, which was fertile ground for the restorationist Disciples of Christ and “Christian” movements. Daniel Warner was preaching “restorationist” ideas among holiness people in nearby Indiana.²³ Also, it is possible that Brooks may have been influenced by a founder of the British Plymouth Brethren movement, John Nelson Darby (1800-1802). Darby toured the United States with considerable fanfare on seven occasions between 1859 and 1874, denouncing the corruption of the “organized” churches (or “sects” as he called them) and calling for true Christians to separate from them.²⁴ Then, too, one cannot discount the latent “primitivist” impulse that lurks in many American denominations, including Methodist bodies, and which can and does surface from time to time.²⁵

However Brooks came to his understanding of the church, one can discern the direction of his thought quite clearly by 1877 in an address that he gave in the first national holiness conventions held that year. The address was entitled “What Are the Chief Hindrances to the Progress of

²²John Petit Brooks, *The Divine Church: A Treatise on the Origin, Constitution, Order, and Ordinances of the Church; Being a Vindication of the New Testament Ecclesia, and An Exposure of the Anti-Scriptural Character of the Modern Church of Sect* (Columbia, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1891).

²³Warner had embraced “primitivist” ideas of the church while a minister of the General Eldership of the Churches of God of North America (Winebrennerian), a restorationist body formed by a group of German Reformed ministers in 1830.

²⁴See Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). Most American Protestants dismissed Darby’s ecclesiology (although it does influence the “separatist” Fundamentalist movement in the early 20th century). However, many embraced his distinctive “dispensationalist” eschatology, which became a central theme in Fundamentalist and “Evangelical” Protestant circles.

²⁵Hughes, editor, *The American Quest for the Primitive Church* and Hughes and Allen, *Illusions of Innocence: Protestant Primitivism in America* document and analyze this in some detail.

the Work of Sanctification Among Believers?"²⁶ In answering his question, Brooks identified "hindrances" both internal to the holiness movement itself as well as external to the movement. He thought that fundamental to the "external" hindrances to the progress of the work of sanctification among believers was "a weakened and deteriorated Christianity" in the United States.²⁷ The main reason holiness teaching was failing to make significant headway in the major denominations is that "carnal preachers stand in carnal pulpits, and preach carnal sermons to carnal hearers, who sit with carnal ease to hear, and then go out with carnal desires and carnal purposes to live a carnal life."²⁸ Brooks charged that "this carnal spirit *controls* in the churches" of America.²⁹

One of the main sources of the "carnal spirit" of the American denominations, Brooks charged, is a "rigid and extreme denominationalism" that promotes rivalry among the denominations and a competitiveness that kills authentic spirituality.

The sect, to survive, must not only live, but *grow*. And if it rise to a controlling rank and prestige, it must in its competitive relation to other living and growing sects, not only grow, but *outgrow*. With the spirit of rivalry that competitive struggle begets, there comes the danger of a lessened devotion, and in the end, a compromised spirituality.³⁰

Brooks went on to declare that "in its very nature the spirit of sectarianism is selfish. It lives for itself; it provides for itself; it prays for itself; it works for itself."³¹ In this self-absorption, "sectarianism" is opposed to the very spirit of Christian holiness. Still, in 1877 Brooks was not yet

²⁶In *Proceedings of Holiness Conferences Held at Cincinnati, November 26th, 1877 and at New York, December 17th, 1877* (New York, NY: National Publishing Association for the Promotion of Holiness, 1878), reprinted in Donald W. Dayton, editor, *The Higher Christian Life: Sources for the Study of the Holiness, Pentecostal, and Keswick Movements* (New York, NY: Garland Publishing, Inc. 1985), 85-102. It is worth noting that Brooks begins his address by contrasting urban and rural, western and eastern responses to the preaching of holiness. He believes that western and rural people are more "pious" and more receptive to the doctrine of holiness than eastern and urban people—pp. 85-86.

²⁷*Proceedings*, 86.

²⁸*Proceedings*, 99.

²⁹*Proceedings*, 99.

³⁰*Proceedings*, 92.

³¹*Proceedings*, 95.

ready to call the supporters of “organized holiness” to leave the major denominations, even though the denominations were deeply infected with “carnality” and “sectarianism” and generally opposed to holiness. Instead, he counseled “holiness people” to remain in the existing denominations. “Holiness people need the Church,” he insisted, “and even if they did not, *the Church* needs the holiness people.”³² At this point Brooks apparently still believed that the major denominations might yet be rescued from their “weakened and deteriorated” state by the holiness revival, even though his portrayal of those denominations was consistently bleak.

Before long, however, Brooks had given up all hope of revitalizing the denominations, and was teaching that the denominational system itself was *inherently* sinful. The American denominations could not be redeemed because they were false churches in open rebellion against Christ, the head of the true church, whose body is one, not many. The one true Church of Christ, according to Brooks, is characterized by visible corporate unity, by the personal sanctity of all its members, by its visible order and polity, and ordinances (which follow clear New Testament patterns) and by its catholicity.³³ “Where any of these are wanting, the true Church does not and cannot exist.”³⁴

According to these criteria, the so-called “churches of sect” or “nominal churches”—the modern denominations—reveal their true character. They are no churches at all. For one thing they are not in visible unity—rather, the very opposite is true. They flourish in and are the product of a humanly-devised system that rewards multiplicity and encourages competition. The modern denominations are nothing more than “sects,” i.e., “a separated part, or a part cut off from a body.” Their “nature is schism.”³⁵

As for the personal sanctity of their members, the “nominal churches” clearly reveal here too that they simply masquerade as Christ’s church. The false “sects” are filled with unregenerate, unsaved people. “Possibly one-half, possibly more, of the membership of the sects is totally without any satisfying fruits of Christian experience or life. This one characteristic condemns their claims to any rightful ecclesiastical

³²*Proceedings*, 102.

³³Brooks, *The Divine Church*, 58-102.

³⁴Brooks, *The Divine Church*, 58.

³⁵Brooks, *The Divine Church*, 268.

character.” In contrast, “the Church of Jesus Christ—the Divine Church—is composed only of saved persons; each and every one possesses a present vital Christian experience; every one sustains a saving union with the Lord Jesus Christ.”³⁶ The true church is a community of saints. According to Brooks, this means that the “sanctity of the Church consists in the *personal* sanctity of its members.” The term “community of saints” expresses “the spiritual character of believers considered personally, and the consequent spiritual character of the body.”³⁷ In the true church “personal salvation is the prerequisite to Church fellowship,” Brooks insists.³⁸ “This truth must be unqualifiedly accepted, that the Church of Christ possesses spirituality unmixed.” The true church is “an unmixed company of saved believers.”³⁹

Brooks concludes his examination of the “Divine Church” by declaring that “there can be no agreement between the spirit of holiness and the spirit of sect. They are as opposite in character as unity and disunity, concord and discord, or the pure spirituality of grace and the self-seeking carnality of nature.” Furthermore,

If anything has been demonstrated in the course of the holiness movement, it is that there can be no real adjustment of the interests of holiness with the interests of sectarianism; there can be no righteous affiliation between holiness and the sects. . . . Whatever their profession may be, the nominal Churches are not in accord with true holiness, and *there is no possibility that they can ever be brought into any real sympathy with it.*⁴⁰

Given this fact, “come-outism” is the *only* option for holiness people. According to Brooks, “the persistent desire and purpose on the part of holiness leaders to keep holiness in subjection to the sects can but have the appearance of willing compromise” with the anti-holiness “pride, and fashion, and carnal pleasure-seeking, and worldliness” that saturates the denominational bodies.⁴¹

³⁶Brooks, *The Divine Church*, 73.

³⁷Brooks, *The Divine Church*, 71.

³⁸Brooks, *The Divine Church*, 72.

³⁹Brooks, *The Divine Church*, 79.

⁴⁰Brooks, *The Divine Church*, 268. Emphasis added.

⁴¹Brooks, *The Divine Church*, 272, 277.

For John P. Brooks, the holiness movement was a divine summons to true believers to abandon the hopelessly apostate “sects” of the day and to gather together in congregations of regenerate and sanctified Christians, organized according the New Testament pattern of “congregational” independence, and together constituting the One (true) New Testament Church.

“The Reluctant Pioneers”

Many supporters of “organized holiness” were distressed by the growing “come-outer” movement in the final decades of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century. They believed that “come-outers” were betraying the interdenominational spirit and reach of the holiness movement that went back to its earliest beginnings in the 1830s and 1840s. They saw “independence” as a retreat from the challenge of witnessing to Christian Perfection “in the churches of which we are members.”⁴² And they saw the trend to “come-outism” not as a divine “restoration” of the “One New Testament Church,” but rather as its very antithesis—a sectarian march toward further division within the Body of Christ.

These holiness people decided to stay where they were—the “stay-putters” we can call them. We might also call them the “reluctant pioneers” among holiness people. In Sidney Mead’s terms, America’s “reluctant pioneers” were those “swept on with the stream” but with “dragging feet and eyes turned back toward home.” Of course, the image doesn’t work perfectly for holiness “stay-putters.” After all, they didn’t “go”—they didn’t leave home with the “come-outers”; they stayed. But, they were “pioneers” in the sense that they went into “new territory” and distinguished themselves from other Christians by their open support of and identification with “organized holiness” after the Civil War. They were definitely numbered among the “holiness people” who by the end of the nineteenth century made up a conspicuous minority in several American Protestant denominations. Yet, at the same time, they were also loyal to the denominations to which they belonged.

A fascinating representative of the “stay-putters” or “reluctant pioneers” among holiness people is Henry Clay Morrison (1857-1942).⁴³

⁴²See the call for a “General Camp Meeting” cited above.

⁴³For Morrison’s life, see H. C. Morrison, *Some Chapters of My Life Story* (Louisville, KY: Pentecostal Publishing Company, 1941) and Percival A. Wesche, *Henry Clay Morrison, “Crusader Saint”* (Wilmore, KY: Asbury Theological Seminary, 1963).

Morrison carried on ministry within the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, for over sixty years. During that time he pastored, served as an itinerant evangelist, was president of Asbury College (a “holiness” institution) on two different occasions, founded Asbury Theological Seminary, and edited *The Pentecostal Herald* (founded as *The Old Methodist* in 1888), a holiness periodical, for over a half century. During these years Morrison was one of the best known leaders of the holiness movement in the United States, and associated freely with various “come-outer” leaders. And yet he remained a part of Episcopal Methodism. His popularity in the MEC, South, was so great, in fact, that he was elected a delegate to five General Conferences of the church.

Morrison did not manage to “stay put” without difficulty. On at least one occasion in the mid-1890s Morrison was charged with insubordination to ecclesiastical authority and expelled both from ministry and from the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. However, the case was eventually overturned and Morrison was reinstated. On other occasions he was threatened with charges that were never actually brought. Twice Morrison actually *withdrew* from the church, only to return a short time later.⁴⁴ In fact, he carried on a sort of “love/hate relationship” with Methodism throughout his years of ministry. On many occasions he expressed his love and appreciation for Methodism and its spiritual heritage. He declared that,

Methodism in her origin, with her history, her doctrines, so broad, so ample, so full, reaching out to all men, and promising salvation from all sin, was ingrained into my very being. It was through the instruction, and in answer to the prayers of Methodist preachers, that I had been taught the doctrine of sanctification subsequent to regeneration. . . . There was in me a love for Methodism in its original purity and power, the significance and meaning of its methods which so pleased, satisfied and thrilled me, that, while I never was a narrow sectarian, I did love and rejoice in Methodism. . . .⁴⁵

He also stated that while “I was in fullest sympathy with what was known as ‘The Holiness Movement’ . . . this in no way interfered with my desire to be loyal to the [Methodist] Church. . . .”⁴⁶

⁴⁴On these incidents, see Morrison, *Some Chapters of My Life Story*, 170-182, and Wesche, *Henry Clay Morrison*, 82-92.

⁴⁵Morrison, *Some Chapters of My Life Story*, 185.

⁴⁶Morrison, *Some Chapters of My Life Story*, 186.

Morrison's professed love for and loyalty to Methodism did not, however, prevent him from seeing what he considered to be serious defects in her. In fact, he was quite capable of launching blistering attacks on her perceived shortcomings. His most sustained critique of Southern Methodism came in a 1910 book, *Open Letters to the Bishops, Ministers and Members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*.⁴⁷ In this book Morrison levels numerous charges against the Church, but they all tend to come back to one main problem—an alarming, and growing spiritual indifference. For example, he charges that “higher criticism” of the Bible is making dangerous inroads among preachers. He warns that the effect of the ministry of preachers tainted with higher criticism will be “to lessen reverence for the Bible, and to loosen the restraints and reins of wicked propensities and degrading appetites” among their parishioners. The preaching of such men does not “result in revival awakenings,” nor does it “fruit into devotion of heart and righteous living.”⁴⁸ However, Morrison also contends that it is in fact spiritual decline in the church that has created a hospitable climate for such “skepticism” in the first place. “The degenerate state of the church, and the consequent rampant and bold wickedness of the times,” he writes, “has made this determined and insidious advance of skepticism in pulpits and schools possible.”⁴⁹ Thus, the appropriate response to higher criticism is not an intellectual one. The real need is for “a deep, widespread revival of Holy Ghost religion” that will produce genuine conversions, clear sanctifications, and which “would at once restore the Bible to its proper place in the faith and love of the people.”⁵⁰

However, it was not only “destructive higher criticism” that was gaining in the MEC, South. There was a general shift in the theological climate: a whole group of “new notions and theories” are being introduced into the church, which Morrison labels “experimental” thinking in contrast to the tried and true “Bible doctrines” rooted in the Methodist and Christian past. These “experimental” doctrines have, according to Morrison, “brought no fire out of the skies, and produced no revivals. They have not produced a high state of grace in those who preach them,

⁴⁷H. C. Morrison, *Open Letters to the Bishops, Ministers and Members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Louisville, KY: Pentecostal Publishing Company, 1910).

⁴⁸Morrison, *Open Letters*, 23.

⁴⁹Morrison, *Open Letters*, 29.

⁵⁰Morrison, *Open Letters*, 28-29.

and under such preaching the church is perishing.” In fact, Morrison predicts that if things are not turned around, the MEC, South, is headed for “a great apostasy” and “deep moral degradation.”⁵¹

Not surprisingly, Morrison believed that one of the greatest casualties of this shift away from “Bible doctrines” to experimental “new notions” in the MEC, South, was the doctrine of Christian perfection. Morrison believed that Christian perfection did not accord well with the new spirit of the church. Consequently it was beginning to be actively opposed by those with influence. “Some of our bishops are not in harmony with the teaching of the Wesleys, Fletchers, Clarke, and Watson on this *distinctive* doctrine of original Methodism,” Morrison claimed. Further, “Many of our church editors oppose it, the pastors of our leading churches ignore or ridicule it, and our theological school at Vanderbilt University is set for its overthrow.”⁵² Morrison even goes so far as to suggest that, should Christian perfection and other “old Methodist” doctrines fall by the wayside and the MEC, South, indeed fall into a great “apostasy,” God might raise up a replacement for a failed Methodism. “When a church or other agency fails to do that for which God raised it up, He will cut it down as a cucumber of the ground and plant something better in its place.”⁵³ This, of course, brings Morrison to within a hair’s breadth of “come-outism”!

It is a spot, however, in which Morrison seems to be comfortable. In fact, he presses the issue even further. Recounting the various “independent” activities of the “organized holiness movement,” which he claims have simply been efforts to conserve the faith and to “keep spiritual fires burning” in the face of growing spiritual laxity, he asks:

Shall we go further? The [holiness] movement is moving. What shall the next step be? Is not God interested in these meetings? Does He not desire wholly sanctified and Spirit-filled ministers, faithful and fearless in the proclamation of His word? You may be sure such a ministry will preach a

⁵¹Morrison, *Open Letters*, 35-37. Morrison refers specifically to disturbing “new theories” involving man’s origin, the inspiration of the Scriptures, the nature of sin, and the future state of the impenitent. He also complains that the “new theories” are often accompanied by the endorsement of tobacco smoking, card playing, dancing, and theater attendance—see pp. 39-40.

⁵²Morrison, *Open Letters*, 53.

⁵³Morrison, *Open Letters*, 34.

whole Bible and a full salvation. It appears to me that we are very rapidly approaching a crisis. . . . Shall we build up the spiritual life of this and that congregation and community, to have it torn down by some higher critic, who has no well defined faith or deep conviction about anything, only that he has a contempt for the doctrine and experience of sanctification? Shall we pour our money into the hands of ecclesiastics who will use it to defeat the great revival for which we work and pray? These vital questions are up for serious consideration. They must have satisfactory answers.⁵⁴

Taken together with Morrison's suggestion that God may well cast aside a failed Methodism and replace it with something new, these questions are clearly intended as a threat to the leadership of the MEC, South. They were well aware that some ministers and lay people had already left the Church by 1910 for new homes in the growing number of "come-outer" holiness groups. How long could the tide be stemmed? *Could* it be stemmed?

To make matters worse, Morrison accepted the presidency of Asbury College in Wilmore, Kentucky, the same year *Open Letters* appeared. Asbury was an independent school that had been founded and was supported by Southern Methodists sympathetic to "organized holiness." It was becoming a rallying point for holiness partisans in the MEC, South. What if Morrison decided to lead the school and its constituency out of the church?⁵⁵ Perhaps at this point in his career Morrison himself was not certain whether his love for and loyalty to Methodism could hold him steady in a Church that seemed to him to be increasingly hostile to his passionate commitment to Christian holiness.

Ultimately, Morrison decided against "come-outism" and instead organized interdenominational (but largely Methodist) "Holiness Unions" to help keep "holiness people" in their denominations where, "remaining in the church where they received the blessing and so living the life of purity of heart and unselfishness of love," they might still "win their brethren in the Church to the doctrine of full salvation." He wrote near the

⁵⁴Morrison, *Open Letters*, 50-52.

⁵⁵Morrison actually served as president of Asbury College on two different occasions, 1910-1925 and 1933-1940. During his first term he began to lay foundations through the Department of Theology of the college for what would eventually become Asbury Theological Seminary. See Morrison, *Some Chapters of My Life Story*, 231-263, and Wesche, *Henry Clay Morrison*, 93-152.

end of his life: “We regretted to see disruption and come-outism of any sort,” and so increasingly “emphasized the importance of those who were sanctified remaining within their church and displaying a life in harmony with the experience they claimed.”⁵⁶ Morrison also founded Asbury Theological Seminary in 1926 to “send forth a well-trained, sanctified, Spirit-filled, Evangelistic Ministry” to serve Methodist churches.⁵⁷

“The Settlers”

Although he ultimately “stayed put” in the MEC, South, Henry Clay Morrison fraternized regularly with holiness “come-outers.” While professing distaste for “come-outism,” he still found much about it to admire. In 1899 he held an eleven-day revival campaign for the Los Angeles, California, holiness “come-outer,” Phineas F. Bresee (1838-1915). Bresee, prior to founding the independent holiness “Church of the Nazarene,” had been a pastor and presiding elder in the Methodist Episcopal Church.⁵⁸ Morrison was quite impressed with what he saw in Los Angeles. He recounted for the readers of his *Pentecostal Herald* some of the details:

For about fifteen years, Rev. P. F. Bresee, D.D., had preached in and around Los Angeles, serving two of the largest churches in the city. A few years ago, a combination of circumstances led to the doctor’s withdrawal from the membership of the M. E. Church, and his entering upon an independent work in the city for the salvation of souls. About a year later he organized “the Church of the Nazarene” with sixty members and began a marvelous career of soul winning for Christ. . . .⁵⁹

Morrison exulted in the fact that Bresee’s was a church “at whose altars sinners were being constantly converted and believers sanctified.” He also

⁵⁶Morrison, *Some Chapters of My Life Story*, 195-196.

⁵⁷Quoted in Wesche, *Henry Clay Morrison*, 144.

⁵⁸There are three major biographies of Bresee’s life and work: E. A. Girvin, *Phineas F. Bresee: A Prince in Israel* (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 1916); Donald P. Brickley, *Man of the Morning: the Life and Work of Phineas F. Bresee* (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 1960); 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, 1995).

⁵⁹Henry Clay Morrison, “The Church of the Nazarene,” *The Pentecostal Herald*, 11 (Jan. 25, 1899), 8.

endorsed Bresee's belief that "a church ought to be able to have a revival the year around," and applauded the fact that the come-outer Bresee was now free to work for the salvation of sinners and the sanctification of believers completely free from denominational constraint. The time with Bresee and the Nazarenes, Morrison declared, "will ever be remembered as one of the green spots in my life."⁶⁰

Phineas Bresee was one of the "settlers" in the holiness movement. Settlers, according to Sidney Mead, are those pioneers who "followed on the heels of the eager beavers and their ever-reluctant companions" and who "rebuilt what they could of the old and remembered in the new place." According to Mead, "The new structure never looked quite like the old, but it was their own, and it was continuous with the past" and it was "the surest hope for the future."⁶¹ This quite aptly describes Phineas Bresee's understanding of what the mission and purpose of the early Church of the Nazarene was, and was to be.

In some ways Bresee's history made him an unlikely candidate to be a major figure among "come-outers" in the holiness movement. During his ministerial career in the MEC (which lasted for thirty-seven years) he was often on the "fast track." He received frequent "promotions," pastored many large and influential churches, and associated with powerful people both inside and outside the church. He was appointed a presiding elder at the age of twenty-five, was elected to the boards of several colleges and theological schools, and was a delegate to General Conference. Bresee also used his positions to advantage to become involved in some business ventures on the side, which brought him a modicum of wealth.⁶²

Yet, in other ways Bresee's history perfectly prepared him to head up the "settler" party among holiness come-outers. Bresee was steeped in "frontier Methodism" and revivalism. He had been literally born in a log

⁶⁰Morrison, *The Pentecostal Herald*, 11 (Jan. 25, 1899), 8. For a brief comparison of the careers of H. C. Morrison and P. F. Bresee, see Charles Edwin Jones, "The Holiness Complaint With Late-Victorian Methodism," in Russell E. Richey and Kenneth E. Rowe, editors, *Rethinking Methodist History: A Bicentennial Historical Consultation* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1985), 59-64.

⁶¹Mead, *The Lively Experiment*, 9.

⁶²Bresee's business interests also eventually brought him to ruin, and helped to hasten his departure from Iowa to California in 1883. For (somewhat contradictory) accounts of this crisis in Bresee's life, see Girvin, *Phineas F. Bresee: a Prince in Israel*, 72-76; Brickley, *Man of the Morning*, 82-84; Bangs, *Phineas F. Bresee*, 97-104.

cabin in western New York and raised in a Methodist Church that had been planted in his community barely fifteen years before his birth. His earliest experience of Methodism involved itinerant preachers, numerous “preaching points” rather than fully established congregations, outdoor meetings, fervent preaching, and informal, revivalistic worship. In 1856, when Bresee’s family moved from New York to Iowa, they were part of a huge migration of settlers to the new state that would more than triple the state’s population between 1850 and 1860. In Iowa, Bresee once again found a frontier form of Methodism, but it was in a “building” mode—eagerly consolidating the gains that had made it the largest denomination in the state by the time the Bresee family arrived. Church buildings needed to be built, Methodist schools needed to be founded, and Methodist publications were required to promote the church and to rally and encourage the Methodist faithful. For twenty-six years Phineas F. Bresee would be a dominant figure in this building and “settling” of Iowa Methodism, helping Methodists there to rebuild “what they could of the old and remembered in the new place.” Throughout it all, Bresee’s guiding ideal was the Methodism of his childhood and the Methodism of his earliest days in Iowa—*itinerant preaching, frequent revivals, personal religious experience, fervent worship, and a disciplined and simple manner of life.*⁶³

Always an advocate of “old time Methodism,” it was not until quite late in his life that Bresee became involved with “organized holiness.” He had already been an MEC minister for almost thirty years and was a widely known and respected leader in the church by the time he first encountered “organized holiness” people soon after moving from Iowa to Southern California in 1883. In Los Angeles he actually became acquainted with two different kinds of “holiness people.” The first group made up a sizeable portion of the congregation of his first pastoral charge in Los Angeles, Fort Street ME Church, also known as “First Church” (where Bresee was pastor from 1883-1886). The second was a group of

⁶³It is interesting to note that this list does not include any special emphasis on the doctrine of Christian perfection, entire sanctification, or “full salvation.” Bresee seems not to have given a particularly prominent place to sanctification in his preaching and teaching until sometime after 1886. It is also well to note that Bresee began in Methodist ministry in Iowa as a “circuit evangelist” whose primary responsibility was conducting protracted meetings. He thus became convinced at the very outset of his ministry that frequent revivals are necessary for the health of the church.

holiness “come outers” that had founded “the Holiness Church of California” along restorationist lines in 1882.

The group at Fort Street Church made a great impression on their pastor, Phineas Bresee. These were loyal Methodists who gave clear and definite testimony to the blessing of entire sanctification, and who ardently promoted the doctrine of Christian perfection—mainly through supporting special “holiness associations” (including the National Holiness Association, as the National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness was by then known) and holiness meetings. Bresee was impressed with the spiritual vitality of these “holiness folks” in his congregation and embraced them, even though he did not at first share all their views. They in turn embraced and supported Bresee, although they recognized that he was, at this point, not in full sympathy with them. Bresee later recalled that “they seemed to appreciate whatever efforts I could and did make in assisting them in the work of holiness,” while “they doubtless prayed much for me,” noting that, “they did not pray at me, and they stood close by me, and sustained me in every way throughout my ministry.”⁶⁴

With the encouragement of this group of parishioners, Bresee invited two prominent evangelists active in the National Holiness Association to conduct a protracted meeting at Fort Street ME Church in 1885. While Bresee did not recall that this meeting produced any exceptional results in the church, it did mark an important turning point in Bresee’s personal spiritual pilgrimage and for the holiness movement in Southern California (and eventually throughout the country).

The second group of holiness people that Bresee came to know in Southern California was connected with the “Holiness Church of California.” This was a “come-outer” organization that had developed from the evangelistic efforts of Rev. Hardin Wallace, an MEC minister from Illinois. Wallace organized the interdenominational Southern California and Arizona Holiness Association in 1880. In short order this association became a hub for holiness “come-outism,” and several of its influential leaders began to advocate “restorationist” ideas of the church similar to those held by J. P. Brooks, D. S. Warner, and others. They taught that the one “pure New Testament Church” would be a church made up of only regenerated and “entirely sanctified” Christians and that the multiple,

⁶⁴Girvin, *Phineas F. Bresee: a Prince in Israel*, 81.

often worldly, “sectarian” churches of America were false churches. Thus, they called true believers to come out of their apostate “sects” and join the one true “Holiness Church.”⁶⁵

It is interesting to note that, during Phineas Bresee’s very first Annual Conference in Southern California, the conference stripped Hardin Wallace and B.A. Washburn, another MEC minister active in the Holiness Church, of their Methodist ministerial credentials, and adopted a resolution requiring evangelists appearing in ME Churches to have “written certification” from the Presiding Elder.⁶⁶ Then, just a few months later, Bresee was invited by his ministerial colleagues to preach at the district convention (a sort of “mini conference” held at the end of the year). Bresee preached on Christian perfection, but condemned perverting the doctrine into an instrument of schism—obviously aimed at Wallace, Washburn, and other holiness “come-outers.” In condemning the perversion of holiness by “come-outers,” Bresee declared:

The name and profession of holiness have been made the scape-goat for attempts to create schism in the Church of God—when it has been made a pretense for slandering the ministers of religion, and slighting the means of grace—when in the name of holiness men are urged to forsake the mother that bore them and turn their back on the churches that have carried them in their arms—when this is done until the community is almost sickened at the very name [of holiness] itself, good men bow their heads in sorrow.⁶⁷

The convention responded to Bresee’s sermon by adopting a resolution affirming that, “It is the duty of all Christians to be holy in heart and life,” and “it has been and is the especial mission of our church to spread ‘scriptural holiness’ over all lands.” The convention also formed a committee (that included Bresee) to correspond with the National Holiness

⁶⁵For accounts of this group, see L. A. Clark, editor, *Truths of Interest: Origin and Distinctive Teachings of the “Holiness Church”* (El Monte, CA: Standard Bearer Publishing House, 1939); Dennis Rogers, *Holiness Pioneering in the Southland* (Hemet, CA: n.p., 1944); B. A. Washburn, *Holiness Links* (Los Angeles, CA: Pentecostal Office, 1887); Josephine F. Washburn, *History and Reminiscences of Holiness Church Work in Southern California and Arizona* (South Pasadena, CA: Record Press, 1912).

⁶⁶Bangs, *Phineas F. Bresee*, 130.

⁶⁷An edited manuscript of the sermon is in *The Southern California Methodist Quarterly*, 1, no. 1 (January 1884), 5-9.

Association “with a view to the establishment of a branch association” in Southern California.⁶⁸ This was obviously an attempt to stifle holiness “come-outism” by endorsing and supporting a more moderate (and denominationally loyal) form of the holiness movement.

At this point Phineas Bresee still looked like anything but a leader of holiness “come-outers.” Here he was serving as a spokesperson in Southern California Methodism *against* “come-outism”—and, according to his own testimony, he was not yet even clearly preaching “second blessing holiness.” Referring to his entire tenure at Fort Street Church (1883-1886), Bresee stated: “At that time I did not preach the second work of grace very definitely. I preached it, but did not give it such emphasis as called out opposition, or as led so many people into the experience as otherwise would probably have been the case.”⁶⁹

Within eight short years, however, all that changed. The story of Bresee’s “conversion” to outspoken support of “organized holiness” and his journey from loyalty to the MEC into holiness independence and “come-outism” is too lengthy to recount here. Suffice it to say that Bresee did become an outspoken exponent of “second blessing holiness” and was increasingly supportive of the “organized holiness movement.” In time he became alienated from MEC leadership and found himself being pushed to the margins of Southern California Methodism. In 1894 Bresee accepted “location” by the Annual Conference, and in late 1895 (Bresee was 58 years old by this time) he organized a group of about a hundred holiness people in Los Angeles into the first congregation of “The Church of the Nazarene.”⁷⁰

In founding the Church of the Nazarene, Phineas Bresee was acting as a holiness “settler.” He was definitely not an “eager beaver.” He came late to “organized holiness,” not embracing the holiness movement until some time after 1886. By then Bresee was nearly fifty years old, and holiness come-outism was well underway. His initial reaction to come-outism when he did encounter it (in its most radical “restorationist,” “eager-beaver” form) was condemnation and opposition. Neither was Bresee

⁶⁸*California Christian Advocate*, 33, no. 8 (December 26, 1883), 3.

⁶⁹Girvin, *Phineas F. Bresee: A Prince in Israel*, 84-85.

⁷⁰This part of the story is told in Girvin, *Phineas F. Bresee: a Prince in Israel*, 97-116; Brickley, *Man of the Morning*, 115-168; Carl Bangs, *Phineas F. Bresee*, 183-215; Smith, *Called Unto Holiness*, 96-121. The number of “charter members” given in the various sources differs.

finally a “reluctant pioneer” like Henry Clay Morrison. He did not “stay put” in Episcopal Methodism. He made a clean break in 1894 and seems not to have looked back.

By 1895 Bresee clearly had come to believe that an organization like the Church of the Nazarene was necessary. This placed him between the “eager beavers” in the holiness movement and the “reluctant pioneers.” It positioned him between the restorationist “come-outers” and their claim that their fellowships of believers constituted the one “true church” and that all denominations were false “sects” (a claim that Bresee considered to be ironically “sectarian”) and the “stay putters” like H. C. Morrison who believed that the existing denominations, energized by non-denominational organizations like his “Holiness Unions,” were adequate voices for holiness. Phineas Bresee neither believed that the Church of the Nazarene was the one “true church,” nor did he believe that the existing denominations, with or without non-denominational holiness unions, associations, or missions were sufficient for the work of faithfully preaching and cultivating Christian perfection.

Bresee considered the founding of the Church of the Nazarene a “practical necessity,” and preferable to the alternatives. The one alternative was holiness come-outism of the “Independent Holiness People” variety—congregational in polity and without central organization. Not only did Bresee believe that this form was “inefficient” in its organization, but he also thought that it was liable to dogmatism and “narrowness” in its pursuit of “primitive purity.” Bresee, the former Presiding Elder, denominational college trustee, and part-time businessman, greatly valued “organization.” “Order and method are a necessity,” he insisted. “The conquering work of Jesus Christ is not to be done in a haphazard, slipshod way.”⁷¹

The other alternative, of course, was “staying put” in the existing denominations. But this was becoming increasingly problematic. Bresee was convinced by 1895, along with many other holiness people, that the major American denominations were often spiritually “cold” and antagonistic to Christian holiness. In his opinion, “organization [of a denomination] to push holiness is a necessity made more and more imperative by the opposition of the churches.”⁷² To send “newly-born and Holy Ghost-

⁷¹*Herald of Holiness*, 2, (November 12, 1913), 13.

⁷²*Nazarene Messenger*, 11 (September 20, 1906), 6.

baptized souls to the enemies of the work [i.e., the major denominations], is not unlike turning over ‘the innocents to the sword of Herod.’⁷³ And to the question, “Why have a Church of the Nazarene?,” Bresee replied: “The answer is plain. Simply because it is needed.” Holiness folks should not be “expected to stand around in cold, formal churches and run the risk of freezing to death.”⁷⁴

Ultimately, however, Phineas Bresee fervently believed that the Church of the Nazarene was divinely ordained, and that he was specially called to the work of organizing it. This more than anything else seems to have enabled him to walk away from Methodism and to invest the last twenty years of his life in building up a new denomination. “God led us forth or we would never have dared to undertake a work so colossal,” Bresee told the readers of the *Nazarene Messenger* in 1903.⁷⁵ He believed that God had called him to “settle” the holiness movement—to rebuild what he could of the old and remembered in the new place. For Bresee, this meant to rebuild the “frontier Methodism” of his youth and early ministry as a Methodist itinerant in Iowa, at least in doctrine and spirit: “We would be glad to have it known that this church is no new or vague line.... We feel ourselves to be part of that body of believers raised up to spread sanctified holiness over these lands, and thus that we are part of that company who are the *real successors* of John Wesley and the early Methodists.”⁷⁶ “We are to be a band like Gideon’s,” Bresee told early Nazarenes:

If old associates or tastes or ease or respectability are likely to affect you, you are not really of this company. If you do not so hear the call of God that you cannot well be anywhere else you have not fully the spirit of this work. It is not simply a call by a preference for a church. It is the call of God to proclaim holiness, without compromise or . . . hindrance.⁷⁷

⁷³*Nazarene Messenger*, 9 (September 8, 1904), 6.

⁷⁴*Nazarene Messenger*, 9 (August 18, 1904), 6.

⁷⁵*Nazarene Messenger*, 8, (July 30, 1903), 6.

⁷⁶*Nazarene Messenger*, 14 (July 15, 1909), 6. Emphasis added. For a careful examination of Methodism’s influence in shaping the early Church of the Nazarene, see Stan Ingersol, “Methodism and the Theological Identity of the Church of the Nazarene,” *Methodist History* 43:1 (October, 2004), 17-32.

⁷⁷*Nazarene Messenger*, 6 (October 17, 1901), 1.

To Bresee, this was the spirit of primitive Methodism (and beyond that, the spirit of the primitive Christian church).⁷⁸ This spirit, which in Bresee's view, was fast fading in the Methodism of his day, would be kept alive and nurtured in the Church of the Nazarene. And if it were, Bresee was convinced that this new "old Methodism" would contribute significantly to "Christianizing Christianity" (or perhaps better "re-Christianizing Christianity) in the United States, and thus help to save the country from "paganism" just as Wesley's movement had helped to revitalize Christianity in England and save that country from "infidelity."⁷⁹ So, Phineas Bresee, the holiness "settler," believed that a stabilized, well-organized and "efficient" Church of the Nazarene, not quite like the old Methodism perhaps, but "continuous with the past," was "the surest hope for the future" of second-blessing holiness, a vital Christianity in America, and a Christian, rather than pagan America.

Concluding Reflections

Holiness "come-outism" in post-Civil War America was never a fully coherent, coordinated movement. It drew in its wake a variety of individuals and groups with varying ideas and agendas. Among others, one can identify what I've chosen to call "the eager beavers," "the reluc-

⁷⁸It should be noted that Bresee quite often connected the early Nazarenes with the "primitive church" in spirit and methods. By this he seems to have meant a spirit of single-minded devotion to God and true holiness, and simple methods of worship and outreach not complicated by "ecclesiastical machinery," elaborate form and ceremony, and the like. He did *not*, however, believe that the primitive church provided a "blueprint" for worship or organization for the church for all time, in contrast to some holiness "restorationists."

⁷⁹"John Wesley was raised up when the desert drift of infidelity was burning and blasting every green thing. When Europe was swept by the storm and there were 40,000 infidel clubs in France, the preaching of righteousness and true holiness under Wesley saved England, and the world will never get over his influence"—Phineas F. Bresee, *Sermons on Isaiah* (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 1926), 115; "Perhaps no missionary work needs more to be done than the planting of centers of fire in this country to preach and lead people into holiness, and help Christianize Christianity, and save America from going utterly into worldliness and paganism"—*Nazarene Messenger*, 8 (November 12, 1903), 3; "The conditions—the great need—call for every effort to Christianize Christianity in America"—*Nazarene Messenger*, 11 (December 6, 1906), 6.

tant pioneers,” and the “settlers.” What do their stories reveal about the late nineteenth-century holiness movement?

1. First, it is striking that few holiness partisans reflected very deeply on the nature of the church, even as many were criticizing their churches for their failings and preparing to leave them in order to start new ones. The obvious exception are the holiness “restorationists” like John P. Brooks and D. S. Warner, who developed (or adopted) a full-blown ecclesiology which directly informed everything they did. Their ecclesiology enabled them to move quickly and assuredly out of the established denominations and into independency. Henry Clay Morrison and Phineas Bresee, while they criticized Methodism and the other major denominations of their day, do not appear to have held fully-developed theologies of the church. At least, if they did, they seldom made them explicit.
2. Second, it is obvious that, by the last decades of the nineteenth century, there was great dissatisfaction with the major denominations on the part of supporters of “organized holiness.” The sense of “isolation” on the part of those testifying to “full sanctification” that had helped to inspire the first holiness camp meeting in 1867 did nothing but deepen during the rest of the century. Holiness people increasingly experienced their churches as profoundly alien places. This was general across the movement.
3. I suggest that running through the numerous expressions of dissatisfaction with the denominations, as well as fueling the threats to “come-out” (Morrison) and the actual formation of independent holiness churches (Brooks and Bresee) were *assumptions* about the nature of the church consistent with a “believers’ church” ecclesiology. As described by Donald F. Durnbaugh, such a church “consists of the voluntary membership of those confessing Jesus Christ as Lord,” is marked by separation from the world and a covenant of the members to “live faithfully as disciples of Christ,” and rejects any idea of the church as a “mixed assembly” of the converted and unconverted. The “believers’ church” also expects each of its members to be actively engaged in works of service, and to submit to congregational discipline. In addition, such a church cares for those in need, follows a simple pattern of worship, and centers “everything

on the Word, prayer, and love.”⁸⁰ This definitely describes the ideal church implied in the holiness critique of late nineteenth-century Methodism, and undergirds the picture of a “true” and vital church painted by “come-outers” from Brooks to Bresee.

4. Finally, we can discern competing interpretations of the meaning and purpose of the holiness movement. All supporters of “organized holiness” agreed that the holiness revival was meant to “Christianize Christianity.” However, they had different concepts of how that would be accomplished.

Restorationists like J. P. Brooks saw the holiness revival of the nineteenth century as a “new Reformation” that was to refashion the Church of God. The Reformation of the sixteenth century had fallen short of God’s intention because it had spawned a host of rival Protestant “sects.” This fracturing of the church was displeasing to God, and the holiness movement was intended to bring healing to a broken church. Christians were being called to unite around the biblical concept of entire devotion to God and self-giving love to neighbor. This simple distilled gospel would overwhelm sectarian divisions and bring Christians together in holy unity. For these “eager beavers,” the holiness movement was essentially “**The Church**” in the making or re-making.

“Stay-putters” like H. C. Morrison saw the holiness revival as the divinely ordained means of renewing the churches of America. A “Holy Ghost Baptism” of perfect love would not abolish denominationalism—nor would it (ideally)—multiply the number of denominations. Rather, a revival of true holiness would enable the various denominations to be the soul-winning, revival-conducting, holy-living communities of believers they had once been, and might be again. For these “reluctant pioneers” the holiness movement was no church at all—nor was it intended to produce any new churches.

⁸⁰Donald F. Durnbaugh, *The Believers’ Church: the History and Character of Radical Protestantism* (New York, NY: The Macmillan Company, 1968), 32-33. For a discussion of the role of “believers’ church” ideology in the shaping of the Church of the Nazarene see Ingersol, “Methodism and the Theological Identity of the Church of the Nazarene,” 18-25. For a full presentation of the Believers’ Church tradition, see Barry L. Callen, *Radical Christianity: The Believers Church Tradition in Christianity’s History and Future* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Publishing House, 1999).

“Settlers” like Phineas Bresee actually differed only a little from the stay-putters like Morrison. Bresee, as we’ve seen, also believed that the holiness movement was the divinely appointed means of renewing the churches of America. However, Bresee became convinced that this might not happen directly. The Spirit’s blessing might be resisted by the “old” churches. When his occurred, new channels must be dug through which the Spirit might flow. In Bresee’s mind, the Church of the Nazarene was one of these new channels. Thus, for the “settlers,” the holiness movement might be seen as “a church,” or at least as the building material for a church or churches.

The churches that emerged from the “come-outer” impulse in the nineteenth century holiness movement have a rich, but in some ways a problematic heritage. Their foundational ecclesiologies—whether explicit (as in the Restorationist wing of the movement) or implicit (as in most of holiness “come-outism”), were fashioned in a highly charged atmosphere of controversy and conflict. They reflect a host of practical and personal considerations. They were fashioned by rugged “pioneers.” Today, however, the “pioneering” phase of these churches is long past. Will the churches birthed by the holiness movement attempt to carry identities forged in the nineteenth century into the twenty-first? Do these identities truly reflect present realities? Are they sources of life and vitality for these churches—or are they albatrosses inhibiting movement into the future? These are vital and difficult questions for the great-great granddaughters and great-great grandsons of the holiness “come outers.”

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION WITHIN A WESLEYAN ECCLESIOLOGY: THE PURSUIT OF HOLINESS FROM THE PERIPHERY

by

Douglas S. Hardy

While there is significant contemporary interest in and study of both spiritual direction and Wesleyanism, the proverbial right hand seems to know very little of what the left hand is doing. These two areas of inquiry tend to operate on separate tracks; consequently, relatively little is being done by way of critical reflection on a specifically Wesleyan understanding of and approach to spiritual direction.¹

Spiritual guidance has always been a primary constituent feature of the Wesleyan tradition, and Wesleyan scholars have noted this in their

¹Two recent publications targeting spiritual directors include chapters on Wesleyan approaches: W. Paul Jones, "Communal Spiritual Direction: The Wesleyan Movement as Model," chapter three in *The Art of Spiritual Direction: Giving and Receiving Spiritual Guidance* (Nashville: Upper Room, 2002), 65-96, and Wesley D. Tracy, "Spiritual Direction in the Wesleyan-Holiness Tradition" in Gary Moon & David Benner (Eds.), *Spiritual Direction and the Care of Souls: A Guide to Christian Approaches and Practices* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 115-151. Prior to these, only three printed sources explicitly dealt with Wesley or Wesleyanism and the formal practice of spiritual direction: Steven Harper, "John Wesley: Spiritual Guide," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 20/2:91-96 (Fall 1985); Wesley D. Tracy, "John Wesley, Spiritual Director: Spiritual Guidance in Wesley's Letters," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 23/1&2:148-162 (Spring-Fall 1988) and Barbara Troxell, "Spiritual Direction: An Interview with Barbara Troxell," *The Christian Century*, 115/13:441-443, 447-449 (April 22, 1998).

writings.² However, recent work has focused almost exclusively on spiritual guidance through the development of small group ministries within the church—drawing on the heritage of Wesley’s class meetings—but it has failed to address a broader cultural phenomenon, viz., the renewal of hunger for opportunities for a more comprehensive one-to-one spiritual direction.³ This oversight has left Wesleyans who are interested in the classical heritage of Christian spiritual direction and its contemporary expressions without a tradition-based lens of their own for reflecting on the theology of this practice.⁴

²For example: Frank Whaling in his introduction to *John and Charles Wesley: Selected Writings and Hymns* (New York: Paulist, 1981—*Classics of Western Spirituality* series); David Lowes Watson, “Methodist Spirituality,” in Frank C. Senn (Ed.), *Protestant Spiritual Traditions* (New York: Paulist, 1986), 217-273; Rupert E. Davies in his introduction to *The Works of John Wesley, Volume 9: The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989—Bicentennial Edition), 1-29; Trickett, David. “Spiritual Vision and Discipline in the Early Wesleyan Movement,” in Louis Dupre & Don E. Saliers (Eds.), *Christian Spirituality, Vol. 3: Post-Reformation and Modern* (New York: Crossroads, 1989), 354-371; Robin Maas, “Wesleyan Spirituality,” in Robin Maas & Gabriel O’Donnell (Eds.), *Spiritual Traditions for the Contemporary Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 303-319; Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood, 1994); Gregory S. Clapper, *As if the Heart Mattered: A Wesleyan Spirituality* (Nashville: Upper Room, 1997); Sondra H. Matthaei, *Faith Formation in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000); and Henry H. Knight III, “The Role of Faith and the Means of Grace in the Heart Religion of John Wesley,” in Richard B. Steele (Ed.), *“Heart Religion” in the Methodist Tradition and Related Movements* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2001), 273-290.

³For example: David Lowes Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1987), *Covenant Discipleship: Christian Formation through Mutual Accountability* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1991), *Forming Christian Disciples: The Role of Covenant Discipleship and Class Leaders in the Congregation* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1991); Michael Henderson, *John Wesley’s Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel, 1997).

⁴W. Paul Jones’ work is the exception. For sample “lenses” from other Christian traditions see: Daniel Buechlein, “The Catholic Tradition of Spiritual Formation,” *Theological Students Fellowship Bulletin* 7/3:16-18 (Jan-Feb 1984); Wendy M. Wright, “Spiritual Friendship and Spiritual Direction in the Salesian World,” *Studia Mystica* 12:49-63 (Spring 1989); Prudence Yelinek, “Pilgrim in a Strange Land: Reflections on Spiritual Direction and the Church of the Brethren,” *Brethren Life and Thought* 34:85-90 (Spring 1989); Arthur Dicken Thomas, “Moses Hoge: Reformed Pietism and Spiritual Guidance,” *American Presbyterian* 71:95-109 (Summer 1993); Joseph J. Allen, *Inner Way: Toward a Rebirth of Eastern Christian Spiritual Direction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994); Benedict M. Ashley, *Spiritual Direction in the Dominican Tradition* (New York:

As W. Paul Jones demonstrates in *The Art of Spiritual Direction*,⁵ bringing the Wesleyan tradition and the contemporary spiritual direction movement into conversation is necessary if a specifically Wesleyan understanding of and approach to the ministry of spiritual direction is to be articulated. This article seeks to add to the conversation by specifically examining the place of spiritual direction within a Wesleyan ecclesiology. Among other things, the practice of spiritual direction raises questions about the relationship between individual religious experience and the structures and practices of the church.

Defining Christian Spiritual Direction

Christian spiritual direction, a form of soul care typically provided by one individual to another,⁶ can be defined as the facilitation of one's spiritual formation through a covenanted relationship with another, formalized in regular meetings for inquiry, conversation and reflection around one's personal experience. The designated spiritual *director* is one who, by virtue of personal holiness, spiritual maturity, and the gifts and graces for counseling, helps the *directee*—the one receiving spiritual direction—to discern and pay attention to the presence and work of God in her or his life. As the author of a seminal contemporary book on the subject defines it, spiritual direction is “help given by one Christian to another which enables that person to pay attention to God’s personal com-

Paulist/Integration Books, 1995); Frank J. Houdek, *Guided by the Spirit: A Jesuit Perspective on Spiritual Direction* (Chicago: Loyola, 1996); Peter Ball, *Anglican Spiritual Direction* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 1998); Gary Furr, “Spiritual Guidance in the Baptist Tradition,” *Presence: The Journal of Spiritual Directors International* 5/3: (September 1999); Joseph Driskill, “Spiritual Guidance in a Main-line Protestant Context,” *Presence: The Journal of Spiritual Directors International* 6/1: (January 2000); Norvene Vest (Ed.), *Tending the Holy: Spiritual Direction Across Traditions* [with chapters on Ignatian, Evangelical, Carmelite, and Benedictine approaches] (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 2003); Moon & Benner, *Spiritual Direction and the Care of Souls* [with chapters on Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Reformed, Wesleyan-Holiness, Social Justice, and Pentecostal/Charismatic approaches].

⁵Nashville: Upper Room, 2002.

⁶Although a one-to-one, individual form of spiritual direction is the norm for the practice, group forms of spiritual direction do exist. For descriptions of how group spiritual direction operates, see Rose Mary Dougherty, *Group Spiritual Direction: Community for Discernment* (New York: Paulist, 1995) and Jeanette Bakke, “Group Spiritual Direction,” chapter in *Holy Invitations: Exploring Spiritual Direction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000).

munication to him or her, to respond to this personally communicating God, to grow in intimacy with this God, and to live out the consequence of the relationship.”⁷

Providing spiritual direction for those seeking guidance in spiritual matters is a practice that has been a part of the Christian church from its earliest centuries. Unique to the contemporary situation, however, is a widespread interest in the practice, at least in North America, that cuts across denominational, clerical, and gender lines. Further, the renewal of interest seems to correspond with the development of what some have described as a “therapeutic culture,” a concern with individual well being, fascination with religious experience, and a search for authentic spirituality as opposed to “religion.”⁸ As a result, much of contemporary Christian spiritual direction practice appears to be loosely connected to or even, in some cases, completely disconnected from the formal, organized life of

⁷William Barry and William Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), 8.

⁸See the following for analyses of the cultural *zeitgeist* of contemporary (1970s forward) spiritual direction: Sandra M. Schneiders, “The Contemporary Ministry of Spiritual Direction,” *Chicago Studies*, 15/1:119-135 (1976); Kenneth Leech, *Soul Friend: Spiritual Direction in the Modern World* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 2001/first edition published 1977); Tilden Edwards, *Spiritual Friend: Reclaiming the Gift of Spiritual Direction* (New York: Paulist, 1980); Alan Jones, *Exploring Spiritual Direction* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 1999/first edition published 1982); Gerald May, *Care of Mind/Care of Spirit: Psychiatric Dimensions of Spiritual Direction* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992/first edition published 1982); Janet Ruffing, *Uncovering Stories of Faith* (New York: Paulist, 1989); Susan Rakoczy (Ed.), *Common Journey, Different Paths: Spiritual Direction in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992); and Carolyn Gratton, *The Art of Spiritual Guidance: A Contemporary Approach to Growing in the Spirit* (New York: Crossroad, 1995). Together these authors identify characteristics of the contemporary era within which a new literature about spiritual direction has arisen: (1) a breakdown of traditional sources of religious and spiritual authority; (2) a seeking for “meaningful” religious and spiritual practices and experiences; (3) desire for a personal, holistic, and maturing faith grounded in a relationship with God; (4) a need for help in discerning meaning, direction, and focus for one’s life and in making decisions; (5) desire for the cultivation of an interior life; (6) desire for perspective on and strength to respond to social needs, both local and global; (7) a need for balance and the avoidance of excesses; (8) utilization of psychological language, concepts, and categories as part of a therapeutic vision for individual development; (9) desire for personal companionship in a relationship marked by mutuality; (10) desire for greater sense of connectedness with all of creation; (11) expectation of freedom of choice; and (12) a need for respecting individual and cultural differences.

the church, i.e., the broader communal context within which Christian formation occurs.⁹ A more constructive way to say this is that spiritual direction operates from the periphery of the life of the church, rather than from the center. While this tendency may be more pronounced in our day, it is certainly not new, as a brief excursus on the origins of Christian spiritual direction will make clear.

The Origins of Christian Spiritual Direction in Monasticism

Christian spiritual direction in a formal sense arose as part of a renewal movement at odds with the established church. This renewal movement is commonly referred to as monasticism and its roots are in the Eastern Church, specifically the lives and teachings of the Desert Fathers (abbas) and Mothers (ammas) in Egypt, Syria, and Palestine during the fourth and fifth centuries.¹⁰ They were the esteemed leaders of a whole group of Christian disciples who had literally fled the temptations of ancient urban culture and what they perceived to be a compromised church to live a more solitary life devoted to prayer in the desert. These first Christian hermits quickly discovered that a new and different set of temptations accompanied efforts at living contemplatively, viz., inner struggles of the mind and heart. The exterior demons of civilized culture had been replaced by the inner demons of mental temptation. Given these challenges of living with a greater attention to interiority, holy men and women were sought out for wisdom and guidance in discerning the path to a holy life and in facing the challenges of a life devoted to mental prayer.¹¹

Formal Christian spiritual direction, then, began as one-to-one conversation focused on a monk's spiritual condition. With its emphasis on interiority and privacy, the monasticism of the Desert Fathers and Mothers constituted a more individualistic approach to spiritual formation than the

⁹The contemporary rise of interest in spiritual direction corresponds with widespread distrust of or indifference toward the church as a spiritual institution. The focus tends to be on "my personal spiritual welfare/journey." Many meetings between directors and directees do not occur in a church context. Further, the models of professional counseling adopted by many spiritual directors encourage a view of spiritual direction ministry as separate or disconnected from communal life and institutional accountability.

¹⁰See J. T. McNeill, *A History of the Cure of Souls* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951).

¹¹See Leech, *Soul Friend*, 37-45 for a description of the role of the spiritual abba/amma in early Eastern Christianity.

other forms of early Christian church-based spirituality that emphasized public, corporate, and concrete ritual practices such as prayers, singing, the Lord's Supper, teaching and preaching. However, spiritual direction relationships were the seeds that would eventually bring forth new expressions of Christian community within the monastic tradition. In the West, for example, religious orders such as the Benedictines, the Cistercians, the Franciscans, and the Dominicans were established.¹² Out of the communal life of these brotherhoods and sisterhoods, spiritual direction practice began to extend beyond the circle of formal religious life¹³ to increasingly include priests and lay parishioners, women as well as men.

If, as historians of Christian spirituality agree, the emergence of monasticism provided the seminal context for the appearance of Christian spiritual direction in a formal sense, then it is worth paying attention to the pattern of that development. Three features of the pattern are significant:

1. A minority group of Christians concluded that the search for spiritual authenticity or holiness necessitated looking beyond (a kind of "leaving") the existing life and structures of the institutional church to a place/space characterized as wilderness or desert. Leaving the norm of institutional church life, however, led to a heightened need for spiritual direction focused on the interior dynamics created in that wilderness place/space.
2. In this more individualistic wilderness place/space, the need for Christian community re-asserted itself. Spiritual direction became both a first-step relational bridge between individuals and a guiding component of the newly-emerging relational life of monastic communities.¹⁴ Ultimately these religious communities forged formal

¹²The Benedictines and Cistercians are examples of monastic (cloistered) orders; the Franciscans and Dominicans are examples of mendicant (missionary) orders.

¹³Members of religious orders are often simply referred to in shorthand as "religious," a technical term meaning those who take on special vows such as poverty, chastity, and obedience. They are more commonly referred to as "brothers" or "sisters." The men do not need to be (and many are not) ordained to the priesthood.

¹⁴Benedicta Ward identifies the three main types of monastic experiments during the fourth and fifth centuries: hermit life (solitude), coenobitic monasticism (communities of brothers), and groups of ascetics as disciples of an abba/amma (*The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 1975, xviii).

relations with the institutional church they had originally felt called to abandon.

3. The ministry of spiritual direction from these communities expanded in ever-widening circles, ultimately benefiting the whole church. Outsiders to these communities came in increasing numbers to find spiritual guidance.

The Wesleyan Movement and Its Parallels to the Monastic Movement

Some fourteen centuries later and in a very different cultural context than those first monastics, John Wesley spearheaded a renewal movement within Christianity that, it may be argued, responded to the same need perceived by some in the church in the early centuries—the need for means to cultivate spiritual vitality in the face of a secularized, culturally accommodating, spiritually lazy, institutionalized church.¹⁵ His approach was quite different from the first monastics in that he and his followers did not physically remove themselves from the cities and villages of their abode nor from the institutional church—the Church of England—with which they took issue. While not monastic in this formal sense, however, it appears that the Wesleyan movement had many features of a monastic movement and, most significantly, operated with a similar vision and agenda as the early monastics.¹⁶ With reference to the three features of

¹⁵Randy Maddox notes of Wesley that “When pressed to justify his appeal to the Ante-Nicene writers as authoritative for Christian doctrine and life, Wesley presented three major reasons: their proximity to Biblical times, their eminent character, and a special endowment of the Holy Spirit upon them. By contrast, his reason for restricting authority to this period was his belief that Christian life degenerated rapidly after Constantine gave official status (and riches!) to the Church” (43).

¹⁶For arguments supporting the view that Wesley launched a form of lay monasticism, see Steve Harper, *Prayer and Devotional Life of United Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 66-87; W. Paul Jones, *The Art of Spiritual Direction*, 65-96; and Andrew Fitz-Gibbon, “Monasticism, Methodism, and Mental Well-Being,” paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society for the Study of Psychology and Wesleyan Theology, Rochester, NY, March 4, 2004. Paul Jones highlights the following specific points of comparison: 1. Wesley’s home upbringing was a mini-monastery, with Susanna functioning as a novice master (72), 2. Wesley’s linking of happiness and holiness resonates with the monastic ideal of joy (75), 3. The Franciscans had 3 orders: first order (monks), second order (brothers), third order (lay associates); Wesley developed 3 orders: first

the pattern from the initial emergence of spiritual direction, note the following similarities with the Wesleyan movement:

1. John Wesley and his Methodists concluded that the search for spiritual authenticity or holiness necessitated looking beyond (a kind of “leaving”) the existing life and structures of the national church. Although they did not use desert or wilderness language like the early monastics, they did create a new place/space characterized by asceticism and discipline through the structures of the Societies.¹⁷ The Societies were open to all who declared “a desire to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins”¹⁸—language very reminiscent of the early monastics!—and structured to enable those gathered “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.”¹⁹ Because Wesley affirmed the value of and need for personal formation (as well as faithful connection to the church), there was a heightened need for spiritual direction focused on the challenges of cultivating holiness of heart and life. The Societies and their sub-structures became the place/space where questions were asked and guidance was provided.²⁰

2. In some respects, John Wesley’s personal journey of the pursuit of holiness of heart and life was similar to the desert monastics. Through the ascetical structures of his early upbringing and the Holy Club experience at Oxford, as well as the wilderness experience of

order (ordained clergy), second order (lay preachers), third order (laity) (76-77, 80), 4. Monastic “rules of life” are similar to Methodism’s rules for societies, classes, and bands (e.g., the General Rules, Articles of Religion, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament, Hymns*, the Large Minutes), 79-81, 5. The *Book of Discipline* is a form of canon law (81), 6. Wesley’s interrogating questions for the class meetings are similar to the monastic “chapter of faults” (86-87).

¹⁷The Societies were further broken down into smaller groupings: Classes, Bands, Select Societies, Penitent Bands. See Dean G. Blevins, “The Means of Grace: Toward a Wesleyan Praxis of Spiritual Formation,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 32/1:69-83 (Spring 1997) for a helpful summary description of Wesley’s connective system.

¹⁸John Wesley, “The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies (1743),” in Davies, *The Works of John Wesley*, 9:70.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 69.

²⁰For lists of the questions used in the Class and Band meetings, see “Rules of the Band Societies,” *Ibid.*, 77-78.

his failed mission in Georgia, he discovered his own need for grace and for the means of grace that come only in the context of loving and supportive community. Consequently, Wesley, the strong leader and sometimes a lone ranger, became Wesley the organizer of small Christian communities. The Societies, the Classes, and the Bands provided differing levels of spiritual guidance in a relational context. All the while, Wesley insisted that his Methodists remain faithful participants in the liturgical life of the Church of England.²¹

3. The remarkable growth of Methodism made the ministry of communal spiritual guidance available in ever-widening circles to all kinds of people in British society. The Societies were intentionally structured to be very inclusive, the only criteria for admission being the “desire to flee the wrath to come.” Certainly Wesley’s intent was that Methodism would renew and strengthen the whole church.

Wesley’s impulse was very resonant with and perhaps even inspired by those early Christians whose fleeing to the desert led to the initial formal practices of spiritual direction. Central to this impulse is the tension created when one seeks to affirm the value and need of *both* intensely personal formation *and* faithful connection to the church as the formative community of faith. What, then, at a most basic level, can be said about the place of spiritual direction within a Wesleyan ecclesiology?

The Place of Spiritual Direction in a Wesleyan Ecclesiology

A. Spiritual Direction Holds a Place of Primacy in the Wesleyan Tradition. W. Paul Jones claims that “the very rationale for the Wesleyan movement is spiritual direction; the spirituality and methods of spiritual direction institutionalized by the Wesleyan movement . . . disclose spiritual direction as a central reason for the church’s existence; the whole reason for the church’s being . . . [is] centered on spiritual direction.”²² These are remarkable claims given the many ways in which Wesley’s contributions are named and claimed. Jones has put his finger on a

²¹The most detailed expressions of Wesley’s views on maintaining relations with the Church of England can be found in “Reasons Against a Separation from the Church of England (1758),” *Ibid.*, 332-349, “Farther Thoughts on Separation from the Church (1789),” *Ibid.*, 538-540, “Ought We to Separate From the Church of England? (1755),” *Ibid.*, 567-580.

²²W. P. Jones, 71, 75, 89.

feature of Wesleyan spiritual practice that we either haven't fully recognized or have been reluctant to own. Providing and receiving spiritual guidance was at the heart of all the activities instituted in Wesley's connective system.²³ If holiness of heart and life was the *telos* of his proclamation, then an interconnected system of spiritual direction for all was his means toward that end.²⁴

This understanding has important implications for our understanding of Church. Among other things, it suggests that spiritual direction is not simply one ministry among many, one "means of grace" among many, one practice option among others that are equally efficacious. Rather, for Wesley, spiritual direction, like a river, runs through it all or else the rich doctrinal claims and liturgical affirmations of the Church remain largely unrealized in the lives of Christians.

B. Spiritual Direction in the Wesleyan Tradition Emerges in and Takes the Shape of a Religious Order or Society. It is not surprising that spiritual direction emerged as a central feature of the connective system that Wesley developed, because that system bore striking resemblances to the monastic orders that arose in the context of the very first emergence of spiritual direction centuries earlier.²⁵ The tension that Wesley created and sought to maintain by the establishing of Societies within the broader life of the Church of England is a feature of Methodism that Wesleyan scholars have heralded as unique and fruitful for ecclesiological consideration. For example, Davies argues that the category of "society" is a necessary third option in addition to the traditional "church" and "sect" categories employed by Weber and Troeltsch to describe the range of forms of Christian communities.²⁶ A Society, he states:

. . . acknowledges the truths proclaimed by the universal church and has no wish to separate from it, but claims to culti-

²³See Bruce W. Robbins & David Carter, "Connexionalism and *Koinonia*: A Wesleyan Contribution to Ecclesiology," *One in Christ* 34/4:320-336 (1998) for a discussion of the uniquely Methodist understanding of connectionalism.

²⁴W. P. Jones asserts that "The Wesleyan approach to direction has three foci: *growth in grace* as the goal of Christian existence; *corporate spiritual direction* as a central means for such growth; and the church's *means of grace* as primary resources for this pilgrimage." (76)

²⁵W. P. Jones sees the Wesleyan movement functioning as "an evangelical order within a Catholic ecclesiology." (76)

²⁶Davies, 2-8.

vate, by means of sacrament and fellowship, the type of inward holiness which too great an objectivity can easily neglect and of which the church needs constantly to be reminded. A society does not unchurch the members of either church or sect, or repudiate their sacraments; it calls its own members within the larger church to a special personal commitment which respects the commitment of others.²⁷

Jones agrees and applies this analysis to the contemporary context by suggesting that “the conflict straining every major denomination today is, in effect, a struggle between a liberal inclusivity based on diversity and a conservative insistence on radical commitment. This is the tension that the Wesleyan movement rendered creative.”²⁸ The tendency toward increasing liberal inclusivity of diversity is characteristic of church. The tendency toward increasing conservative insistence on radical commitment is characteristic of sect. Neither is ultimately conducive to the flourishing of spiritual direction. It is the society modeled on the traditional religious order that bridges church with the impulse of sect by providing a place/space for intimate care of souls while remaining connected to the grounding resources of the church. Spiritual direction, then, not ecclesial structures or doctrine is the glue that can creatively hold together the impulses of church and sect.²⁹

C. Spiritual Direction in the Wesleyan Tradition Acknowledges Two Different Streams of “Means of Grace.” If the distinction between Church and Society (or religious order) is truly Wesleyan, then any articulation of the Wesleyan means of grace must reflect this distinction. In fact, Wesley held to a view that his Methodists would benefit from—“*both* the traditional means of grace present in Anglican worship and such distinctive means as class meetings, love feasts, and covenant renewal services.”³⁰ The former reinforced “the identity or character of

²⁷*Ibid.*, 3.

²⁸W. P. Jones, 78. Jones explains: “The value of the first is its appeal to large segments of the population, made possible by watering down the demands of faith. The value of the second is its faithfulness to the radicalness of Christianity, so stringent that it restricts Christian living to a smaller group.” (76)

²⁹The metaphor is mine. Jones says it this way: “There is reason to identify the present resurgence of interest in spiritual direction as a hungering for the creative blend of church and sect that characterized the Wesleyan movement at its inception” (*Ibid.*, 78).

³⁰Maddox, 194.

God” while the latter “were typically more effective in awakening an openness to God’s Presence.”³¹ Spiritual direction, then, would be more like a distinctively Methodist practice than a classic traditional sacramental practice. It is one of those more ordinary means of grace that helps the Christian experience God in a personal way, which then has its spin-off effects in the context of corporate church life, e.g., worship.

Because for Wesley both streams fall under the general category “means of grace,” they are vitally connected. In other words, the more intentionally individualized spiritual direction received in the context of the society/order is dependent on the more intentionally generalized or corporate spiritual direction received in the context of the liturgical life of the church. Wesley’s persistent urging of his Methodists to faithfully attend parish worship was “to convince them that it was not a matter of duty but of sustenance;” i.e., his “advocacy of parish worship was based more on soteriological than ecclesiastical concerns.”³²

Implications for Spiritual Direction in the Church Today

Jones, like others, concludes that Methodism’s shift from being a society within the broader church to eventually adopting a church-type identity of its own led to losses that characterize much of the church today and poses a challenge for any who would call themselves Wesleyan: “as a mainline, broadly based denomination, Methodism became only marginally disciplined and minimally sacramental.”³³ The distinctives and strengths of both expressions of Christian community—church and societies—were diluted, weakened, compromised. Part of the loss in the shift from society or “order” to church was the eclipsing of spiritual direction and the use of rules of life as Methodism developed its own “canon law,” i.e., “legal regulations for institutional ordering.”³⁴ So, for example, annual conferences that originally “were the vehicle for corporate clergy spiritual direction”³⁵ became characterized more and more by preoccupation with organizational concerns.

Can this lost ground be recovered? Since the Wesleyan movement itself was not a “first,” but in fact a recapitulation of earlier movements,

³¹*Ibid.*, 194.

³²*Ibid.*, 205, 206.

³³W. P. Jones., 78.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 81.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 89.

there is historical basis for assuming that such a movement can and will occur again. For those who hope for a turn toward spiritual direction in the life of the church Wesleyan, the following implications of the above analysis are offered as guides in considering the current situation:

1. The rise of interest in spiritual direction, especially individualized spiritual guidance, in our contemporary culture is indicative of a desire for God, a desire to “flee the wrath to come,” and a dissatisfaction with the church as-is.³⁶ Even though it implicates the church, it ultimately validates the church’s ultimate *telos*—holiness of heart and life.
2. Interest in, response to, and provision for spiritual direction will most consistently emerge on the periphery of the church, and actually may require forms and structures that are extra-church. This is nothing new. A Wesleyan perspective recognizes the good news in this, viz., that new “societies” or “religious orders” may emerge, giving expression to the Wesleyan vision for holiness of heart and life.
3. Serious pursuit of holiness of heart and life—the kind implicated and advocated in Wesleyan doctrine and the broader church’s liturgies—gives rise to the need for individualized spiritual direction.³⁷ A church, therefore, cannot be “Wesleyan” only in its doctrinal affirmations, its teachings, and its liturgy. Without corresponding Wesleyan spiritual practice that is both ecclesial *and* of the nature of society/order, it is Wesleyan in name only.
4. A “small groups” program offered within the confines of the church and organized with a primarily ecclesial agenda of assimilation (e.g., evangelism and church growth) is not a faithful replication of Wesley’s Classes and Bands as contexts for significant spiritual direction.

³⁶Randy Maddox notes that the distinctive means of grace provided by the Methodist societies were introduced because of what “Wesley found to be lacking in the typical parish member’s experience of church.” (209)

³⁷The underlying principle here is that “a ‘rule’ necessitate[s] spiritual direction” (W. P. Jones, 71), i.e., being a Christian disciple requires spiritual companionship for the journey in order to attend to the unique work of the Spirit in each person. Spiritual direction, in a Wesleyan frame, is understood as “discernment, support, and discipline” (75), as “the method by which one moves through discipline to discipleship, from general principles to specific actions.” (82)

5. Any contemporary Wesleyan attempt to foster or embrace society/order structures for spiritual guidance will inevitably create tension with the broader corporate, liturgical life of the church.³⁸ Therefore, any advocacy by spiritual directors for directees to be vitally connected to church life needs to be based on a theology of the church as means of grace.³⁹
6. A Wesleyan approach to spiritual direction will be ecumenical, creating and carefully preserving space/place for all who seek God and desire holiness of heart and life.
7. Any approach to spiritual direction that fosters separation from the broader life of the church cannot be Wesleyan, for it will lose the grounding that keeps it Christian. Wesley held schism “to be among the worst possible sins.”⁴⁰

The Wesleyan movement, then, like its predecessors in the monastic movement, produced the right conditions for the flourishing of spiritual direction as a central Christian practice for nurturing holiness of heart and life. Ironically, it did so by embodying a creative tension with the institutional church, a tension that highlights the reality of both personal and corporate spiritual formation needs. The key to recovery of spiritual direction in the Wesleyan tradition is a recovery of the creative tension between church and society/religious order, a recovery of “a basic discipline for daily, personal spiritual life, nurtured by spiritual direction within a structure that provides supportive accountability.”⁴¹

³⁸Davies notes that Societies, by the very tensions they seek to maintain, contain the seeds of their own potential destruction: “Religious societies in general, because of the very intensity of their devotion, tend to become either exclusive or obsessive, i.e., they either confine their membership to those who show a similar degree of commitment to that of their founders or concentrate narrowly on one or two particular aims.” (24)

³⁹This approach actually holds promise for postmoderns who are not likely to respond to “shoulds” appealing only to church authority.

⁴⁰Davies, 28.

⁴¹W. P. Jones, 81.

**EIGHT-DAY RISING LOAVES:
A POSTMODERN–ANTE-NICENE DIALOGUE
ON BAPTISMAL NEW CREATION**

by

Kenton M. Stiles

The symbol of the eighth day of creation offers rich meaning to Christian thought and practice by focusing our attention on the New Birth and new existence that is available to us. Whereas the original cosmic creation described in the Genesis narrative took seven days to be fulfilled, the realm and reign of the New Creation has been accomplished in just one: the eighth day of Christ. It is therefore surprising that this Christological symbol has not been explored and utilized as frequently in contemporary theology as it was in Christian antiquity.

This image, regardless of its popularity in theological discourse, belongs fully to the church. That is, while the eighth day of creation may be a minor theme in systematic theology, it has greater ecclesiastical and practical significance because of the symbol's place in sacramental theology and liturgy. Its meaning, unfortunately, could very well remain obscure since the sacrament to which it relates is not the Eucharist, which is celebrated frequently and prominently in the life of the church, but to baptism. However, it is my belief that this baptismal symbol can make a significant contribution to our Wesleyan understandings of baptism and the New Creation, even as postmodern evangelicals are rediscovering the importance of such religious symbols.

The Vulnerability of Reference

In North America's postmodern and post-Christian world of today, churches struggle to establish a sense of personal and communal identity. Pastors and educators alike wrestle with the question of whether meta-narrative is truly dead. As they do so, and as the changing winds of contemporary Christian culture continue to blow through—or over!—the content, style, and structure of (non-liturgical) Wesleyan worship, pastors and worship leaders have increasingly turned to religious symbolism to bridge the gaps yawning between the different generations and groups in their congregations. But such stopgap solutions also entail risk. It is the possibility that these symbols, despite the best intentions, can become empty shells or meaningless ciphers if they do not appear within a narrative-symbolic context that adequately *re-presents* the reality to which they point and in which they participate.

This danger, the vulnerability of reference, is a regrettable but inherent problem that is quickly discovered when one investigates the layers of meaning in the words *symbolize* and *symbol*. To symbolize is to make a comparison or analogy between dissimilar or perhaps even unequal subjects. A symbol can be a simple sign of reference, or it can uncover a deeper reality that binds the referents together. We also find that “to symbolize” can mean “to converse or confer,” in which case a symbol acts as an agent that initiates a conversation, whether it be verbal (i.e., inter-subjective and external) or analytical (i.e., internalized and psychological). Symbols thus make the introduction at the meet of meaning. But from ancient usage we also find that a symbol can, at its worst, cause two parties “to meet, to engage with, to fight, or to meet in battle.” The potentially combative nature of the symbol is therefore truly a *root* problem: that is, in its constituent parts the prefix *sym-* denotes “with-ness” or “togetherness,” while the verb *ballein* means “to throw” or “to toss.”¹ A

¹I would here direct the reader to the excellent theological prolegomena “Theology and Imagination” in Rob L. Staples, *Outward Sign and Inward Grace: The Place of Sacraments in Wesleyan Spirituality* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1991), 41-60. Staples sees symbols not as mere signs, signals, or signposts that are sentimentally contrived, nor as rational concepts whose meaning can be exhausted by pure logic, nor again as purely aesthetic creations that are later granted theological significance. Rather, he maintains that the best symbols not only combine these dimensions of reason, faith, and imagination into an integrated whole, but that such symbols also *participate*—in a Tillichian sense—in the reality which is their referent.

symbol that is poorly thrown into use without regard for the context in which it will be received will ultimately introduce a note of (cognitive) dissonance. Indeed, a symbol that lands in an alien or hostile context may come to a violent end! But a symbol like the eighth day of (New) Creation, when it is thrown in with baptismal liturgy and biblical narrative, can create truly satisfying results.

In addressing the challenge that Wesleyan-Holiness pastors face in meaningfully articulating and ritualizing the doctrine of New Creation through the sacrament of baptism in our postmodern/Western context, it is my position that a dedicated return to biblical narratives and to creative imagining offers a starting point for re-imagining baptismal New Creation. Specifically, I submit that 21st-century pastors and theologians should revisit the 4th-century baptismal traditions of northern Italian Christianity to see how hero narratives, water miracle narratives, and narratives that relate soteriologically or eschatologically to New Creation (e.g., Genesis, Passion, or Resurrection narratives) were used to shape baptismal experience. Despite this dedication to biblical narrative, there is also evidence of great creativity and freedom that enabled the leaders of this time to explore parallel or complementary images and symbolism found in fourth-century secular culture.

Creation's Eighth Day: The Wesleyan Context

Having referred to cognitive dissonance above, I wish to begin this discussion with a moment of theological confusion. The confusing situation or context to which I refer is not Wesleyan baptismal theology, for the Wesleyan view of the sacraments and the means of grace has frequently been the subject of study. Rather, this movement's lack of theological clarity exists at the level of the New Creation generally, and is essentially non-existent with regard to the symbol of the *eighth day of creation* and its connection with baptism.

For both of the Wesleys, the image of the New Birth is far more significant than that of the New Creation. Theodore Runyon, however, chooses the New Creation as the central theme of Wesleyan soteriology, even as he affirms that the New Birth is the key to understanding Wesley's doctrine of salvation:

The renewal of the creation and the creatures through the renewal in humanity of the *image of God* is what Wesley identifies as the very heart of Christianity. "Ye know that the great

end of religion is to renew our hearts in the image of God.” This century’s foremost Wesley scholar, Albert Outler, calls this renewal of the image “the axial theme of Wesley’s doctrine of salvation.” “God will thus ‘renew’ us ‘in the spirit of our mind,’ and ‘create us anew’ in the ‘image of God, wherein we were at first created,’” says Wesley quoting Ephesians 4:23 and Colossians 3:10. We will trace this theme of the *new creation* through Wesley’s thought, seeking to spell out its implications in his own time and for the present day.²

To use the image of the New Creation in this manner makes perfect sense given what appears to be Runyon’s progressive and postmodern target audience. The book’s overtones of ecological, economic and liberation theologies naturally resonate with the idea of transforming creation and the *status quo*. Nevertheless, this admirable and relevant interpretation of Wesley’s theological center, the New Birth, is technically an *interpolation* insofar as it transfers to the New Creation that which actually belongs to the New Birth. Furthermore, it pays no attention to the historical notion of creation’s “eighth day.”

For John Wesley, the New Creation emerges as an eschatological category in his later writings. In the sermons “God’s Approbation of His Works” (1782), “The General Deliverance” (1782), and “The New Creation” (1785), Wesley finds use for his personal interest in natural history and romantic pastoral verse as he imagines how God will take up and transform the world’s physical elements, features, and creatures at the world’s end. In the coming physical paradise, the earth will gleam with brighter colors and be marked by perfect weather and pristine landscapes. The new earth will be perfectly ordered, winds will blow gently, and crystal-clear brooks will flow freely. Fire will invigorate but not destroy. Animals will fulfill Isaiah 11’s image of the “peaceable kingdom” and perhaps even be able to know and enjoy God.³ Indeed, God’s original artistic design for creation will be surpassed:

²Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley’s Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press), 8.

³Wesley writes, “May I be permitted to mention here a conjecture concerning the brute creation? What if it should then please the all-wise, the all-gracious Creator, to raise them higher in the scale of beings? What if it should please him, when he makes us ‘equal to angels’, to make them what we are now? Creatures capable of God? Capable of knowing, and loving, and enjoying the Author of their being? . . . However this be, he will certainly do what will be most for his own glory” (Sermon 60, “The General Deliverance,” §3.1, *Works*, 2:448).

Every part [will be] suited to the others, and conducive to the good of the whole. There [will be] “a golden chain” (to use the expression of *Plato*) “let down from the throne of God”—an exactly connected series of beings, from the highest to the lowest: from dead earth, through fossils, vegetables, animals, to man, created in the image of God, and designed to know, to love, and enjoy his Creator to all eternity.⁴

Wesley’s creative vision, however, goes deeper than his scientific curiosity and poetic impulse: the problem of evil, generally, and natural evil, in particular, motivated him to write these sermons.⁵

Charles Wesley followed John in presenting the New Creation as an image of the personal transformation that follows the New Birth and as the coming cosmic transformation at the world’s end. The most popular use of the phrase is the invitation for God to “finish then Thy new creation” in the hymn “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling.”⁶ But Charles sees an eschatological dimension in New Creation, as well. Hymn 64 graphically describes the cosmos’ transformation:

3. Then let the thundering trumpet sound, The latest lightning glare,
The mountains melt, the solid ground Dissolve as liquid air;
4. The huge celestial bodies roll, Amidst that general fire,
And shrivel as a parchment-scroll, And all in smoke expire!
5. Yet still the Lord, the Saviour reigns, When nature is destroyed,
And no created thing remains Throughout the flaming void.
6. Sublime upon his azure throne, He speaks the almighty word;
His fiat is obeyed! ’tis done; And Paradise restored.
7. So be it! let this system end, This ruinous earth and skies,
The new Jerusalem descend, The new creation rise!

But Charles pens yet another view of the New Creation—one which corresponds to the problem of evil, as noted above. Hymn 60 vindicates God in response to Lisbon’s tragic 1755 earthquake:

⁴Sermon 56, “God’s Approbation of His Works,” §1.14, *Works*, 2:396. The noted verbs have been changed to the future tense.

⁵Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 253.

⁶Hymn 385, verse 3. From the collection of *Standard Hymns* of 1889, see the following: Hymn 140, verse 4; Hymn 148, verse 3; and Hymn 736, verse 3.

3. Every fresh alarming token, More confirms the faithful word;
Nature (for its Lord hath spoken), Must be suddenly restored:
From this national confusion, From this ruined earth and skies,
See the times of restitution, See the new creation rise!
4. Vanish, then, this world of shadows, Pass the former things away:
Lord, appear! appear to glad us, With the dawn of endless day,
O conclude this mortal story, Throw this universe aside!
Come, eternal King of glory, Now descend, and take thy bride!⁷

Nevertheless, while Charles' poetry is thematically and theologically consistent with John's prose, neither Wesley connected the New Creation with the eighth day or baptismal liturgy or catechesis.

One trend in recent Wesleyan-Holiness theology, encountered above in Runyon's work, is to take a broader view of New Creation and to employ it as a more culturally-relevant concept in our contemporary world. A second example exists in *Wesleyan Perspectives on the New Creation*, a collection of essays written on the topic for the Eleventh Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies.⁸ While the title suggests that each author's perspective has been trained on the same subject, the written evidence suggests that the true common thread is perspectivism itself, rather than the New Creation. While it is a fine collection of essays, it is thoroughly contemporary and thus provides little historical clarity for the theological muddle the Wesleys created. With so many views of the New Creation con—fused together, how can we not be confused together?

Nevertheless, I do believe that the Wesleys offer help to Wesleyan-Holiness churches seeking to enrich baptismal experiences.⁹ Although

⁷Maddox's research finds that Hymns 59, 60, and 63 correspond to the same natural disaster and the overarching question of theodicy (Maddox 1994, 373, n. 158).

⁸M. Douglas Meeks, ed., *Wesleyan Perspectives on the New Creation* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2004). The proceedings of the 1996 Annual Meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society, whose convening theme was the "New Creation," demonstrate this same broader view of New Creation.

⁹This being said, one must admit that John Wesley did not place great importance on baptism except as a rite of initiation for infants or as confirming the faith of a convert who had not been baptized previously. The problem was simple: the audiences to which Wesley preached was filled with individuals who were baptized but were not living a regenerate life, a life filled with the grace witnessed to by baptism. For a more extensive discussion of John Wesley's view of baptism and the class meeting as catechumenate, see Maddox (216-229) and Henry H. Knight, III, "The Significance of Baptism for the Christian Life: Wesley's Pattern of Christian Initiation," *Worship* 63 (March, 1989): 133-142.

denominations and individual churches vary in how they conduct baptism, the class meetings of the Methodist society provide us with an analogue to the baptismal catechetical instruction of the fourth century. John Wesley believed that these small groups, which met “in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they might help each other to work out their salvation,” served as a fitting analogy to the rigorous instruction received by baptismal catechumens in Christianity’s earliest centuries.¹⁰ The meetings served to further awaken Wesley’s previously-baptized “catechumens” to the reality of regenerating grace and to train them to regularly receive God’s grace through more “ordinary” means (e.g., the Eucharist, corporate worship, accountability, prayer, and works of mercy). As such, for Wesley the “bath water” preceded the new Christian “baby.”

While the situation is often reversed today as many Christians avoid baptism until they have “grown into” their faith, the small-group “catechumenate” remains relevant in its various forms (e.g., class meetings, discipleship groups, intensive Bible studies, and introductory “Christianity 101” classes) insofar as it provides a nurturing environment of spiritual instruction and accountability in which baptism’s significance can be both immediately felt and sustained in the future. Furthermore, it is my opinion that the symbolic experience and meaning of baptism, (New) Creation’s “eighth day,” can be further enhanced when (1) the act of baptism culminates a *process* of aesthetic-spiritual-rational formation and (2) is marked by attention to imagination/creativity, Biblical narrative, and symbolic ritual and architectural elements. As we try to imagine and implement such holistic forms of baptism in this new century, the practices of fourth century Christian baptism provide us with a worthy model.

Fourth-Century Baptismal Architecture

Any attempt to understand early Christian baptism must pay attention to narrative, doctrinal, ritual, decorative, and architectural details. As a thoroughly unified and comprehensive process, the experience was truly of baptism as a whole, but histories often fail to view it as such. Whereas Christian historians focus on catechetical and liturgical details, many art historians have glossed over the literary evidence (e.g., letters, sermons, liturgies, and decorative inscriptions) that define or describe how bap-

¹⁰Wesley, *Works* (Jackson), 8:250-251.

tismal structures functioned as a fully ritualized space. This latter oversight is highly ironic since architectural historians have grown increasingly sensitive to the priority of function over form for both domestic and public Roman architecture.¹¹ Nevertheless, the overwhelming tendency has been to focus primarily on pure architectural similarity, in which case the 4th-century Italian baptisteries could have been modeled after Imperial mausoleums of the same period,¹² the typical axially-oriented Roman atrium house,¹³ or the Roman baths.¹⁴

The common consensus today is that Constantine “copied” his predecessors’ tombs and used them as his “inspiration pieces” when building the prototypical Italian baptistery at the Lateran.¹⁵ The correlation between mausoleal and baptismal architecture appears to be supported by Pauline theology, most notably in the analogy made between baptism and Christ’s death and resurrection in Romans 6. In theory, then, the celebration of baptism should be seen as a morbid ritual that culminated a three-year process of examination and instruction by which the baptismal can-

¹¹Cf. the Introduction to Frank Brown, *Roman Architecture* (New York: George Braziller, 1961). In it the author flatly states, “The architecture of the Romans was, from first to last, an art of shaping space around ritual” (9).

¹²See Richard Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 69-70. The practice of erecting imperial mausoleums ended abruptly after Hadrian’s death in 138 C.E., but apparently was revived by four emperors—Diocletian, Maxentius, Galerius, and Constantine—who reigned between 300 and 310 C.E.

¹³A helpful overview of historians who maintained that Christian basilica-atrium-baptistery complexes derived from domestic Roman architecture can be found in L. Michael White, *Building God’s House in the Roman World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 12-17.

¹⁴This evidence includes round *thermae*, the *frigidaria* at Badenweiler and Pompeii’s Stabian Baths, the circular *calidaria* at Caracalla’s and Constantine’s baths in Rome, and numerous round and octagonal nymphaea and changing rooms in imperial palaces. Cf. Krautheimer, “Introduction to an ‘Iconography of Medieval Architecture,’” chap. in *Studies in Early Christian, Medieval, and Renaissance Art* (New York: NYU Press, 1969), 115-150. Like that of the atrium house, this theory persisted long past its viability.

¹⁵The Lateran baptistery’s shape was eventually repeated at the following locations: Milan’s San Thecla (ca. 350-55), Ravenna-Orthodox (ca. 390), Ursiana (ca. 410-20), Lomello, Como, Brescia, Aix-en-Provence, Riez, Nevers, Mar-seilles, Albenga, Aquileia (ca. 450), Novara, Frejus, Grado (ca. 450), Ravenna-Arian (ca. 495), and Riva San Vitale, (ca. 500). Cf. Krautheimer, *Christian Architecture*, 176-77; and Robert L. P. Milburn, *Early Christian Art & Architecture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 207-9, 212-14.

didates were elevated from the status of *auditores*—literally, “hearers of the Word”—to that of *competentes* and full membership in the community of faith. After official initiation into the church through baptism, individuals immediately received another sacrament, Christ’s body and blood, as they partook of their first communion.

However, a closer look at extant baptismal liturgies, catecheses, and decorations demonstrates that the mausoleal theory is too narrow. Despite the architectural evidence, the crucial relationship between baptism and Christ’s death and resurrection, and the immense influence of Paul’s theology, baptism celebrates spiritual rebirth and life rather than death, burial, and mourning. Therefore, candidates did not swoon, black was not worn, funeral dirges were not sung, and pyres were not lighted.¹⁶ Instead, baptism contained elements from both ecclesial practice (e.g., exorcisms, blessings, songs of praise, and creedal confessions) and daily life (e.g., entering and exiting a building, undressing and clothing oneself, and the bathing of bodies and feet). This affirmation of life was natural since baptism marked the initiation of individuals into the life of a local congregation and the historical community of the Judeo-Christian faith. As such, baptism introduced believers into the grand narrative of God’s salvific works. As will be seen below, this meta-narrative was overtly present when the stories of biblical heroes and Christian saints were intertwined with catechetical instruction and baptismal sermons.

Narrative Baptismal Decorations

While the architecture of these early Christian structures was not inherently narrative, their shaping of baptismal space permitted for narrative decorations and rituals. Significantly, the decorations found in these fourth-century baptisteries have more in common with the earlier narrative decorations at the Christian catacombs than with the decorations typically found in contemporary Roman imperial architecture—whether mausoleal or palatial—or in Christian art of the following centuries. Indeed, Christian art after the fourth century turns away from narrative and

¹⁶Interestingly, Krautheimer cites the existence of tombs at Ravenna’s Arian Baptistery (ca. 495) and the Council of Auxerre’s prohibition of burial within baptisteries (578) in support of his mausoleal theory. His argument is blunted at two points: (1) Auxerre was a local council and not an *ecumenical* one, implying that burial in baptisteries had only become a problem at that particular time and place; and (2) the Lateran baptistery predates both instances by nearly two centuries.

toward tradition—with “tradition” here signifying the ideas of ecclesiastical and political authority, their vested interests, and hierarchical syllogisms of power. The narrative style of the Good Shepherd found in the catacombs and in early baptisteries is a far cry from the high Christology and ecclesiology expressed by the enthroned *Majestas* that appeared later. The century that began with Christ enthroned above his disciples in the apse mosaic of S. Pudenzianza, Rome (ca. 400), and has its mid-point in the mosaics of Christ’s baptism and the crown-bearing apostles of Ravenna’s Orthodox Baptistry (ca. 458), would end with the creation of Ravenna’s apostle-filled Arian baptistry and the birth of S. Apollinare Nuovo’s nave. Both of the last two structures would eventually be crowded with images of saints and royalty.

Fourth century mosaics, frescoes, and sculptures, however, did retain the narrative feel of the earliest Christian art. One structure from the previous century, the Dura-Europos baptistry (ca. 230-57), ably demonstrates the early Christian aesthetic. On its walls one finds eight identifiable images: the Good Shepherd with his sheep, the healing of the paralytic by the pool of Bethesda, Jesus and Peter walking on the Sea of Galilee, the encounter at Jacob’s well between the Samaritan woman and the Messiah who offers (eternal) life-giving water, David—the oil-anointed future king—beheading Goliath, a nighttime procession of candle-carrying women (i.e., the baptismal Vigil), and a scene of the Garden of Eden (i.e., heaven). A painting of Adam and Eve, added later, reinforced the idea of restored innocence and purity.¹⁷ Similar scenes—some identical—would appear a few decades later on the walls and ceilings of the Callistan and Priscillan catacombs in Rome.¹⁸ Four aspects of all these decorations are

¹⁷Cf. C. Bradford Welles, ed., *The Excavations at Dura-Europos . . . Final Report VIII, Part II* (New Haven, Conn.: Dura-Europos Publications, 1967), for a careful and extensive iconographic study of how the image of the Good Shepherd unifies these baptismal decorations symbolically and ritually. Whereas the narrative images depicted in the lower register refer to different elements found in the ritual celebration of baptism at Easter, the upper register point to the person and acts of Jesus, who is the source of salvific *aretai* [“mighty works”]. Welles, therefore, argues that the earthly Good Shepherd of Dura-Europos was also depicted as a *cosmic* shepherd—one who through baptism “provides salvation for his own in this world and the next” (186).

¹⁸ See Paul Corby Finney, “The Earliest Christian Art,” chap. in *The Invisible God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 146-230, for a detailed contemporary discussion of the catacomb images and the manner in which they represent biblical narratives. One cannot overstate the significance of these decorations being narrative (i.e., living) images rather than morbid images.

relevant here: (1) biblical narrative as iconographic source; (2) the correlation between baptism and water-related biblical miracles or events; (3) the relation of “Good Shepherd” imagery to the baptismal context; and (4) the correlation of decorations with specific liturgical practices.

Jesus’ designation as the Good Shepherd, first made in John 10:11, proved popular with early Christians, especially in relation to baptism. *The Acts of Thomas*, which originated in Syria (ca. 200) shortly before the building of the Dura-Europos baptistery, describes a barbarian king’s baptism and refers to the Good Shepherd in the baptismal liturgy.¹⁹ Further west, other Christians expanded this image by adopting and sacralizing the popular Roman pastoral ideal of the *morally* good shepherd. Tertullian (ca. 210), for example, mentions that orthodox Carthaginians served the Eucharistic wine in cups decorated with images of the Good Shepherd.²⁰ Lamps depicting the (Roman) good shepherd, produced in central Italy between 175 and 225, may have also been popular with Christians.²¹ Within a few years the image began appearing in Roman Christian catacombs, eventually numbering over one hundred and twenty examples.²² Christian sarcophagi would also include Shepherd images by the third century’s end.

Turning to the fourth century, we find an account of the Lateran baptismal decorations in the sixth-century work *Liber Pontificalis*. Items that Constantine personally donated, listed in the *Vitae* of Pope Sylvester I (r. 314-35), included the following: a font of silver-covered porphyry, the font’s golden basin and its supporting porphyry column, seven eighty-

¹⁹The passage in question reads, “And now at my supplication and request, do thou receive the king and his brother and join them unto thy fold, cleansing them with thy washing and anointing them with thine oil from the error that encompasseth them; and keep them also from the wolves, bearing them into thy meadows. And give them also drink out of thine immortal fountain which is neither fouled nor drieth up; for they entreat and supplicate thee . . . thou that art Lord and verily the Good Shepherd.” Cf. Johannes Quasten, “The Painting of the Good Shepherd at Dura-Europos,” *Medieval Studies* 9 (1947): 1-18. Quasten’s essay is the seminal work on this subject in Christian iconography.

²⁰Tertullian, “On Purity,” in *Treatises on Penance*, vol. 28, *Ancient Christian Writers* (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1957), 78-82. Tertullian, an outspoken critic of idolatry and a member of the heretical Montanist movement, felt that the eucharistic use of cups with pagan shepherd images was tantamount to apostasy: “Perhaps that shepherd will favor you whom you picture on the chalice, himself a debaucher of the Christian sacrament, worthy to be both an idol of drunkenness and a protector of the adultery which follows upon the cup” (82).

²¹Finney, 116-135.

²²Milburn, 30.

pound silver statues of stags, a thirty-pound gold statue of a lamb, a five-foot silver statue of Christ, and a five-foot silver statue of John the Baptist that included—presumably on a tablet that he held—the inscription “Behold, the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sin of the world.”²³ Eight porphyry columns were located at the corners of the octagonal font, so the statues were presumably located between each column on top of the connecting balustrades or low walls, with the deer being located on seven sides and the other statues on the eighth.

These statues visually presented several theological and narrative images simultaneously. The lambs of God (i.e., Jesus and the gold statue) introduced the theme of the Christ’s propitiatory sacrifice and its consequence of eternal life. This eternal theme was further emphasized by John’s prophetic words about the Messiah, but John’s physical presence near the font is a reminder of Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan River. The pastoral setting of this baptism was further enhanced by the deer, which helped link the pastoral settings of Jesus’ baptism, the Garden of Eden’s Fountain of Life,²⁴ and the liturgical elements of Psalm 23 and 42.²⁵ Interestingly, the golden lamb and silver stags were all capable of pouring water. Because Constantine’s baptistery was situated on the former baths of the Lateran Palace, it is natural to conclude that water actively poured from the mouths of the animals into the baptismal font since this type of construction was common in Roman baths and fountains. The Lateran baptistery was eventually copied

²³*The Book of Pontiffs (Liber Pontificalis)*, trans. Raymond Davis, *Translated Texts for Historians: Latin Series V* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1989), 17.

²⁴See Paul A. Underwood, “The Fountain of Life in Manuscripts of the Gospels,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* (1951): 43-137, for the most comprehensive study of the symbolic relationship between deer and the Fountain of Life. Early examples include the Lateran baptistery, the mosaics at San Giovanni in Fonte, Naples (c. 390), and pavement mosaics in the octagonal baptistery of Salona, which dates to the end of the fourth century (Krautheimer, *Christian Architecture*, 181). The connection is most clearly demonstrated in the Lateran baptistery where an eight distich poem was inscribed on an architrave and installed above the font on Constantine’s porphyry columns. Two of the lines read, “This is the fountain of life [*fons vitae*], which purges the whole world, taking its course from the wound of Christ. Hope for the Kingdom of Heaven, you who are reborn in this font; the blessed life does not accept those who are born only once” (Underwood, 55).

²⁵The psalms came to be included in the Roman liturgy some time between 215 and 370. Given the presence of the golden lamb and deer in the Lateran’s baptistery, it seems that a date of 315-320 would be likely if ritual function helped determine the aesthetic form of the decorations.

in Rome, northern Italy, Provence, and the upper Adriatic region. Popes Innocent I (r. 401-417) and Sixtus III both donated similar silver stags to the baptisteries of S. S. Gervasius and Protasius and S. Maria Maggiore, and their predecessor, Pope Damasus (r. 366-384), attached an octagonal and niched baptistery to St. Peter's basilica in Rome.²⁶

The baptistery of San Giovanni in Fonte, Naples, dating to the end of the century, offers the best evidence of early Christian narrative decoration. Its ceiling mosaics have deteriorated over the centuries, but the central medallion and the scenes in five of the eight "pie" sections are still identifiable. Within the dome's central medallion, a superior Chi-Rho cross and an inferior Alpha and Omega are set in starred blue heavens; above these signs the hand of God appears, holding a cluster of gold leaves. While in the context of baptism these symbols represent the selection of Christ as God's eternal Son and as the victor over death and sin, the emblems themselves are derived from representations of imperial apotheosis and sovereignty common in the Constantinian era.²⁷ These imperial symbols, plus a mosaic in which Christ passes the Law to Peter and Paul, hint of the hierarchical and politicized decorations that began to emerge at the turn of the century.

The surrounding images, however, depict biblical narratives related to baptismal liturgy or Jesus' water miracles. One such image portrays Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, washing and anointing Christ's feet with perfumed oil (John 12:1-8). Both foot-washing and the anointing of baptismal candidates with chrism were a part of the baptismal liturgy. The baptismal Psalms and Jesus' Johannine self-designation are depicted through two mosaics of the Good Shepherd with his sheep. These are, in turn, paralleled by two mosaics depicting a previously unprecedented scene in early Christian art: the Good Shepherd standing between two deer drinking from streams (i.e., the streams flowing from the Fountain of Life). San Giovanni's baptismal mosaics thus demonstrate a more intentional and image-specific composition than even the Lateran's statuary.

²⁶Ibid., 31, 36.

²⁷Three of the four symbols have Constantinian precedent or overtones. The Hand of God crowns Constantine on several coins minted during his reign. Ironically, this symbol is first encountered in Jewish art rather than in imperial Roman or Christian iconography. A century earlier the Hand appears in frescoes depicting Moses and Ezekiel in the synagogue of Dura-Europos. The Chi-Rho, an abbreviation for *cristoV*, was the same emblem that Constantine saw in a vision and bore to his victory at Milvian Bridge in 312. Golden leaves signify the imperial laurel wreath.

San Giovanni's water miracle mosaics further reinforce baptismal symbolism and liturgy. The wedding miracle in Cana presented an image of water, wine, and transformation to baptismal candidates; each element has a place within baptism and the subsequent celebration of eucharist. To this scene's immediate left, Jesus and the Samaritan woman are depicted at Jacob's well. Here, again, baptism's eternal living water is present. Two Galilean water miracles also appear: Jesus and Peter walking on the water, and the post-Resurrection draught of fishes. Both of these scenes have eucharistic overtones at the conclusion of their narratives, the Feeding of the Five Thousand and the disciples' final meal with Jesus prior to the Ascension.

With regard to baptismal decorations, final consideration should be given to the patronage and writings of St. Paulinus of Nola, a unique and significant figure in the history of early Christian art and architecture. As a patron, his architectural accomplishments include organizing and funding the remodeling and construction of buildings (ca. 401/2) at the martyrial complex of St. Felix near his estate at Cimidium-Nola, east of Naples. News of his generosity spread, and by 403 a baptistery in Agen, France, was to be dedicated to him and St. Martin of Tours. In his correspondence with Severus, Agen's bishop, Paulinus begins to articulate a Christian aesthetics. While Paulinus declined to compose a baptismal inscription like those at San Thecla and the Lateran, he strongly felt that "it is right" that Martin's image be included in the baptismal decorations. Paulinus saw that images could be didactic in and of themselves, but he also felt that mounting inscriptions nearby would help observers understand the meaning of portraits of Martin and himself—namely, that they would not serve as ends in themselves, but would act as true symbols, leading others to emulate their holy living. Paulinus later posted similar signs by many of the painted images on the buildings in Nola.²⁸ The con-

²⁸In Poem 27 (ca. 403) he expresses his views on the aesthetic power of paintings: "This is why we thought it useful to enliven all the houses of Felix with paintings on sacred themes, in the hope that they would excite the interest of the rustics by their attractive appearance, for the sketches are painting in various colors. Over them are explanatory inscriptions, *the written word revealing the theme outlined by the painter's hand*. So when all the countryfolk point out and read over to each other the subjects painted, . . . their astonishment may allow better behavior in them. Those reading the holy accounts of chastity in action are infiltrated by virtue and inspired by saintly example" (emphasis mine).

nection that Paulinus makes between aesthetic encounter and religious experience repeats a key theme in our baptismal investigation, namely, that aesthetic representations and remembering lead to re-presentation and re-remembering in actual human experience.

Narrative And Baptismal Liturgy

If 4th-century baptism was truly narrative, then the ritual would have engaged participants in a remembering and re-remembering process. That is to say, through baptism the catechumens repeated or re-enacted bodily actions that effectively joined them to the ongoing story of divine adoption and salvation. The eighth day of New Creation was thus ritual re-creation. The liturgies of this period are further unified by the manner in which they repeat the pattern established by the churches in Rome. In effect, the same narrative was being enacted throughout Italy.

Rome's baptismal liturgy first appears in Hippolytus' *Apostolic Tradition*, which documents the catechetical preparations and baptismal liturgies from the administrations of popes Zephyrinus (198-217) and Callistus (217-22). Preparation for baptism normally began with three years of intense spiritual instruction and moral examination for catechumens.²⁹ During Easter week at the end of the third year, catechumens prayed and fasted throughout Good Friday and Saturday before attending the Easter Vigil. During the night, the bishop exorcised the candidates, breathed on their faces, anointed them with oil, and performed a symbolic opening of the eyes and ears, the "Effetha." On Easter morning the candidates entered the sacred ritual space of the baptistery: children first, men next, and women last. The catechumens stripped themselves of all clothes and jewelry, and women unbound and loosened their hair. A triple renunciation of Satan, his service, and his works, performed while candidates faced west, was followed by anointing with the oil of exorcism. Candidates then stepped down into the water, offered a triple confirmation of the Trinity, and were immersed. After a final anointing with the oil of thanksgiving, the neophytes (literally, the "newly enlightened ones") re-dressed in their own clothes. Baptism proper was now complete, but the extended ritual continued as the neophytes proceeded to the next sacred space, the sanctuary. A second confirmation followed and included the

²⁹Hippolytus of Rome, *The Apostolic Tradition*, in Lucien Deiss, *Early Sources of the Liturgy*, trans. Benet Weatherhead (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1967), 54.

laying on of hands, prayer, and a Trinitarian anointing. The bishop next administered the seal of the Holy Spirit on each forehead, gave the kiss of peace, and concluded with the celebration of the Eucharist, which included a special element of milk and honey.

The writings of bishops Zeno of Verona (ca. 362-370), Ambrose of Milan (ca. 372-397), and Chromatius of Aquileia (ca. 390-408) all reveal that continuity with the third-century Roman rites was maintained in each city.³⁰ The form of the Veronese liturgy has been reconstructed from Zeno's baptismal sermons and has only a few minor variations, such as the exclusion of the Effetha. The inclusions are more notable: neophytes were robed in a white baptismal garment as they exited the font, and the congregation sang as the groups proceeded into and out of the baptistery.³¹ Ambrose's two catechetical lectures, a six-part series on the sacraments, and a shorter discussion of the Mysteries exhaustively document Milanese baptism and clearly present the Ambrosian liturgy as a more sophisticated form of Hippolytus' liturgy. However, like Verona, Milan had made some important additions: robing the neophytes in white, performing the rite of foot-washing, and singing of Psalm 23 as the neophytes proceeded from the baptistery into the basilica. Ambrose's use of song during baptism is hardly surprising since he was responsible for introducing responsorial singing into the Western church. The Aquileian liturgy, alluded to in Chromatius' sermons, resembled the Veronese rites, but a notable addition, foot-washing, illustrates Ambrose's influence within the church of his day.

The baptismal ritual richly engaged the senses and was full of contrasts that powerfully enacted or re-presented the reality of salvation and a transformed life. Vestments and nudity, architecture and rich decorations, light and shadow, all were witnessed visually. With the ears one heard bubbling water, shuffling feet, murmured prayers, clearly spoken words, and joyous outbursts of song. The smell of scented chrism was in the air. Tongues tasted the elements at the celebration of the Eucharist. The tactile senses were engaged by cold stone, heated water, gentle human touches, smooth oil, and textured fabric, but above all else they experienced bodily

³⁰The most notable exceptions are the second post-baptismal anointing and the rite of foot washing.

³¹Gordon P. Jeanes, ed., *The Day Has Come! Easter and Baptism in Zeno of Verona* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1995), 149-214. It is difficult to precisely locate the point at which singing may have occurred in the liturgy.

movement—movement through sacred spaces, through light and darkness, through entry and exit, and even through varied postures.

On a primary level, all of the actions performed in the baptismal liturgy accomplished precisely what the bishop and priests said they did. Thus, to renounce the devil, his pomps, and his works was just that, a renunciation. On a secondary level, however, a catechumen's *present* actions also collided with *past* biblical events as re-presentation or remembering. Bishops were able to clarify these narrative roots of baptismal rites through symbolic hermeneutics. Ambrose, for example, identified the following ritual origins for his catechumens: the Effetha followed Jesus' use of spit to heal a blind man; foot-washing re-enacted Jesus' own act of servitude; and immersion derived from the cleansing of Naaman's leprosy, Jesus' miracle by the pool of Siloam, Elisha's miracle of the floating ax head, the parting of the Red Sea, and Jesus' baptism by John. Chromatius found typological precedence for foot-washing in the stories of Abraham's heavenly visitors at Mamre and Gideon's encounters with God in Judges 6.

The difference between these two levels of action consists in the words *mimesis* and *anamnesis*. The first term is common, referring to the act of remembering. According to Richard McCall, the second term is more appropriate for the events of Easter week as it signifies how baptism re-remembered the past *as present* in each candidate's body:

It is a commonplace that, for the Judeo-Christian worship tradition, history plays a fundamental role, both as the locus of God's "mighty acts," including the incarnation, passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and as the material, as it were the ground for that particular presence-to-God effected in the act of liturgical *anamnesis*. This [is a] "reactualization" in our present lives of the mighty acts of God. . . . The participant in the liturgy. . . is part of the plot, as it were. Although the *anamnetic* narrative may center on events in the lives of others (Jesus, for example), the liturgical participant is invited to enact now one, now another, role in the unfolding story.³²

If individuals indeed became oriented to a larger "unfolding story" of God's mighty acts, we must conclude that the fundamental meaning of

³²Richard D. McCall, "Anamnesis or Mimesis? Unity and Drama in the Paschal Triduum," *Ecclesia Orans* 13, no. 2 (1996): 316, 318.

fourth-century baptism cannot be found within itself, regardless of baptism's historical significance, its theological profundity, or the manner in which it may have symbolically re-enacted the *personal* salvation narratives of its catechumens. Rather, the orientation was toward *biblical* narrative; so we now turn to the sermons, catecheses, and other teachings by which bishops established this narrative context that we now turn.

Narrative As Unifying Agent

Many types of biblical narratives are encountered in pre-baptismal instruction and homilies. Although I have suggested above that the majority of these narratives relate to Hebrew heroes, water miracles, and events in Jesus life, one also encounters the stories of less inspiring figures and events. For example, and despite what has been said above about the influence of mausoleal architecture and symbolism, the image of Christ's death did occur frequently. Paul had, of course, connected Jesus' death with baptism centuries before, and Hippolytus records that the death-resurrection dyad was creedally present in the Roman liturgy at each candidate's second immersion. The imagery of this dyad reinforced the new reality of one's own personal transformation, of the contrasting existence (i.e., between the old self and the new self) established through baptism, and of one's official entry into the communion of the church.

Another narrative possessing natural death-symbolism is Daniel 3, one of five passages read during the Veronese Vigil and the last one read prior to entering the baptistery.³³ This is the story of the Hebrew youths and the fiery furnace that would be their crematorium and mausoleum. Surprisingly, Zeno's sermons show that he had little interest in the story's morbid overtones. Rather, he focused on the positive symbolic values to be found in the number three, the heavenly dew that protected the men, and the identity of the being who saved them. Here again we see that baptism's fundamental meaning lay in the new existence that the sacrament signed and sealed rather than in the spiritual death that logically preceded it.

The story of Adam and Eve is another narrative link in the transformative chain connecting the old and new selves. The primal pair's presence was felt in the first Vigil reading, Genesis 1, which reminded its hearers of creation's original goodness and humanity's possession of the

³³Jeanes, 105. The readings are, in order, Genesis 1, Exodus 12, Exodus 14, Isaiah 1 or 5, and Daniel 3.

divine image, and continued to be felt insofar as the couple's sin stood as the theological foil to salvation and baptism.³⁴ Their expulsion from the garden was then paralleled in ensuing readings from Isaiah 1 and 5, which told of how Israel, God's chosen but disobedient nation, no longer merited God's favor and would be expelled from the delightful gardens or vineyards it once enjoyed. The neophytes' triple renunciation of Satan also provided a *negative* reference to Adam and Eve, who *did not* choose to repudiate their tempter.

Two final types of Lenten practice symbolize a return to Adam and Eve's prelapsarian innocence: sexual abstinence and an uncorrupted appearance. The first, which occurred during the forty days of intense instruction and moral examination leading up to baptism, was part of a larger group of mildly ascetic activities that included prayer, fasting, and abstinence. This Lenten state of restored purity was further symbolized for both genders by their nudity within the baptismal waters. A second step for the women was the loosening of their hair and the removal of any jewelry or fabric used to cover or bind it up.³⁵ In contemporary Roman culture such coiffure normally advertised a woman's promiscuity, but Christian virgins of the day subverted the practice to testify to their vows of chastity. Loosened hair, like nudity, was an ambiguous symbol under normal circumstances, but within the baptismal context these practices identified the catechumens with Adam and Eve's idyllic existence.

Ambrose's Use of Narrative and Numerical Symbolism. The writings of Ambrose and Zeno are especially helpful in seeing how biblical narrative was the underlying agent that unified baptismal liturgy and

³⁴Four of Zeno's surviving sermons (I.7; I.27; I.45; I.50) were preached after the reading of the creation narrative.

³⁵See Margaret Miles, "Christian Baptism in the Fourth Century," chap. in *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (Tunbridge Wells, England: Burns & Oates, 1989), 24-52. Regarding baptism, Miles concludes that "a closely woven set of religious meaning of loosened hair—as associated with penitence and impurity—was held in tension with secular meanings of loosened hair—as wantonness, insubordination, subversiveness, and sexual availability. In addition, the loosened hair of [a] woman at baptism also signified the loosened hair of a virgin or unmarried woman, a woman not engaged in sexual activity. At baptism every woman, whether married or virgin, became virgin temporarily, both by literally abstaining from sexual activity during the extended period of catechism and by her initiation into a new life and community" (51).

meaning. With Ambrose, this is seen most clearly in “The Sacraments” and “The Mysteries,” the lectures that were delivered to his neophytes *after* baptism.³⁶ Again, these instructions were necessary since these previously unbaptized Christians had not witnessed or participated in these sacraments before.

The illustrations Ambrose used to explain the various ritual elements of baptism and baptism as a whole are drawn primarily from the Scriptures. Narratives from the Hebrew scriptures which were cited as types of baptism include the Spirit’s movement over the waters at creation (9), Noah’s deliverance from the flood (I.23; 10), Naaman’s immersion and healing in the Jordan River (I.13-14; 16), the anointing of David with oil (29-30), and the miracle of Elisha and the floating ax-head (II.11). Events from the Exodus received special attention. Ambrose found types of the baptismal liturgy in the marking of door lintels with the blood of Paschal lambs (34), the parting of the Red Sea (I.20; 12), the miraculous appearance of water from the rock at Mara (II.12; 14), and the pillar of smoke and fire that led the Hebrews through the Sinai wilderness (I.22; 12). Ambrose also used numerous accounts from the life of Jesus, including his baptism in the Jordan by John (I.15-19), the healing of the lame man at the pool of Bethesda (II.3; 22), the healing of the blind man at the pool of Siloam (III.2; 11), Christ’s “baptism” of blood in the crucifixion (II.17-19, 23), and the coming of the Holy Spirit in the “baptism” of fire at Pentecost (II.15). Ambrose’s pedagogical method ensured that the neophytes understood their new identities within the larger context of Hebrew and Christian narrative; unfortunately, we have no extant evidence proving that Milanese church decorations followed his lead.³⁷

Stories drawn from life events and nature also served as illustrations in Ambrose’s baptismal exegesis. Allusions to funerals and bathing occurred frequently. Neophytes were also coached to be like athletes seeking the victor’s laurel wreath (I.4). They were further challenged to

³⁶References from “The Sacraments” and “The Mysteries” are henceforth given parenthetically in standard and *italicized* text, respectively.

³⁷See Annabel Jane Wharton, “Ritual and Reconstructed Meaning: The Neonian Baptistery in Ravenna,” *Art Bulletin* 69, no. 3 (Sept. 1987): 362, n. 20. Wharton feels that “Ambrose’s rhetoric is so specifically visual that it is tempting to suggest that the hall in which he presented his lectures was decorated with scenes from the Old Testament. According to Agnellus’ description of the ecclesiastical complex at Ravenna, the basilica and the bishop’s refectory were adorned with images, including scenes from the Old and New Testaments.”

remain true in their allegiance to Christ just like those who vowed to repay borrowed money, lest they face the wrath of a Judge (I.5). Even more powerful are the images he found in nature: neophytes were eagles that must aspire to the heavens (I.6); they were fish whose ability to live in water enabled them to survive the floods and storms of the world (III.3); they had the appearance of newly-shorn sheep whose whiteness came from losing the dirty wool of their sins (38).

A particular instance of Ambrosian symbolism merits special attention for how he redefined the meaning of the baptistery as a whole. To Ambrose the relationship of the baptistery to the sanctuary had a scriptural parallel in the Tent of Meeting and its division between the Holy Place and its inner room, the Holy of Holies. The most obvious point of comparison, their architectural proportion and relation, was not of concern to Ambrose. Rather, he focused on these sacred spaces' ritual usage—a use that occurred but once a year. Whereas the Holy of Holies was where the High Priest made intercession for the sins of the entire Jewish nation, the baptistery was the “sanctuary of regeneration” (5) for those being united with the entire body of Christ. Ambrose then pushed his comparison further: just as Aaron's staff of wood grew into a flowering almond tree a day after it was placed in the Holy of Holies, so also the neophytes had experienced miraculous spiritual growth and blossoming after being watered by baptism.³⁸

Ambrose's interest in baptismal symbolism extended beyond Scripture. Baptismal liturgy, decorations, and architecture were also examined through the lens of numerology. In a poem attributed to Ambrose, the numerological significance of the number eight was applied to the octagonal shape of San Thecla's baptistery. San Thecla's octagonal baptistery and font, like the Lateran's, would likely have been copied due to the city's prominence as the Empire's western capital and as the seat of Christendom's leading bishop, Ambrose. But Ambrose's sanctified numerology provided another reason to follow this design: the eight sides were visual reminders of (New) Creation's eighth day.

³⁸Ambrose writes, “To what does this point? That you may understand what the second tabernacle is, in which the priest introduced you, in which once a year the highest priest is accustomed to enter, that is, the baptistery, where the rod of Aaron flourished. Formerly it was dry; afterwards it blossomed: ‘And you were dried, and you begin to flower by the watering of the font.’ You had become dry to sins, you had become dry by errors and transgressions, but now you began to bring forth fruit ‘planted near the running waters’” (IV.2).

Symbolic Christian interpretation of the numbers six, seven, and eight is found as early as 130 C.E., the approximate date of the apocryphal *Epistle of Barnabas*. Since God formed creation in six days and rested on the seventh, seven was thus understood as a sign of completion or perfection. However, God ultimately fulfilled Creation's destiny through the addition of the eighth day, the day of Christ's resurrection. Ambrose eventually developed a full theology of the eighth day—Zeno's "day of salvation":

One who begins the mystery of regeneration on the eighth day is sanctified by grace and called to the inheritance of the kingdom of heaven. Great in the power of the Holy Spirit is the grace of seven, yet the same grace echoes in response to seven and consecrates the number eight. . . . Thus, the grace of the Spirit which was bestowed on the eighth day brought back to paradise those whom sin had made outcasts. . . .

The seven of the Old Testament is the eight of the New, since Christ arose and the day of the new salvation has shed light upon all. . . . On that day there comes the splendor of a full and perfect circumcision to the hearts of men. On this account, the Old Testament gave the number eight a share in the ceremony of circumcision.³⁹

Ambrose's reference to circumcision was ingenious. Whereas circumcision, the rite of male initiation into the Jewish faith, occurred eight days after birth, baptism, the Christian initiation rite paralleling circumcision, characteristically occurred on Easter Sunday, with Sunday being the first and eighth day in the weekly cycle. As if this were not enough, Ambrose and Zeno's neophytes would experience the one/eight day cycle yet again as they received their final catechetical instructions. This time period began on Easter and ended on the next Sunday, Whitsunday—literally, "white" Sunday—following the removal of the white baptismal robes.

Zeno of Verona: Narrative Imagination Unleashed. Whereas Ambrose's lectures were delivered after baptism, Zeno's sermons were preached at the Vigil or during baptism itself. Due to the timing of their delivery, these sermons had a direct effect on how catechumens imagined the baptistery's

³⁹St. Ambrose, Letter 50, in *Letters*, vol. 1 (1-91), trans. Mary Melchior Beyenka, vol. 26, *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1954), 266-267.

ritual space. Zeno's words prepared them for both what and how they would see. By priming the pump, so to speak, Zeno ensured that the baptismal liturgy, decoration, and architecture would be encountered creatively.

Zeno's illustrations frequently drew upon biblical narratives and events in daily life. Stories from Scripture included references to Exodus events (I.9, 18, 29; II.16, 26), the sacrifice of the Paschal lamb (I.8), and the trial of the three Hebrew youths in the fiery furnace (I.11, 22, 31, 55; II.15, 22). Zeno's allusion to a deer drinking water (II.14) appears to have been a reference to the singing of Psalm 42 (I.12, 23). Zeno also compared baptism to tending a vineyard and new vines (I.10.B; II.11), preparing a batch of identical white loaves of bread—the white-robed catechumens—in a bakery (I.41), bathing (I.12, 23, 49), being judged and executed by invisible authorities (I.42), and facing imprisonment and purification through torture (II.10).

Zeno used images from nature to even greater effect. Both graphic and powerful, his association of natural childbirth with spiritual rebirth was reminiscent of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus. Zeno was no shrinking violet, and his words transformed the baptistery into the mother's body and the font into a womb:

Thanks to your faith, the wave of rebirth has already begotten you. It is bringing you forth through the sacraments. . . . Lo, the sweet wail of the new-born is heard. Lo, the most illustrious brood of the begotten proceeds from the one womb. A new thing, that each one is born spiritually. Run, then, forward to the mother who experiences no pains of labor although she cannot count the number of those to whom she gives birth. Enter, then. Enter! Happily you are going to drink the new milk together. . . . Fly to the fountain, to the sweet womb of your virgin mother. . . . Fly without delay to the milk of this genital font.⁴⁰

Zeno's frequent earthy descriptions of baptism did not leave the hearer stuck with the physical realities of childbirth, however. A reference to Jesus' birth in a "stinking" and "filthy" manger would end with the spiritual rebirth of the resurrection, and his allusion to mother's milk antici-

⁴⁰Quoted in Thomas M. Finn, *Early Christian Baptism and the Catechuminate: Italy, North Africa, and Egypt*, vol. 6, *Message of the Fathers of the Church* (Collegetown, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1992), 56-57.

pated baptism's triple immersion and partaking of the special Eucharistic element.

Whereas these images of mother and child had narrative foundations, this was not true of Zeno's reinterpretation of time. On this topic his baptismal theology reaches its zenith both in terms of creativity and trajectory. Zeno saw Easter not only as "the day of salvation," a phrase which appears repeatedly in his sermons, but as the temporal axis of the cosmos. Creation's eighth day, baptism, was simultaneously its new first or primal day. Accordingly, Zeno's sermons referred to all of the major divisions of time. Hours, days, months, seasons, years, stages of life, and history's ages—all of these could all be explained in terms of baptismal salvation. Zeno took the classical notion of cyclical time and relocated it within a Christian context where life's seemingly endless motions reached their fulfillment through the water sacrament.

On one occasion he interpreted the seasons as the four cycles of spiritual life: winter was the age of idolatry and eternal death, in spring Christian infants bloomed as "dazzling sweet flowers" when watered by baptism and stirred by the Spirit's zephyrs, summer was the Christian's fruitfulness, and autumn was the age of maturity and martyrdom (I.33). In yet another sermon Zeno offered a Christological interpretation of all "the secrets of the divine horoscope." Aries represented the Lamb of God, Virgo referred to Jesus' virgin birth, Aquarius was baptism's "saving stream," and Pisces symbolized "the two peoples from Jews and Gentiles who live by the water of baptism, sealed by one sign into the people of Christ" (I.38).

Much of Zeno's attention was devoted to the natural units of time measurement, but he also understood time to be symbolic as a whole. As such, baptism was a proleptic or anamnestic event where the contemporary act (i.e., baptism in Verona) participated in the primal event, Christ's resurrection. Baptism was also eschatological since it anticipated the believer's heavenly end:

[The day of salvation] gives birth to its own beginning from its end and yet it is as near as ever to *the cradle of its birth*. Indeed it bears the image of *the mystery of the Lord*, for it announces *the passion* by its setting and *the resurrection* by its rising to new life, and thus it promises to us as well *the gift of future blessedness*, and it will also grant this to our *competentes* whom now the happy sunset invites so that, immersed

in the milky depth of the sacred ocean and rising from there, new with the new day, they may come with us to the *glory of immortality* (I. 57).

Time was therefore thoroughly “kairotic” for Zeno, shot through with eternal time. In baptism’s new temporal continuum, time had been stood on its end, could be read both forward and backwards, was both overlapped and isolated, and was simultaneously circular and teleological. The Veronese catechumens could not have missed the radical and dramatic way in which time was redefined. Furthermore, Zeno’s views of time—a cosmological matter—would have influenced how they understood the baptistery as a whole. Standing under a vaulted or domed ceiling and speaking of the passing of the seasons, years, and ages of humanity, Zeno transformed the baptistery into a model of the cosmos, the universe in miniature. Within the “cosmic house” of the baptistery, each of the universe’s three tiers—water, earth, and the “dome of heaven”—would have been represented physically and spatially.⁴¹

The importance of Zeno’s and Ambrose’s words cannot be overstated. These bishops, Christ’s own representatives, presided over the baptismal liturgy and creatively shaped how the rites, sacred space, decorations, and spoken words were understood. The form that their imaginative minds gave to baptism as a whole can be summed up as “narrative identity.” While individual portraits, symbols, rites, or scripture passages had a certain meaning in and of themselves, they reached their fulfillment only insofar as they were caught up in the larger story of death and resurrection, cosmic history, and the Christian meta-narrative of divine salvation. In theory, the only limit that could be placed on the symbolic meaning of the baptistery’s space was that of a dull mind: only an unimaginative preacher or his hearer could restrict how baptism and its narrative context would be envisioned and experienced.

Concluding Beginning

Re-membering the complex aesthetic-symbolic-theological experience of fourth-century narrative baptism may well be an unachievable

⁴¹Cf. Karl Lehmann, “The Dome of Heaven,” *Art Bulletin* 27 (1945): 1-27; and E. Baldwin Smith, “Domical Forms and their Ideology,” chap. in *The Dome: A Study in the History of Ideas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 61-94. See especially Smith’s discussion of domical structures as the “cosmic house” (79-94).

ideal in the twenty-first century. The economics alone are prohibitive. Even if a church could afford to build and appropriately decorate a detached baptismal structure and to staff and provision a forty-day catechetical program, how many adults could possibly arrange for the necessary six weeks of paid vacation or qualified childcare for an extended religious holiday? In light of this, pastors and professors should consider more accessible practical aids for enhancing baptismal meaning. If this sacrament is given full narrative and multi-sensory presentation, post-modern Christianity's (re-)turn toward religious symbolism need not include the risk of baptism becoming an empty cipher.

Creative & Narrative Preaching. Today's baptismal sermons should already be benefiting from two decades' worth of emphasis on creativity and narrative by leading homileticians and educators. But theory *must* be put in practice, and a pastor need not fear that an imaginative sermon series on Hebrew heroes, water miracles, or "old-school" religious symbolism will not engage a congregation. Different can be good! And preachers must accept that their words really are the primary tools by which they engage and expand their congregation's vision of narrative identity and feel for doctrinal concepts. Both Ambrose and Zeno provide excellent models of how sermons can have great creative effect when their stories or images are taken from sources which are diverse (e.g., scripture, nature, or daily life), shocking (e.g., professional sports, TV commercials, or Web pop-ups, spam, or blogs), or subversive. Indeed, if Zeno's graphic illustrations were repeated from some pulpits today, more than a few pastors would be looking new places to minister.

Multi-sensory Presentation. Ancient baptism was a complex process that effectively engaged all of one's senses. In most cases today, however, fewer senses are engaged and the experiences are generally less intense. But what if this were not the case? What if candidates entered a sanctuary in a white-robed procession with lighted candles and censers? What if a stage area was transformed into a lush streambed? What if the rest of the congregation actually stood up and moved together, sang a Psalm, and shared the Eucharist and the special element with the candidates? Pastors accept the research that shows that what is taught is more effectively retained when it is seen and written as well as heard. It is therefore logical to conclude that an individual's baptismal experience will be more profound when more senses are engaged.

Electronic Media. DVDs, digital projectors, and computer presentation programs offer great potential for deepening the visual experience of baptismal imagery and symbolism. Still photos, ecclesiastical art, landscape backgrounds, and video footage can all be used to complement a pastor's homily, a liturgical procession, or the actual rite of immersion. Sacred digital resources are available at online worship resource sites and Christian bookstores, but secular sources like the local computer superstore also have a wealth of digital images and movie clips available on DVD.

Small Group Nurture. With the ideal of early Christian baptismal instruction and examination not possible today, Wesley's comparison of small classes or accountability groups to the catechumenate seems prophetic. It is here that pastoral staff and lay leaders can prepare baptismal candidates who are *already* experienced and doctrinally-astute Christians for the "other side" of faith and baptismal meaning: the affective. Baptism provides an excellent reason to introduce a spiritual formation program that focuses on the nurture of prayer life, meditation, aesthetic aids to worship, and other devotional forms. Candidates could meet weekly with a spiritual advisor or sponsor during the Lenten season.

Get Historical. Contrary to popular belief, I have found that the use of brief historical references in prayers, sermons, or blessings does not promote drowsiness or tooth decay. Rather, getting historical is a type of *reframing* technique that broadens perspectives and challenges ecclesiastical monotony and continuity. Since our congregations today are part of the continuum of the body of Christ, there is something to be gained in seeing how "it used to be done." This is part of what is meant by "narrative identity." The experience will likely be more pleasant, however, if a certain degree of aesthetic and historical distance is maintained and if the dialogue is descriptive rather and prescriptive. Practically speaking, it is wiser to go back in time by two millennia or three centuries than by just two or three generations.

Be Early and Be Intentional. Creativity does not just happen spontaneously. On the rare occasion that this does occur, it can often be messy! It is better to plan far in advance and gain the input of creative laypersons in your church or imaginative clergy in your denomination—especially if you are not an especially creative person. It seems ironic to speak of planning for creativity, but the terms are not mutually exclusive. Michelangelo's greatest creations were born out of many years of planning and execution, and there is little shame in being found in such company.

ECUMENISM, SPIRITUALITY, AND HOLINESS: EXPLORING WESLEY AND THE VARIETY OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITIES

by

Donald Thorsen

Think yourself, and let think. Use no constraint in matters of religion.
Even those who are farthest out of the way never “compel to come in”
by any other means than reason, truth, and love.

—John Wesley, “The Nature of Enthusiasm”¹

For the past decade, I have been teaching a variety of courses in Christian spirituality. Mostly, I teach two courses in the Doctor of Ministry program at Azusa Pacific University. They are entitled “Theology for Spiritual Formation and History of Christian Spirituality.” Although I am a trained theologian, I enjoy researching Christian spirituality inside and outside the Wesleyan and Holiness traditions. I also enjoy teaching about Christian spirituality to Doctor of Ministry students. They come from practically every tradition of Christianity. They are Protestant and Roman Catholic, mainline and evangelical, charismatic and non-charismatic, and so on.

In researching Christian spirituality, one of the more interesting discoveries I have made is the widespread recognition and appreciation of John Wesley. He is regularly viewed as a Protestant champion of what

¹John Wesley, “The Nature of Enthusiasm,” sermon 37, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 2, ed. Albert C. Outler, The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley, editor-in-chief Frank Baker (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 82.

could be called the Holiness tradition of Christian spirituality. It is refreshing as well as interesting to see Wesley viewed so prominently in ecumenical publications. In my experience as a theologian, Wesley does not always fare well in public perception as a contributor to the historical development of Christian theology. To be sure, Wesley is mentioned regularly from a theological perspective; you cannot ignore the founder of Methodism. However, his theology and ministry too often seem to be minimized, if not caricatured, in comparison to those from, for example, the Lutheran and Reformed traditions. This marginalization of Wesleyan and Holiness theology would be true especially of its more conservative or evangelically oriented representatives.

The consideration of spirituality as a means for encouraging ecumenical dialogue is not a new idea. Such dialogues have gone on for quite awhile in interdenominational ecumenism. In fact, they have gone on for quite awhile in interfaith dialogue as well. However, Christians from the Wesleyan and Holiness traditions, particularly the Holiness branches reflective of the membership of the Wesleyan Theological Society, have not always realized the opportunities they have for participating in and contributing to present-day ecumenism. The surprising affirmation and appreciation of our historic spirituality as well as theology from ecumenically oriented Christians outside our tradition encourages me. It encourages me with regard to the potential role the Wesleyan and Holiness tradition has in contributing to Christian unity and cooperation.

Although the Wesleyan and Holiness tradition of spirituality is often categorized as just one form of Christian spirituality among many, its view of holiness as an expression of Christ-likeness aids ecumenical understanding and cooperation because of its inclusive nature and embrace of the varieties of Christian spirituality. I want to develop the ecumenical value of holiness by looking at its inclusive nature, which is embedded, albeit sometimes overlooked, in Wesleyanism. In particular, I want to investigate a Wesleyan understanding of holiness as it relates—in a complementary fashion—to the varieties of Christian spirituality. Finally, I want to present ecumenical opportunities both inside and outside the Wesleyan and Holiness tradition.

An Interlude. In talking about the conservative branch of the Wesleyan and Holiness tradition, reflective of the Wesleyan Theological Society, it is difficult to know how to refer conveniently to ourselves.

Without doubt, we do not call ourselves the only representatives of Wesleyanism, since there is a variety of expressions of it. Likewise, we seldom call ourselves the Holiness Movement, since many identify the Holiness Movement more with the 19th and early 20th century expression of Wesleyanism. The seeming reticence to refer to ourselves as a “holiness people” is present among those in the academy as well as the church, among clergy as well as laity. The reticence is typified by Keith Drury’s portentous proclamation in 1994 that “The Holiness Movement Is Dead.”² Yet, for many of us, the holiness impulse of Wesleyanism remains a focal point of Scripture as well as self-identity and, to varying degrees, remains a self-description. What exactly, then, are we to call ourselves? For the sake of practicality, I will refer to the conservative expression of the Wesleyan and Holiness tradition simply as the holiness tradition. It is debatable, of course, as to how simple this designation is, since it is used to refer to Christian traditions other than our own.

Wesley and Ecumenism

Although John Wesley was a champion of holiness spirituality, it is a matter of debate as to whether or not he was a champion of ecumenism. Of course, we cannot finally determine Wesley’s ecumenical acumen since he lived prior to the emergence of the 20th-century ecumenical movement. However, that has not prevented people from speculating.

On the one hand, Wesley’s emphasis on a “catholic spirit” has inspired innumerable Wesleyan and Methodist Christians to advocate ecumenism.³ For example, Wesley said:

But although a difference in opinions or modes of worship may prevent an entire external union, yet need it prevent our union in affection? Though we can’t think alike, may we not

²Keith Drury, “The Holiness Movement Is Dead,” Presidential Address, Christian Holiness Association, 1994, in DruryWriting.Com, 2004, <http://www.drurywriting.com/keith/dead.footnoted.htm>, accessed 23 February 2005.

³Wesley, “Catholic Spirit,” sermon 39, *Works* 2:79-96. For another example of Wesley’s concern for the church, see the introduction to his *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*: “Would to God that all party names and unscriptural phrases and forms which have divided the Christian world were forgot, and that we might all agree to sit down together, as humble, loving disciples, at the feet of our common Master, to hear His word, to imbibe His Spirit, and to transcribe His life on our own!” *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament* (Rpt.; London: Methodist Publishing House, 1986), 8.

love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt we may. Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences. These remaining as they are, they may forward one another in love and in good works.⁴

On the other hand, Wesley expressed strong opinions about different views of theology and ministry, which sometimes left him in heated debate with church friends and foes. Wesley was well known for his debates with George Whitefield and Calvinists over predestination, with Bishop Lavington over enthusiasm, with Bishop Warburton over ecclesiastical boundaries, and so on.⁵ Wesley often agreed to disagree with other Christians. Yet, he remained charitable to them, for example, in his enduring friendship with Whitefield. In sum, Wesley left a catholic spirit that continues to influence Christians on behalf of greater unity and cooperation.

Reflecting this catholic spirit, the United Methodist Church has been a leader in ecumenical activity. Such activity includes the reuniting of the Methodist Episcopal Church (North and South) and merger of the Methodist Protestant Church in 1939, as well as its involvements with the World Council of Churches, National Council of Churches, and regional and local ecumenical bodies.

Although not as prominent, denominations in the Holiness tradition forayed into ecumenism as early as the 19th century. For more than a hundred years, holiness denominations have supported the National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness (later named the Christian Holiness Association, and then Christian Holiness Partnership). They sometimes affiliated with the National Association of Evangelicals as well as other ecumenically oriented groups. However, with few exceptions (for example, the Salvation Army and Church of God, Anderson), holiness denominations have been known more for sectarianism than ecumenism.

The Wesleyan Theological Society has taken steps toward promoting ecumenism. The Society has regularly invited speakers from outside the holiness tradition to speak in plenary addresses. Representatives have been sent to the Commission on Faith and Order of the National Council of Churches since the 1980s. Donald Dayton in particular has served both

⁴Wesley, "Catholic Spirit," *Works*, 2:82.

⁵For a helpful historical and theological discussion of these disputes, read Kenneth J. Collins, *John Wesley: A Theological Journey* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003).

as a representative on behalf of ecumenism and as a representative in promotion of the importance of including the holiness tradition in ecumenical dialogue.

Wesley and Holiness

Although we may question John Wesley's advocacy of ecumenism, we cannot question his advocacy of holiness. He clearly promoted "holiness of heart and mind." In *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, his premiere statement on Christian holiness and spirituality, Wesley said:

Hence I saw, in a clearer and clearer light, the indispensable necessity of having "the mind which was in Christ," and of "walking as Christ also walked"; even of having, not some part only, but all the mind which was in Him; and of walking as He walked, not only in many or in most respects, but in all things.⁶

The theme of holiness, especially when articulated as love, runs throughout Wesley's preaching and writing. In describing a true Christian, Wesley said that such a "one loves the Lord his God with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his mind, and with all his strength. . . . And loving God, he 'loves his neighbor as himself.'"⁷

Wesley's focus on holiness was expressed in a variety of ways. In addition to speaking about holiness in terms of love for God and neighbor, he also spoke of holiness in terms of joy, happiness, thankfulness, prayer without ceasing, purity, obedience, fruits of the Spirit, and doing all to the glory of God. As such, holiness represented both a gift and task. As a gift, God imputes righteousness to believers by God's saving grace through the work of Jesus Christ. As a task, God enlists those same believers to respond in faith, hope, and love to God's offer of sanctifying grace. God wants to impart righteousness to believers, as they become co-workers with God in becoming more like Jesus Christ. In all instances, God initiates, nourishes, and completes the sanctifying process. Yet, God paradoxically requires our response to divine grace.

In this life, Wesley thought that believers might and should seek to experience "Christian perfection," a technical term used by Wesley, some-

⁶John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (1872 rpt.; Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1966), 11.

⁷John Wesley, "The Character of a Methodist," quoted in *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 17-19.

times known as entire sanctification and other words used to express a more mature Christian life.⁸ Sometimes conceived as a second work of grace subsequent to conversion, Wesley thought Christians should live a more holy life, due to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. Such a life should manifest holy thoughts, words and actions. Wesley was, in fact, optimistic with regard to how much the sovereign God of the universe might transform believers into holy examples of Christ-like living.

From our contemporary perspective, we might want to think of Wesley's concept of holiness as wholeness. The holistic pursuit of personhood represents the kind of holy healing Wesley thought that God wants to perform in our lives. Randy Maddox focuses on this idea in talking about the therapeutic nature of Wesley's soteriology. He says:

This need [for healing] accounts for the prominence of therapeutic language (resonating with early Greek practice) in Wesley's various comments on human salvation. Indeed, Wesley characterized the very essence of religion as a *θεραπεία εἰς ψυχᾶς*—a therapy by which the Great Physician heals our sin-diseased souls, restoring the vitality of life that God intended for us.⁹

Wesley represents a clear example among Protestants of one promoting holiness in believers. He thought that greater holiness could occur among groups of believers and, indeed, in society as a whole. Just as Wesley was optimistic with regard to God's grace to perfect believers individually, he was optimistic with regard to how God could transform society. Many Christians inside and outside of Methodism have looked to Wesley for an example of a holistic as well as transformative understanding of Christian holiness.¹⁰

Wesley and the Variety of Christian Spiritualities

As I research contemporary literature on Christian spirituality, I am continually struck by the widespread recognition and appreciation Chris-

⁸Again, see Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, passim.

⁹Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 144-145.

¹⁰H. Richard Niebuhr remains one of the more striking examples of recognizing Wesley as a transformer of culture. See *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1951), 218ff.

tians have for John Wesley. At least within the Protestant tradition, Wesley represents a role model of what is most often called holiness spirituality. Even if authors do not agree with Wesley, he is credited with representing an important spiritual impulse among Christians throughout church history.

A survey of contemporary literature on the subject of Christian spirituality reveals Wesley's prominence. In summary of such literature, let me list some of the typologies used by scholars to discuss Christian spirituality. For example, Richard Foster, who is Quaker, represents a prominent, contemporary authority in Christian spirituality. In his book *Streams of Living Water*, he outlines what he considers six "great Traditions—streams of spiritual life if you will—and to note significant figures in each."¹¹ They are:

The Contemplative Tradition, or the prayer-filled life; The Holiness Tradition, or the virtuous life; The Charismatic Tradition, or the Spirit-empowered life; The Social Justice Tradition, or the compassionate life; The Evangelical Tradition, or the Word-centered life; the Incarnational Tradition, or the sacramental life.¹²

In Foster's book as well as in other writings on the Christian life, Wesley figures prominently as a representative of holiness spirituality.¹³

Other typologies list a larger number of Christian spiritualities. Ben Campbell Johnson, a Presbyterian, lists seven types of spirituality. He lists Wesley, for example, as having an Ascetic Spirituality rather than a Holiness Spirituality per se, but the essence of the type remains the same. Gary Thomas, a Baptist, draws upon Carl Jung and Myers Briggs "types" in identifying nine "spiritual temperaments," what he calls "sacred pathways": (1) Naturalist, (2) Sensate, (3) Traditionalist, (4) Ascetic, (5) Activist, (6) Caregiver, (7) Enthusiast, (8) Contemplative, and (9) Intellectual.¹⁴ In

¹¹Richard J. Foster, *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith*, foreword (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), xvi.

¹²Foster, xvi.

¹³The book *Authentic Spirituality: Moving Beyond Mere Religion* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), Barry L. Callen elaborates on each of the spiritual traditions identified by Richard Foster (*Streams of Living Water*) and highlights the holiness and Wesleyan dimensions in particular.

¹⁴Gary L. Thomas, *Sacred Pathways: Discovering Your Soul's Path to God* (1996 rpt.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 21; cf. 26, 100-101.

this typology, Wesley and the holiness tradition appear several places, as both Ascetics and Activists. While these typologies may not appeal to everyone in the holiness tradition, they reflect recognition of Wesley and the larger holiness embodiment of Christian spirituality.

Most comprehensive studies of spirituality resist typologies and list a wide variety of Christian spiritualities, spanning the entirety of church history. Robin Maas and Gabriel O'Donnell, a Methodist and Roman Catholic respectively, offer more of a historical than typological list. They include patristic spirituality, monastic spirituality, mendicant spirituality, *devotio moderna* spirituality, Lutheran spirituality, Ignatian spirituality, Reformed spirituality, Carmelite spirituality, Anglican spirituality, Wesleyan spirituality, black spirituality, Marian spirituality, and feminist spirituality.¹⁵ Of course, it would not take long perusing *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* to find literally dozens of distinctive Christian spiritualities.¹⁶ Finally, in all these studies, Wesley remains a prominent and well respected leader—a crucial piece of the mosaic we call Christian spirituality.

Interlude. Proponents of the holiness tradition, as I have said, are generally conservative or, what could be called, evangelical in their beliefs and practices. Ironically, it is the larger evangelical body of Christians who seem less open to the holiness tradition than mainline Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Orthodox Christians. Since evangelicalism seems to be so greatly influenced by conservative and fundamentalist versions of Calvinism, there exists an inherent tension between that branch of evangelicalism and the holiness tradition. Mark Noll's *Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* represents a widespread prejudice against both the holiness and pentecostal traditions. Noll makes them out as scapegoats for many problems, intellectual and otherwise, within the greater evangelical tradition.¹⁷ Nevertheless, there remains the need to speak ecumenically with the evangelical as well as other traditions of Christianity.

¹⁵Robin Maas and Gabriel O'Donnell, O.P., eds., *Spiritual Traditions for the Contemporary Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), passim.

¹⁶*The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Gordon S. Wakefield (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), passim.

¹⁷Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 109-145, esp. 115-116.

Holiness, Inclusivity and Exclusivity

I like to think of holiness as a holistic, inclusive form of Christian spirituality.¹⁸ Ideally, I think it is. Why? Holiness implies wholeness and completeness. In the Bible, God is referred to as being holy: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isaiah 6:3, NRSV; cf. Revelation 4:8).¹⁹ Some consider the holiness of God as being representative of all God’s perfections, all of God’s transcendent characteristics.²⁰ In scripture, Christians are repeatedly called to live lives of holiness. In the Old Testament, Leviticus 11:44a says, “For I am the Lord your God; sanctify yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy.” In the New Testament, 1 Peter 1:15 says, “Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct.” In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus makes the most profound call to holiness when he says, “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). This call is to wholeness and completeness in every respect as well as to a moral conception of godliness, usually thought to be representative of holiness spirituality.

When holiness is viewed in relationship to the varieties of Christian spirituality, there is no reason to consider them in competition. On the contrary, it is not a matter of either holiness or some other form of spirituality, whether it is evangelical, sacramental, contemplative, or activist. Holiness may be understood in essence as embracing all of the traditions of spirituality. It is a both/and relationship rather than one that is either/or. In fact, one could say that holiness, in the essential sense of the term, could be understood as a catchword that integrates all types of spirituality. Laurence Wood, for example, exemplifies this inclusive attitude in his writings on Christian spirituality. In his article on “Sanctification from a Wesleyan Perspective” in *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification*, he speaks positively of the other four views, cultivating points of contact and cooperation rather than focusing on non-essential differences of opinion.²¹

¹⁸Maddox shares this holistic concept of salvation and spirituality; see *Responsible Grace*, 145-146.

¹⁹All biblical references come from *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, New Revised Standard Version, eds. Bruce M. Metzger and Roland E. Murphy (New York: University Press, 1991).

²⁰For example, see Gustaf Aulén, *The Faith of the Christian Church*, 5th ed., tr. Eric H. Wahlstrom (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), 102-106.

²¹Laurence W. Wood, “The Wesleyan View,” *Christian Spirituality: Five Views on Sanctification*, ed. Donald L. Alexander (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 95-132.

Despite the inherent inclusivity of Wesley and his ideas of spirituality, the holiness tradition has often been quite sectarian in its theological as well as ecclesiastical manifestations. As already mentioned, Wesley sometimes had difficulty accepting and cooperating with everyone who called themselves Christian, even with his “catholic spirit.” Likewise, proponents of the holiness tradition—individually and corporately—have sometimes promoted fragmentation and schism more than ecumenism.

Nevertheless, holiness continues to embody an inclusivity that makes it a very appealing point of contact with other traditions of Christian spirituality. In addition, it becomes an appealing point of contact for ecumenical dialogue, theologically and ecclesiastically. Proponents of holiness must remain humble; other traditions have equal rights in expressing their views of spirituality, especially in claims to holism reflected in their spirituality. Proponents of holiness must also remain open—genuinely open—to learning from other Christian traditions of spirituality. Wesley arguably remained open to learning from others when his views were demonstrated to be deficient or wrong.²² Likewise, those of us in the holiness tradition need to be humble, yet bold in uplifting the ecumenical value of holiness.

The Dying of the Light

I have contended that, at least from the standpoint of the Wesleyan and holiness contributions to Christian spirituality, the holiness tradition is respected and listened to by Christians outside its tradition. Ironically, Christians within the Holiness tradition do not always take holiness people as seriously as do outsiders. This theological and ecclesiastical low sense of worth appears in many ways. A telling example may be seen in the address already mentioned by Keith Drury entitled “The Holiness Movement Is Dead.”²³ Drury delivered the address at, of all places, the Presidential Luncheon at the Annual Meeting of the Christian Holiness Associa-

²² Wesley said, “But some may say I have mistaken the way myself, although I take upon me to teach it to others. It is probable many will think this; and it is very possible that I have. But I trust, whereinsoever I have mistaken, my mind is open to conviction. I sincerely desire to be better informed. I say to God and man, ‘What I know not, teach thou me’.” See “Sermons on Several Occasions,” preface, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 1, ed. Albert C. Outler, The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley, editor-in-chief Frank Baker (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984), 107.

²³ Drury, “The Holiness Movement Is Dead.”

tion in 1994. Of course, Drury supported the holiness tradition; he did not consider it literally dead or irrelevant. However, he wanted to challenge—even shock—its members to renew or, perhaps, resurrect it. In his “Retrospective” on the address ten years later (2004), Drury did not think that “a significant renewed ‘movement mentality’ has . . . emerged.”²⁴ Interestingly, in his Retrospective, Drury predicted the following:

Doctrine is the last to go. I believed at the time (and I still do) that a movement fades first, then the experience, and finally the doctrine. Doctrine usually outlasts the death of the movement and experience by decades.²⁵

In partial fulfillment of Drury’s prediction, the Free Methodist Church recently altered its statement on entire sanctification, as did the Church of the Nazarene. The alterations appear—in my opinion—more like Keswick articulations of God’s work in a believer subsequent to conversion, rather than prior articulations more reflective of 19th-century Holiness Movement phraseology. These changes are not necessarily bad; in fact, we may consider them important attempts at re-conceptualizing and communicating holiness. Nevertheless, they also reflect theological flux within the holiness tradition. It remains to be seen whether holiness remains a focal point of self-identity and expression, ministerially as well as theologically.

In a related situation, a case study could be made and, in fact, has been made about Azusa Pacific University. In 1998, James Burtchaell wrote a book entitled *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from Their Christian Churches*. In it, Burtchaell says:

Countless colleges and universities in the history of the United States were founded under some sort of Christian patronage, but many which still survive do not claim any relationship with a church or denomination. . . . This book is an attempt to narrate and understand the dynamics of these church-campus relations, the ways they have tended to wither, and the whys.²⁶

²⁴Keith Drury, “Retrospective,” DruryWriting.Com, 2004, <http://www.Drurywriting.com/keith/dead.footnoted.htm>, accessed 23 February 2005.

²⁵Drury, “Retrospective.”

²⁶James T. Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from Their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), ix.

Burtchaell investigated a variety of Christian institutions of higher education and their ecclesiastical traditions, which included Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Lutherans, Catholics, and evangelicals. Among the evangelicals, he included a case study of Azusa Pacific University. In most instances, Burtchaell chronicled a progression from ecclesiastical conservatism to liberalism and in some instances to secularism.

Burtchaell notes that Azusa Pacific University (APU) never had a specific relationship with a denomination. Nevertheless, the University described itself historically as a part of the Wesleyan and holiness tradition. In time, however, its self-descriptions progressively reflected “the deletion of [writings] that had located APU in the tradition of Wesleyan evangelical Christianity. Henceforth they would be unlocated Christians.”²⁷ In addition to comments about the University, Burtchaell comments on the Holiness Movement—its breakdown and relationship—to APU. He says:

The Holiness movement was so united that it became the functional equivalent of a denomination. But denominations are not churches, and in time, for want of preservation and renewal, the Holiness movement decomposed. . . . Thus for many years the college was functionally, though not formally denominational, even sectarian. You had to be an insider in the movement really to belong there. But as that movement dissolved, and as a finally “successful” college began to grow, its intake was increasingly market driven, to the point where now Calvinists and Catholics are nesting on campus. It is so interdenominational that it is now nondenominational.²⁸

According to Burtchaell, APU may still consider itself evangelical; however, it is a generic evangelicalism without anchorage in its historic holiness.

After the publication of Burtchaell’s book, the response of the University served more to prove than disprove his thesis. Although several discussions were held throughout APU about the book, most dismissed its thesis as groundless. From the administration down to the faculty and staff, too few were left from the holiness tradition for the University as a whole to care about losing its historic holiness. Aside from the School of

²⁷Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light*, 768.

²⁸Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light*, 776.

Theology, which still explicitly affirms its Wesleyan and holiness heritage, few cared about—much less understood—“the dying of the light.”

Is the holiness tradition dead at APU? Is the Holiness Movement as a whole dead? Is the term holiness itself still a viable, coherent and winning expression of Christian spirituality? Well, I do not think holiness is dead either at APU or in the Holiness Movement, what is left of it. Moreover, I think holiness remains an expression of Christian spirituality with promise for ecumenism as well as for people in general. However, work needs to be done in order to ensure its relevance.

The work that needs to be done is, at least, twofold. First, the holiness tradition needs to assess, revise, and re-appropriate holiness for today. Like institutions of higher education, denominations run the risk of lapsing into generic Christianity or, just as problematic, generic evangelical Christianity, when they do not meaningfully hold on to their holiness roots. Second, the holiness tradition needs to look outside itself. It also needs to look for opportunities not only to further the kingdom of God through accustomed forms of ministry, but also through unaccustomed forms which should include progress in ecumenism.

Ecumenical Opportunities

How then shall we live? Regardless of how we may specifically view ecumenism, those of us in the holiness tradition need to become more intentional about how we plan to promote unity and cooperation inside and outside ourselves.²⁹ In my opinion, the most important place for us to start is in the recovery, renewal, or resuscitation of what we mean by holiness. If, as I have argued, Christians outside the holiness tradition value and promote holiness themselves, then we should lead in articulating what it means, along with promoting the relevance of holiness for others, individually and socially, inside and outside the church.

I do not intend here to define the heart and soul of what holiness means. Such definitions have appeared time and time again. However, it seems to me that our definitions have not remained relevant for however you want to characterize contemporary society, modern or postmodern, conservative or liberal, religious or secular, and so on. Certainly, we need to avoid caricatures that have sometimes ghettoized our tradition as sectarian, legalistic, and irrelevant.

²⁹I do not intend to promote a far-reaching agenda for ecumenism such as the one put forth by Kenneth J. Collins in *The Evangelical Moment: The Promise of an American Religion* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 157-180.

Individual denominations have undertaken study projects for articulating their own heart and soul. The Free Methodist Church, for example, has undertaken a multi-year symposium on the “Search for the Free Methodist Soul: An Intergenerational Conversation.” However, a more multi-denominational approach to the discussion is needful. Last year Kevin Mannoia orchestrated a study project called “The Wesleyan Holiness Study Project” which involves administrators, pastors, and scholars from almost one dozen holiness and pentecostal churches. Interestingly, in investigating what holiness means for today, it may well require a broadened understanding of the holiness tradition that includes more than representatives from the classical Holiness Movement. Denominations representing pentecostal and charismatic traditions have already committed to the Wesleyan Holiness Study Project, or have expressed interest in doing so. Most notable is the Church of the Foursquare, led by Jack Hayford. Because of the holiness family resemblance shared with the pentecostal and charismatic traditions, we may end up with a somewhat broader, albeit more comprehensive conception of holiness, holiness spirituality, and holiness tradition.³⁰ This may sound intimidating to some, and too broad to others. However, more than classical Holiness Movement denominations claim holiness as a descriptor of their spirituality. Of course, the Wesleyan Theological Society has a longstanding tradition of cooperation with the Society of Pentecostal Studies. Increased collaborative projects could produce amazing results, both for self-understanding and for the promotion of greater opportunities for ecumenism.

At the 2005 gathering of the Wesleyan Holiness Study Project, pastors in southern California were invited to attend a special session dedicated to the discussion of holiness and its relevance to churches today. It was entitled “Holiness in the 21st Century.” Bishops and conference superintendents along with pastors discussed the practical realities of promoting holiness in church self-understanding, values, and ministry. This pastoral component of the Wesleyan Holiness Study Project intends to prevent discussion from staying too theoretical, too academic. Instead, it wants to keep discussion relevant for the church, locally and in relationship with other churches.

³⁰Scholars who have developed the theological, ecclesiastical, and cultural connection between classic Holiness Movement Christians and classic pentecostal and charismatic Christians include: Donald W. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Grand Rapids: Francis & Taylor, 1987), and Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

Owning and expanding on our understanding of holiness will help us as well as others to understand Christian spirituality in all its dimensions. I think that holiness represents an important biblical, church historical, and—potentially—ecumenical concept. As the holiness tradition succeeds in presenting holiness today, I further think that we have an increasing number of opportunities to participate in ecumenism, as well as contribute to current ministries. For example, re-appropriating and promoting holiness might benefit the Christian Holiness Partnership, which has languished recently in its effectiveness as an ecumenical body. It might also embolden representatives from the holiness tradition inside the National Association of Evangelicals, where they have long been participants. Perhaps a new approach would help, for example, in participation with Christian Churches Together (CCT). The CCT is a planned ecumenical gathering that intends to bring together churches from the National Council Churches as well as the National Association of Evangelicals. Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches already participate.³¹ In 2004, William Rusch spoke about the CCT in a plenary session of the Wesleyan Theological Society.³² Rusch has worked hard to establish the new Christian forum, and he continues to enlist our support in bringing together the broadest representation of churches to date.

From the standpoint of the Wesleyan Theological Society, I support its longstanding attempts to promote ecumenism. I commend its support of sending representatives to Faith and Order, of holding joint meetings and receptions with the Society of Pentecostal Studies, and of encouraging participation in international meetings of Wesleyan Theological Societies in the Bahamas (2003) and South Korea (2005). Of course, the 2003 establishment of an Ecumenical Session at Annual Meetings also contributes to the promotion of commonality, cooperation, and unity.

Conclusion

John Wesley's focus on holiness continues to be an inspiration for contemporary Christian faith and practice. It is an inspiration for those of

³¹See "Catholic Church Joins New Christian Forum," *EcuLink: An Ecumenical Newsletter*, National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 65 (Winter 2004-2005): 2. Cf. www.nccusa.org.

³²The address by William Rusch, "Toward a New Conference on Faith and Order in North America: A Progress Report," appeared in the *Wesleyan Theological Journal* (Spring 2005). For more information about Christian Churches Together in the USA, see the website at <http://www.religioustolerance.org/chrcct.htm>.

us in the holiness tradition who value holiness as an important descriptor of Christian spirituality, manifested in the transformation of individuals as well as the church and society. Holiness is an inspiration for those who view Christian spirituality as a complex of valid expressions, and who consider holiness an integral component in understanding and affirming all Christians. It is an inspiration for those who seek ways of promoting ecumenical activities, realizing that a renewed focus on holiness may positively influence those inside the holiness tradition as well as those outside the tradition—those who want to enlist the holiness tradition for the sake of greater unity and cooperation among Christians.

Ecumenism remains an ideal, which to many of us seems unachievable. Yet, it remains an ideal that many of us consider a goal we cannot ignore with integrity as Christians. In recovering and expanding on our understanding of holiness, we may not only find our tradition fortified. We may find ourselves contributing in promising ways to the unity of the church and cooperation within God's kingdom.

JOHN WESLEY REDFIELD: A STUDY IN 19TH-CENTURY AMERICAN METHODIST REVIVALISM

by

Howard A. Snyder

“The mightiest revival that Burlington ever saw, and which shook all Vermont” is the way Cassius Castle, a young Methodist in Burlington, described meetings that began in the local Methodist Episcopal Church in December, 1854. The revival started under the ministry of evangelist Fay Purdy, but continued another six weeks with the preaching of John Wesley Redfield. “Never have I heard such divine eloquence as poured forth from the lips of this devoted and faithful servant of the Lord Jesus Christ [Redfield],” Castle reported—not even from Bishop Matthew Simpson himself.¹

John Wesley Redfield (1810–1863) was a sort of John the Baptist figure within Methodism in the 1840s and 1850s. B. T. Roberts called him “the most wonderful evangelist of his day,”² and Wilson Hogue considered him “among the greatest evangelists of the nineteenth century.”³ Yet he was a quixotic and controversial figure. Redfield’s ministry was con-

¹C. A. Castle, *A History of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Burlington, Vermont* (Burlington: Free Press Association, 1903), 24.

²B. T. Roberts, “Introduction,” in Joseph Goodwin Terrill, *The Life of Rev. John Wesley Redfield, M.D.* (Chicago: Free Methodist Publishing House, 1889, 1912), 3.

³Wilson T. Hogue, *History of the Free Methodist Church of North America* (Chicago: Free Methodist Publishing House, 1915), 1:267.

temporaneous with that of Charles Finney. Finney's revival ministry, however, began earlier, continued much longer, and was more widespread than Redfield's.

Redfield was a self-taught medical doctor and Methodist local preacher. He was a New Englander, born June 23, 1810, probably in Claremont, New Hampshire.⁴ The day of his birth a woman appeared at the Redfields' door and told the new mother that in a dream an angel told her the baby must be named John Wesley. Mrs. Redfield concurred, and the baby was named John Wesley Redfield. "By that unlucky name was I baptized and have been known through life," Redfield later said.⁵

For our present purpose, interest in Redfield is twofold. First, his revivals in Methodist Episcopal churches in the 1850s paved the way, in part, for the formation of the abolitionist Free Methodist Church in 1860. Redfield denounced Methodist toleration of slaveholding and "worldliness" in the church, provoking considerable opposition and controversy. Second, Redfield strongly emphasized the Holy Spirit, using Pentecostal language to describe the Spirit's work in the church. He commonly spoke of "Pentecostal power" and "the Pentecostal baptism of the Holy Ghost" and understood genuine revival as "the first dawning rays of that type of religion which must usher in the Millennium after the pattern of Pentecost." Though Redfield was not a Pentecostal in the post-1900 sense, his use of Pentecostal language is instructive for understanding antecedents to modern Pentecostalism within the American holiness movement of the 1800s.

Redfield's Early Life

As a child, Redfield felt called to preach, but he wasn't actually converted until his teen years. At a Methodist camp meeting he heard Willbur Fisk (later the founder of Wesleyan University) and other Methodist preachers. He sought God at the altar, but the commotion was so great that he was distracted and repulsed—until he saw that many were being

⁴Terrill, 17. Terrill gives Clarendon, New Hampshire, as the birthplace; probably the correct town is Claremont, as a number of Redfields lived there and there is no Clarendon. Also, Terrill gives Redfield's birthdate as January 23, 1810 (17), but Redfield's autobiography clearly reads "June," not "January." In his January, 1864, tribute to Redfield, B. T. Roberts also gives the date as June 23. B. T. Roberts, "Rev. J. W. Redfield, M.D.," *The Earnest Christian* 7, no. 1 (Jan. 1864): 5.

⁵Terrill, 17. The principal sources on Redfield are this biography by Terrill (a convert of Redfield's) and Redfield's manuscript autobiography (located in the Marston Memorial Historical Center, Indianapolis, IN), Terrill's main source.

saved. He went off into the woods alone and gave himself fully to Jesus. “Instantly, as I ventured on Jesus, my burden was gone,” he recalled. “I was filled with inexpressible delight, and before I was aware of what I was doing, I was on my feet shouting, ‘Glory to God!’”⁶

Redfield didn’t know what had happened to him. When assured that he had experienced conversion, he said to himself, “Well, if this is religion, the world will now soon be converted; for I shall tell it so plain that everybody will certainly believe and seek, and find it.” He began to share his faith “from house to house and from town to town.” Some responded, but many did not want to hear the message.⁷

Willbur Fisk was a friend of the Redfield family and took interest in this unusual young man. He suggested that Redfield go to Wesleyan Academy which had just been opened at Wilbraham, Massachusetts, and where Fisk served as the first principal before going on to become the founding president of Wesleyan University.⁸ One of the imponderables of Methodist history is what would have happened had Redfield taken Fisk’s advice and gone to Wilbraham, where solid learning was punctuated with periodic revivals. He didn’t, and never received much formal education. Terrified at “the awful responsibility of a Christian minister” and fearful of following human direction rather than God’s, Redfield in fact turned away from God and began to wander spiritually. He abandoned his faith and between the ages of 20 and 30 studied medicine, dabbled in philosophy and spiritualism, and entered into a disastrous marriage.⁹

After more years of struggle and eventual separation from his wife, Redfield rededicated his life to Christ and began a fruitful evangelistic ministry. He was licensed as a Methodist local preacher in Lockport, New York, despite his forthright declaration, “I am an abolitionist of the strongest type.” If given a license to preach, he said, “I shall certainly use it for God and the slave.” Though never ordained, Redfield was licensed as a local preacher at different times and places. Eventually he divorced his wife and years later, in 1856, remarried.¹⁰

⁶Terrill, 19f.

⁷Terrill, 20ff.

⁸Terrill, 21; Potts, 7f, Joseph Holdich, *The Life of Willbur Fisk, D.D., First President of the Wesleyan University* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1842), 151, 164–170.

⁹Terrill, 23-54.

¹⁰Terrill, 60f, 165f, 292f; Hogue, 1:266f.

Redfield had already proved himself a convinced abolitionist. Around 1840 in Cleveland, Ohio, he defied a mob to give an eloquent abolitionist lecture and organized an antislavery society. He also helped a runaway slave escape to Canada, an act of civil disobedience. "What had I to do with protecting my own freedom and rights," he wrote, "when there stood my suffering Jesus in the person of this poor outcast. I seemed to hear his voice ringing in my ears, 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren ye have done it unto me.'" ¹¹

Shortly after this, Redfield began earnestly to seek entire sanctification. Becoming very ill with "consumption," he spent several months in New York City, recuperating at the home of a friend (probably during the winter of 1841-42, though the chronology is uncertain). Struggling both with illness and his duty to preach, he finally received the word from the Lord, "You may live while you preach, but no longer." He consecrated himself fully to do God's will. "This single sentence has kept me moving for more than twenty years at my own expense to toil in the face of all opposition," he later wrote. ¹²

Despite his illness, Redfield was induced to preach in the local Methodist Church (probably the Bedford Street M. E. Church on Manhattan's west side). The pastor insisted that Redfield exercise his local preacher's license, and God used this insistence to confirm Redfield's renewed dedication. His health improved, and soon he was preaching in various New York City Methodist congregations with "great manifestations of divine power."¹³ Redfield was still seeking holiness. He was warned, however, not to attend Phoebe Palmers' Tuesday Meeting across town, "for they will tell you to believe that you already have the blessing."¹⁴ But that summer Redfield attended a camp meeting where the Palmers were ministering. Here he heard Phoebe Palmer for the first time. Mrs. Palmer "showed the reasonableness of believing that God meant what he said," Redfield noted, "and that our faith must rest mainly on his promise." God has promised holiness, Mrs. Palmer said, "and faith consists in taking him at his word."¹⁵

¹¹Terrill, 52-65, 71, 11.

¹²Terrill, 81-87.

¹³Terrill, 88.

¹⁴Terrill, 92.

¹⁵Terrill, 95f.

Well, Redfield thought, “I have tried everything else but faith; I will now go out and make an experiment.” Redfield finally received the blessing of holiness by faith alone. He gave public testimony to what God had done for him and this “seemed to settle and establish” him in his experience.¹⁶ From this point on Redfield “was marvelously used of God in the conversion of sinners, in the sanctification of believers, in the quickening of the Church, and in the general promotion of the work of God.”¹⁷

Redfield’s Revival Ministry

Redfield began conducting revival meetings throughout New York State and New England. He was actively engaged as a revivalist from the early 1840s to about 1860. His revivals were often attended by such phenomena as shouting and seekers being slain in the Spirit. In this sense his revivals resembled those of frontier Methodism and of Methodist camp meetings a generation earlier. In fact, Redfield was often unwelcome in larger city churches which were becoming more urbane and wanted to distance themselves from what they saw as earlier Methodist excesses.

One of Redfield’s more remarkable revivals brought him into direct contact with Stephen Olin (1797–1851), president of Wesleyan University and famous within Methodism for his intellect and his oratory. The revival was at Middletown, Connecticut, home of Wesleyan University, in 1846. Redfield began revival services at the local M.E. Church on Sunday, February 15, and preached almost daily for two weeks.¹⁸ “The church was crowded, and the people seemed amazed,” B. T. Roberts, then a Wesleyan student, later wrote. “For some eight or ten weeks, the altar was crowded with penitents—from fifty to a hundred coming forward at a time.”¹⁹ Roberts was mightily impressed by Redfield’s “deep-toned piety” and his “unearthly, overpowering eloquence.” “Dr. Redfield’s preaching created a profound sensation,” he wrote. Both town and campus were stirred as the revival continued for several weeks after Redfield left.²⁰

¹⁶Terrill, 97, 99, 75.

¹⁷Hogue, 1:267.

¹⁸Terrill, 4, 162; Mrs. Julia Olin to Mary R. Garrettson, Mar. 11, 1846 (Wesleyan University Archives).

¹⁹B. T. Roberts, “Dr. Redfield’s Labors,” *The Earnest Christian and Golden Rule* 7:2 (Feb. 1864), 37.

²⁰Roberts, “Dr. Redfield’s Labors,” 37.

In fact, a religious quickening was already stirring before Redfield arrived. Phoebe Palmer had visited Middletown in the fall, and a number of people in the university community were affected by her visit.²¹ Faculty members discerned “a sensible increase of [religious] interest” among the students, some of whom held special prayer meetings for revival. As the winter term began, religious fervor increased. Within a week of Redfield’s arrival, a powerful revival was underway. Though physically weak, President Olin went to the Sunday morning service on February 22, only the second time he had been able to attend since the previous August.²² He wanted to hear Redfield for himself, as some were criticizing the revival. His conclusion was that this was a genuine work of God. Olin’s “candid hearing satisfied him both of the sincerity and the soundness of the preacher,” Roberts noted, and he remembered Olin saying, “This, brethren, is Methodism, and you must stand by it.” With Olin’s endorsement, “the faculty, the official members, and the church received and endorsed the truth.”²³

Despite his delicate health, Olin did what he could to encourage the revival. Thursday, February 26, was the annual concert of prayer for colleges,²⁴ and Olin decided to attend. Most of the campus community were present, including students and faculty with their families. Olin intended to speak only briefly, but his heart was full and he continued for well over an hour. To Prof. Joseph Holdich, Olin’s talk was “a deeply-thought, clearly-conceived, and well-reasoned oration, full of religious as well as intellectual power, that profoundly moved the entire company,” leaving “few dry eyes.”²⁵ In a letter to his brother, Olin wrote,

²¹Richard Wheatley, *The Life and Letters of Mrs. Phoebe Palmer* (New York: W. C. Palmer, 1881 [Garland, 1984]), 273f.

²²Stephen Olin to J. R. Olin, Mar. 1, 1846, in Olin, *The Life and Letters of Stephen Olin, D.D., LL.D., Late President of the Wesleyan University*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1853), 2:272.

²³Roberts, “Dr. Redfield’s Labors,” 37.

²⁴About 1815, students at a number of New England colleges began holding “concerts of prayer for a revival of religion” in America’s educational institutions. This grew into something of a movement, sparking a number of collegiate revivals. Clarence P. Shedd, *Two Centuries of Student Christian Movements: Their Origin and Intercollegiate Life* (New York: Association Press, 1934), 81f, 164f.

²⁵Joseph Holdich, “Dr. Olin at the Wesleyan University,” chap. 3 in vol. 2 of Olin, *Life and Letters*, 2:89.

Several of our students profess to have found peace while I was speaking. Twenty of them have become professed converts within the last ten days, and more are inquiring the way. Nearly fifty converts are also numbered in our town congregation. It is truly a wonderful time. About three fourths of our students profess religion, and I never saw a more hopeful company of young men.²⁶

Overall, Redfield's ministry in Middletown was well received. Joseph Holdich found Redfield's ministry "very acceptable and useful, both in the city and the University," with "nothing of what any one could call extravagance." Many were sanctified, as well; "the doctrine of entire holiness has not been overlooked, and several students have been made happy partakers of this high privilege in Christ Jesus," noted Holdich.²⁷

By the time the revival ended, 400 people had reportedly been converted, about 300 from the city and 100 in the university community—26 of whom became preachers.²⁸ Prof. Holdich, a veteran of many revivals, said "this is certainly the most remarkable revival of religion I have ever seen."²⁹ After Middletown, Redfield went on to conduct revivals in many Methodist churches and holiness camp meetings. Gradually his ministry extended into western New York and on to Illinois and the St. Louis, Missouri, area.

The revival in Burlington, Vermont, mentioned above, was especially noteworthy. Redfield preached in Burlington in early 1855, before going west. Although his manuscript gives only a brief summary—less than a page—this revival bore multiplied fruit and is well documented in secondary sources. It had an impact not only in the local Methodist church but also among students at the nearby University of Vermont. One of the students later described how "in a few weeks, twenty-five or thirty young men were converted, many, if not most of whom, became ministers."³⁰ One of these was the writer himself, R. H. Howard, who became a Methodist preacher. Another was Constans L. Goodell (1830–1886), the noted Congregational minister, who was converted during his senior year

²⁶Stephen Olin to J. R. Olin, Mar. 1, 1846, in Olin, *Life and Letters*, 2:272.

²⁷Joseph Holdich, "Revival in the Wesleyan University" (Letter to the Editors), *Christian Advocate and Journal* 20:33 (Mar. 25, 1846), 130.

²⁸Terrill, 4, 163f; Roberts, "Dr. Redfield's Labors," 38.

²⁹Holdich, "Revival in the Wesleyan University."

³⁰Quoted in Terrill (286), from a letter (c. 1886) by Howard printed in the *California Christian Advocate*.

at the University of Vermont. Howard's sketch of Goodell's conversion gives an insightful glimpse into Redfield's method and manner:

[Goodell] had become greatly interested in Doctor Redfield and his meetings, not so much on any religious grounds as on the score of his eloquence and the marvelous sweetness of his singing. The writer will never forget seeing Goodell and [another] gifted classmate . . . night after night elbowing their way to the front, and sitting flat on the carpet before the pulpit—the house being too full to obtain seats—for the sake of listening to the wonderful oratorical flights of that now long since departed, but gifted evangelist—little dreaming, meanwhile, that he was himself so soon successfully to engage in the same glorious work of calling sinners to repentance.³¹

Goodell was to attain national prominence in the Congregational Church. When he died in 1886, William M. Taylor, pastor of New York's Broadway Tabernacle, said of him: "When he was converted, he was converted through and through. The change in him was so marked because it was so radical."³² Some of Redfield's spiritual genes seemed to transfer to Goodell, who had a lifelong concern for evangelism, missions, and ministry to the poor.

One of Redfield's revivals coincided with Charles Finney's meetings in Rochester, New York, in 1856. Redfield's meetings were held at Rochester's First M. E. Church. Despite opposition from the presiding elder and some of the other Methodist preachers, Redfield had a moderately successful meeting.³³ Meanwhile, Finney, then 63, had returned to Rochester for his third revival there. His first, in 1830-31, was one of the most remarkable in American history and helped spread Finney's fame. The 1856 meeting was also a dramatic success. "The number of converts was incredible," a Presbyterian pastor wrote exuberantly.³⁴

³¹Account by R. H. Howard, *The Congregationalist* (11 Feb. 1886), quoted in A. H. Currier, *The Life of Constans L. Goodell, D.D.* (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph and Co., 1887), 21. This account is quoted also in Terrill, 286. Goodell was the long-time pastor of Pilgrim Church, St. Louis, MO, and a leader in the (Congregational) American Missionary Association whose major focus was ministry to Africans and African Americans. See also "Death of Rev. C. L. Goodell, D.D.," *The American Missionary* 40, no. 3 (March 1886).

³²William M. Taylor, "Introduction," in Currier, *Life of Constans Goodell*, x.

³³Terrill, 296f.

³⁴J. H. McIlvaine, quoted in Keith J. Hardman, *Charles Grandison Finney, 1792-1875: Revivalist and Reformer* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 430.

Finney's meetings began on December 30, 1855, and continued until late April, 1856, when Finney became ill.³⁵ He worked mostly among the Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Baptists, noting in his *Memoirs* that "the Methodist churches went to work in their own way."³⁶ He was referring to the Redfield revival. In contrast, Redfield's meeting was of shorter duration and was confined mostly to one Methodist congregation. He was in Rochester for just three weeks toward the end of the four-month Finney revival.³⁷ After two weeks, Redfield reported very large crowds and "some strong conversions," but also opposition. "I never saw a greater chance for a great work in any place," he wrote. "But as soon as we get to a boiling point, the moderators put the fires out, and we have to start anew."³⁸ Redfield's efforts included afternoon services, and Terrill reports that Finney occasionally came to hear the Methodist evangelist. "The two men seemed to enjoy each others' society," notes Terrill, and "[bade] each other Godspeed in their mission of calling souls to Christ."³⁹

How effective was Redfield as a revivalist? What should be made of his claims of hundreds of conversions in his various meetings? Lack of data makes it hard to assess Redfield's self-reporting. Time and place references are often vague in his autobiography and only occasionally do Terrill's *Life of Redfield* or other sources provide clear information. In some cases however it is possible to evaluate Redfield's claims. An example is Redfield's labors in Goshen, New York, in February and March, 1850.⁴⁰ Redfield reports, "Four hundred were converted in this revival, and the church paid instead of receiving mission money."⁴¹ Redfield wrote to the Palmers after about three weeks in Goshen, "Our house [i.e., church sanctuary] is packed every evening before dark, from 40 to 70 are

³⁵Garth M. Rosell and Richard A. G. Dupuis, eds., *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney: The Complete Restored Text* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 551.

³⁶Rosell and Dupuis, 548.

³⁷Terrill, 293, 296–299.

³⁸Terrill, 299.

³⁹Terrill, 297.

⁴⁰According to two letters from Redfield to Phoebe and Walter Palmer (February 26, 1850, from Goshen, New York, and March 12, 1850, from nearby Middletown, New York), Redfield began ministry in Goshen early in February, 1850 (probably Sunday, February 3) and left there on Sunday, March 10. John Wesley Redfield Letters, Methodist Collection, Manuscript Division, New York Public Library.

⁴¹Redfield manuscript autobiography, 211.

identified as seekers every night; 232 up to last night profess to have found Jesus. It is thought there may be about 700 more old enough to be converted, and if God helps, we think it not best to stop till we see Jesus finish the job.”⁴²

New York Conference *Minutes* (Methodist Episcopal Church) lend some credence to Redfield’s report. Goshen first appears in the minutes as “Goshen Mission” in 1848 and 1849, reporting in the latter year only 34 members (including six probationers). The 1850 *Minutes* list Goshen with a total of 200 members—significantly including 140 probationers (generally a clear sign of revival) and 30 “Colored.” Given the fact that some converts probably were not brought into membership, some joined other churches, and some may already have been nominal members, 400 converts is probably a fairly accurate report.⁴³

Another example is Redfield’s ministry in Bridgeport, Connecticut, apparently also in 1850. Redfield reports, “The work broke out in greater power, and in a very few weeks there were over five hundred conversions. The church was saved and another new one built.”⁴⁴ The *Minutes* of the New York East Conference do suggest a considerable impact from this revival. The Bridgeport M. E. Church reported 217 full members and three probationers in 1850. A year later it reported 255 full members and 170 probationers—a sign of revival. The following year full membership jumped to 384, with 20 probationers. By 1854 full membership had reached 395 (with 35 probationers), and in 1854–55 the East Bridgeport M. E. Church was formed, Bridgeport reporting 333 full members (plus 18 probationers) and East Bridgeport 60 full members (plus eight probationers). In this case however, as occasionally elsewhere in Redfield’s manuscript, what Redfield appears to report as an immediate result (“another new [church] built”) actually occurred, apparently, over a period of three or four years.⁴⁵

⁴²Redfield to Phoebe and Walter Palmer, February 26, 1850 (cited above).

⁴³Typically, Redfield rounds off the number of converts in hundreds, or sometimes thousands. In this case, membership at Goshen declined to 150 in 1852 and 121 the following year—a not uncommon pattern in the aftermath of revival, particularly among the Methodists, where often not all probationers submitted to the fairly rigorous requirements of full membership.

⁴⁴Redfield manuscript autobiography, 243. Cf. Terrill, 210.

⁴⁵In my critical edition of Redfield’s autobiography, I give a number of incidences where conference statistical records tend to substantiate (or in some cases fail to substantiate) Redfield’s reporting of evangelistic fruit.

Some of Redfield's most stirring revivals were held in towns west of Chicago in the late 1850s. Here also Redfield's preaching proved controversial, and it is more than coincidence that, when the Free Methodist Church was organized in 1860, many of its earliest "western" congregations arose in places where Redfield had held meetings in Methodist congregations.

Redfield lived only about three years beyond the formation of the Free Methodist Church. He died in 1863 near Marengo, Illinois, where he had been staying since suffering a stroke three years earlier. In announcing Redfield's death in *The Earnest Christian*, B. T. Roberts wrote:

Dr. Redfield was one of the most remarkable men of the day. . . . For over twenty years he has devoted his time to the promotion of revivals of religion, receiving no compensation for his unremitting labors. As a revival preacher, he had no equal in this country. . . . Vast audiences were wrought to the highest pitch of religious excitement under his awful appeals, and wherever he held meetings the country was moved for miles around, and hundreds of converts were added to the church of God.⁴⁶

Redfield's Vision of Authentic Methodism

Redfield had a passion for the poor and was committed to abolitionism, simplicity, and the right of women to preach. He "labored to bring all to the gospel level by noticing the poor, and especially the colored poor."⁴⁷ For him, genuine Christianity meant commitment to these values. He was explicit about God's call to the church of his day: A return to the purity and power of primitive Methodism. His essential message was one of conversion and sanctification as understood and emphasized in the early Methodist movement. He was convinced that the way to effective evangelism was to preach holiness. He saw his evangelistic mission in terms of Christ's commission to preach the gospel everywhere, and especially to the poor. He felt that God had directed him explicitly to Mark 16:15, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (KJV), as well as to Luke 4:18, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor" (KJV).⁴⁸

⁴⁶[B. T. Roberts,] "Death of Dr. Redfield," *The Earnest Christian* 6:6 (Dec., 1863), 184.

⁴⁷Terrill, 259.

⁴⁸See Redfield's manuscript autobiography, 23 (Terrill, 30f) and 99 (not found in Terrill).

Redfield felt that Methodism must be faithful to its original message and dynamic. He spoke of bringing Methodism “back to its primitive simplicity and power” and of the need for “preaching and pressing full salvation, the primitive doctrines of the Methodists.”⁴⁹ After a revival in which many “professed to have obtained the blessing of holiness and the work of God among sinners broke out in great power” resulting in some 300 conversions, Redfield “was sure that the Methodist Church would rapidly return to their primitive power and glory and the world will soon be redeemed. The redemption of the world . . . through the M. E. Church was the theme of my day labors and night dreams.” But, he said, “I was again doomed to disappointment. . . [for there was] a deep seated hostility to holiness [even among] Methodist preachers and an evident leaning in them towards a system of worldly policy and a desire to prune Methodism of all the objectionable features.”⁵⁰ Redfield spoke of “the grand scheme of relaying the foundations of primitive Methodism on the cornerstone of holiness,”⁵¹ but he also saw that he was fighting a losing battle.

The vision of Redfield may be summarized as follows: God had granted Methodism a message of holiness (Christian perfection) capable of enlivening the church and winning the world to Christ. Methodism was called to be faithful to this message. Salvation was primarily the cleansing, empowering presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers, and through this came the empowering of the church for winning people to Christ. Redfield’s concern was “trying to win a lost world to Jesus.”⁵² He spoke of the salvation or redemption of the world and felt that “Methodist preachers needed only to see the workings of their own doctrines applied and with such success and they would at once return to them . . . and then the world would soon be redeemed.”⁵³ Redfield is not very explicit as to what the world’s redemption would mean, but apparently he hoped that the conversion and sanctification of a substantial portion of the world’s population would usher in a millennial reign of justice and righteousness.⁵⁴

⁴⁹Redfield, manuscript autobiography, 136, 144.

⁵⁰Redfield, manuscript autobiography, 148f.

⁵¹Redfield, manuscript autobiography, 190.

⁵²Redfield, manuscript autobiography, 5.

⁵³Redfield, manuscript autobiography, 124.

⁵⁴Terrill, 110, and Redfield, manuscript autobiography, 132, suggest that Redfield’s views of the millennium were those of Adam Clarke.

Stephen Olin and Redfield: Two Visions of Mission?

Both Redfield and Olin saw Methodism in danger of decline spiritually and in missional effectiveness, but their diagnoses and prescriptions differed. For Redfield, the issue was the preaching and experience of entire sanctification. For Olin it was the faithful enlistment of all the denomination's energies in world evangelization. These represent somewhat different, though not necessarily conflicting visions of Methodist's mission.

Redfield was always an "immediatist," whether the issue was revival, the abolition of slavery, or reform in the church. Redfield "generally encountered, wherever he labored, fierce opposition from ecclesiastics" because of his call for radical discipleship and opposition to "the gospel of expediency."⁵⁵ Olin, on the other hand, was more urbane and patient, though no less concerned. And though he despised slavery, Olin was never an abolitionist, feeling that abolitionism did more harm than good. In contrast to Redfield's meager schooling, Olin affirmed education. As early as 1834 Olin argued that the Methodists "must educate our ministry better, or sink. We may boast of preaching to the poor, but without the due intermixture of the rich and influential, we cannot fulfill our destiny as a Church. Nothing can save us but an able ministry, and this can not be had but by thorough education."⁵⁶ Redfield would have sharply disagreed with this analysis.

Olin wrote in 1842, shortly before going to Wesleyan University, "I believe that our system has not worked well in large cities" where Methodism seemed to be "losing strength." Olin wasn't sure of all the reasons, but he conjectured that "the general adoption of pewed churches and an abandonment of class-meetings, especially the former," were factors.⁵⁷ Here Redfield would have agreed. Olin felt Methodism needed reform and renewal, and it is not surprising therefore that he endorsed the Redfield revival at Middletown four years later, telling the students, "This is Methodism, and you must stand by it."

Although Olin no doubt had a broader cultural understanding than did Redfield and a greater appreciation for education and learning, yet in

⁵⁵B. T. Roberts, "Introduction," in Terrill, 5.

⁵⁶ Stephen Olin to the Rev. Mr. Landon, Sept. 4, 1834, in Olin, Stephen Olin to "the Rev. Dr. —," Mar. 27, 1842, in Olin, *Life and Letters*, 2:55.

⁵⁷ Stephen Olin to "the Rev. Dr. —," Mar. 27, 1842, in Olin, *Life and Letters*, 2:55.

many ways their visions of authentic Methodism were more similar than different. Redfield was more “radical” and Olin more “progressive” in terms of the Methodism of their day, yet the two were agreed on the necessity of conversion and holiness and the priority of evangelization.

Probably the greatest difference between Olin and Redfield concerns the relationship of Christianity to culture, a difference that can to some degree be explained by differing cultural location and experience. Redfield was for the immediate abolition of slavery; Olin took a gradualist approach and was prepared to tolerate slavery in the short run. Redfield championed the gospel for the poor and saw wealth as a snare; Olin felt the church needed both the poor and the prosperous. Olin saw education as one means for the advancement of authentic Methodism; Redfield was at best distrustful of higher education. Redfield’s main accent was the preaching of entire sanctification; Olin affirmed the emphasis on holiness, but had a broader agenda, including the organizational effectiveness of Methodism and its involvement in a range of benevolent enterprises.

Redfield’s “Pentecostal” Vision

Redfield’s understanding of the mission of the church, and of entire sanctification, was Pentecostal—as *Redfield* understood that term. This is clear from the way he spoke of salvation, sanctification, and particularly the work of the Holy Spirit. Frequently he used the language of Pentecost and of power, especially toward the end of his life. He said that God desired the church to “aim at reaching the highest demonstration [of God’s power] as revealed on the day of Pentecost. I am strongly impressed that Pentecost is God’s ideal of what a church ought to be.” He described a revival in a Methodist church in Philadelphia, apparently in the late 1840s, that he felt was truly Pentecostal in tone. He wrote:

The doctrine of personal holiness was made the theme of our labors, and in a few days we were compelled to close the church and lock the doors after the congregation had filled it comfortably full or we should be so crowded that it would be impossible to do anything. The slaying power of God was felt and seen in its operations to an extent next to Pentecostal—jumping, shouting, falling, and sinners unmasked would run over the tops of the pews, wading through the masses of people, and rush to the altar of prayer.

In February, 1862, Redfield received, he said, a special revelation that he should go to Syracuse, New York, site of an earlier revival, and there “repeat my efforts for a special revival of religion after the type of Pentecost.” Redfield said he heard “a voice to my inner ear saying to me that Syracuse is the Jerusalem of America, and from that point must salvation go forth to save the nation.” His ministry in Syracuse a dozen years earlier had been merely “the first dawning rays of that type of religion which must usher in the Millennium, and after the pattern of Pentecost.” Redfield recalled that in his earlier ministry in Syracuse the church had experienced “a power . . . that savored largely of the Pentecostal type. Such power and such unearthly demonstrations I never saw as a whole and such conflicts with the power of perdition.” Redfield felt that God showed him that “Pentecost was heaven’s ideal of a church on earth, and all that then took place was yet to be repeated.”

Near the close of his life Redfield reflected on the mission of the newly organized Free Methodist Church, as he understood it. In an important passage he wrote:

I am strongly impressed that God has had one grand design in raising up this people, and that is to bring the church back to that type of religion which had its inauguration on the day of Pentecost . . . to give to the world an abiding specimen of what the gospel is to do for men. As long as the world sees only the moral change produced by the gospel they will soon learn to parry its claims, and seeing the deficiency of the gospel to meet the wants of mankind, they will hardly feel to give full credit to the doctrine that sin has been the cause of all moral and physical evil and that Christ is a restorer every way capable of completing the task of mending all our derangements. But let an occasional evidence as on the day of Pentecost be given that Jesus can heal our sickness, cast out devils, and call upon the resources of infinite power in pressing need, and then the world will have a perpetual testimony before it that God is God and that the Christian religion in its purity has God’s special care and protection.

“I now see,” Redfield added, “that Pentecost with all its wonders and miracles is the lowest point from which to rise. If the gospel is the plan by which men are to be restored to what they have lost, I see not why we are not authorized to take our standpoint on Pentecostal ground and from that

rise to our highest ideal of paradise as led by the Holy Ghost.” Yet, he said, all genuine spiritual “advance is in the track after our Captain Jesus who was made perfect through sufferings, and we too shall find that sufferings precede each and every advance step.”

Almost a year before his death, as Redfield was suffering from the results of his stroke and the anguish of being sidelined from ministry and wondering why God did not heal him, he decided to fast and pray “and lay my whole case before the Lord,” he said. He wrote out a prayer which suggests both his personal struggle and his theological conviction. He was still hoping to be God’s catalyst for a great revival in Syracuse. He wrote:

O Lord, Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done in Syracuse as in heaven.

First petition: O Lord, make me every whit whole.

Second petition: Send the Pentecostal baptism of the Holy Ghost in all its power, glory, and extent, and with all the accompaniments of Pentecost.

Third petition: Send us a revival in depth, breadth, and extent, and power such as this nation has never known. . . .

Fifth: Grant to usher in the jubilee of freedom to every man, woman, and child within this broad nation. And for these, God helping me, I will fast and pray till the token or answer comes.

Redfield did not see his petitions answered. Though he did return briefly to Syracuse, he was very ill and unable to conduct another revival. What should we make of Redfield’s focus on Pentecost?

First, Redfield was using Pentecostal language half a century before “Pentecostal” came to be associated with tongues-speaking. Redfield was a Pentecostal in the sense that many later nineteenth-century holiness folk were. They hoped to see the same power that was demonstrated on the Day of Pentecost unleashed in the church in their day.

Second, the Pentecostal revival Redfield envisioned was both personal and social—both for the church and for the larger culture. Redfield was a lifelong ardent abolitionist and saw his antislavery views as connected with his concern for revival. Genuine Pentecostal revival would transform society and lead to the Millennium. On this point he was in sync with many

other revivalists (not just Methodists), especially in the period before the Civil War.

Finally, it is somewhat surprising to find Redfield using such strong Pentecost and power language this early in the nineteenth century. During the late 1800s, many American Christians (especially in the Holiness Movement) began emphasizing the “baptism of the Holy Spirit”—unintentionally preparing the way for modern Pentecostalism. But here is Redfield in the 1840s, 1850s, and early 1860s, speaking of the Pentecostal baptism—and in effect embodying his own Pentecostal movement!

Conclusion

Although John Wesley Redfield is less well known within the Holiness Movement than Phoebe Palmer (with whom he had some correspondence), B. T. Roberts, and others, he is a figure well worth studying. Because of his revivals in the 1850s and his marked influence on many early Free Methodists, he really should be viewed as the co-founder of the Free Methodist Church. He is significant in other ways as well, as this paper suggests. His life and ministry provide a close-up lens for studying revival, mission, cultural accommodation, and social witness within the Methodist movement in the decades just before the Civil War.

Bibliographic Note: Numerous references to Redfield occur in the Free Methodist denominational histories by Hogue and Marston and the biographies of B. T. Roberts by Zahniser and Benson Roberts and in my own forthcoming biography of B. T. and Ellen Roberts. B. T. Roberts’ tribute to Redfield, first published in *The Earnest Christian*, is reprinted in Elias Bowen, *History of the Origin of the Free Methodist Church* (Rochester, NY: B. T. Roberts, 1871), 311–324.

The standard source is Joseph Goodwin Terrill, *The Life of Rev. John Wesley Redfield, M.D.* (Chicago: Free Methodist Publishing House, 1912; first published in 1889) which has occasionally been reprinted. It consists mainly of extracts from Redfield’s autobiography, but Terrill omitted much and in some places heavily edited Redfield. My critical edition of Redfield’s autobiography, “*Live While You Preach*”: *The Autobiography of Methodist Revivalist and Abolitionist John Wesley Redfield (1810–1863)* is to be published by Scarecrow in 2005.

There are interesting references to Redfield in many early Free Methodist biographies and autobiographies—particularly in E. E. Shelhamer, ed., *Life and Labors of Auntie Coon* (Atlanta: Repairer Office, 1905), Edward Payson Hart, *Reminiscences of Early Free Methodism* (Chicago: Free Methodist Publishing House, 1903), and Joseph Goodwin Terrill, *The St. Charles' Camp-Meeting, Embodying Its History and Several Sermons by Leading Ministers, with Some Practical Suggestions Concerning Camp-Meeting Management* (Chicago: T. B. Arnold, 1883). See also the biographical sketch in William C. Kostlevy, ed., *Historical Dictionary of the Holiness Movement* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2001), 213f, which while generally accurate gives Redfield's birth month as January (following Terrill) rather than June, and has 1848 rather than 1846 as the year of Redfield's revival at Wesleyan University.

JOHN WESLEY AND SLAVERY: MYTH AND REALITY

by

Irv Brendlinger

Beyond question, slavery is one of the greatest atrocities of civilization. Perhaps it holds reign as the singular greatest social injustice in all of human history. When we think of human atrocities, our minds go to the Holocaust, with its six to seven million Jewish victims plus others that have received less notice, gypsies and homosexuals. We also think of the ethnic cleansing of more recent years with figures approaching 1.4 million victims.¹ How does African slavery compare? Not only is slavery directly responsible for some 20 million deaths (to say nothing of the living deaths of those who “survived”), but its after-effects are difficult to calculate (or grasp) either in numbers or influence.

We sometimes lose sight of the direct correlation between American colonial slavery and the American civil war. When we see the anguish of Abraham Lincoln over the probable disintegration of the Union, we must not forget the inseparable cause of secession. Some two hundred years before, when no one saw this land as anything but colonies, it is doubtful that anyone would have predicted slavery’s power to divide a nation. Few recognized it as a moral problem. The camel’s nose in the tent was invis-

¹The largest figures relate to deaths resulting from individual dictator regimes such as Stalin (7 million) and Mao (30–50 million). However, the issue of slavery transcends individual countries or leaders, and covered more than a century. It is unique in that it was based not on war or ethnic cleansing, but on purely financial motives.

ble. In Lincoln's time it not only divided the nation, but was directly responsible for 600,000 deaths in the civil war.²

It doesn't stop there. One hundred years after that war, the country was finally forced to address the civil rights of the descendants of slavery. Into the 21st century, that problem has by no means been solved. Despite legal attempts to restrain their influences, discrimination and prejudice continue to emerge and flourish. Add the facts together: 20 million African and American slave deaths, plus the casualties of the civil war, plus the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, plus the civil rights struggles of the last century and a half. It is not oversimplifying to lay all of this at the feet of one cause, slavery. Like a gruesome cancer, it spread its lethal malignancy to every facet of the American organism. And its effects are still with us. All this is what comes to mind when the word "slavery" is uttered.

This is the slavery that John Wesley was aware of in Georgia and Carolina. It is the slavery he wrote against when he was sixty-nine years old. While not the only evil, it definitely was the paramount social/moral evil of Wesley's century. That is not myth. But, as with any major figure or world event, there is both reality and myth. Wesley's intersecting with slavery invites us to discern the difference between myth and reality regarding several issues:

1. Was Wesley opposed to the institution of slavery? Or is that merely myth, because he only opposed the horrors of the slave trade? The reason for this question is that many eighteenth-century persons were greatly opposed to the slave trade, but had no moral difficulty with the institution of slavery.
2. If he opposed slavery, was it the abuses that troubled him, or did he reject the philosophical underpinnings of the institution itself?
3. What is truth and what is myth about Wesley's contemporaries, such as his friend John Newton, author of *Amazing Grace*, and known as the "converted slave trader"?
4. Is it myth or reality that Wesley's position was supported by Coke and Asbury on the American scene?
5. And finally, was Wesley's influence on the ending of slavery truly significant, or is that myth?

²*Abraham and Mary Lincoln: A House Divided*, Part 3, American Experience, broadcast 7 January, 2004, PBS.

A close look at Wesley and slavery should bring clearer understanding to these issues.

A Close Look At Wesley

In the last quarter of the eighteenth century the media began to expose the public to the horrors of the slave trade. People became aware of stomach-turning details. The trade involved what was termed the “triangular trade route.” The first leg involved the voyage from England to Africa with goods to barter with Africans for African slaves, often prisoners of tribal war or victims of slave raids. The second leg brought the slaves from Africa to the West Indies or American colonies and was known as the “Middle Passage,” the middle leg of the triangle. In America the slaves were unloaded and products such as sugar, cotton, and tobacco were loaded for the final leg of the triangle, back to England. Since this was a “business” for profit, what was a captain to do if food or water became scarce? What if disease broke out among the cargo? Sick slaves would infect others. They would not bring a decent price or they may not even be saleable when they reached America. It became common practice, good business sense, to cast such fiscal liability overboard. Sailors reported that the Atlantic, from Africa to America became heavily shark infested because of the availability of human flesh. The harbors of the West Indies had the same reputation for the same reason.

One particular incident occurred in 1781 and exposed the public to these realities. A ship called the *Zong* encountered problems on the high seas. The captain’s calculated solution was to jettison some 132 slaves and then recover the loss from the insurers. Back in England it would be a financial matter between the ship’s owners and the insurance company. However, at the time of the incident, one of the slaves managed to cling to a trailing rope and, under cover of darkness, pulled himself back into the ship. Undetected, he hid in the hold and completed the journey, not just the Middle Passage, but all the way to England, where he told his story. Suddenly there as a different perspective on the incident and the insurers were not willing to simply cover the losses. As the legal battle proceeded, a greater consequence ensued. Newspapers broadcast the outrageous atrocity that had been committed. The awareness dawned: such treatment was not uncommon in this business.

As the public and individuals in policy-making positions responded to such horrors, two foci emerged: the slave trade and slavery. Parliament

began to address the matter of England's involvement in the slave trade. For some the issue was not the wrongness of slavery. They did not believe it was wrong. The slave trade was the problem. If it were ended, atrocities against Africans would be ended, or at least mollified for two reasons. First, the barbarous procurement of slaves, and the inhuman transporting across the Middle Passage would stop a major source of suffering. Secondly, without an ongoing supply of fresh slaves, slave owners would be forced to treat their slaves better in order to maintain their labor force. Kind treatment would make economic sense. Slavery could be humane.

For others the issue was slavery itself. They acknowledged the slave trade as a horrific evil, but they also rejected the practice of slavery, no matter how "humane" it could be. On principle, philosophical or theological, the very institution of slavery could not be justified. To end slavery would also end the slave trade.

Wesley knew about slavery. He would have been aware of the *Zong* incident, but he had also directly encountered slaves and slavery years earlier in America. Would he have opposed the slave trade in order to make slavery gentler? Would he have seen slavery as acceptable under biblical guidelines, if slaves were treated properly, especially if they were evangelized? Fortunately, we can go to Wesley himself to find his answers. His *Journal*, sermons, tracts and commentary on Scripture give a clear picture.

Nowhere in the corpus of Wesley's writings is there a statement in support of slavery. While he does not attack slavery head on until he is sixty-nine years old, he has numerous interactions with the topic throughout his life and not once does he speak favorably about it. When he does confront slavery, he leaves no doubt about his position. He gives no evidence that his position has changed and he continues to work to end slavery until his death, nineteen years later. What is remarkable is that, at the age of sixty-nine when most of his peers were either inactive or dead, Wesley exerts extensive energy in the cause. Something had ignited him. It was not a new conviction that slavery was wrong, but probably a new awareness that he could do something about it. He felt he *must* do something about it.

Regarding his actual position, Wesley vehemently opposed the slave trade. Some of his harshest epithets are used in referring to those involved in the trade. He calls them "men-butchers."³ He is fully aware of how the

³Wesley, *Works* (Jackson edition), Vol. IV (Journal), 95-6 (April 14, 1777).

trade is carried on and prays “that we may never more steal and sell our brethren like beasts: never murder them by thousands and tens of thousands!”⁴ He deduces that the slave trade is the greatest reproach in England’s history.⁵ To those involved in it, he appeals,

Are you a man? Then you should have a human heart. . . . Do you never feel another’s pain? Have you no sympathy . . . no sense of human woe, no pity for the miserable? When you saw the flowing eyes, the heaving breasts, or the bleeding sides and tortured limbs of your fellow-creatures, was [were] you a stone, or a brute? . . . Whatever you lose, lose not your soul: Nothing can countervail that loss. Immediately quit the horrid trade: At all events, be an honest man.⁶

He is no less clear or emphatic about the institution of slavery. Rather than seeing the slave trade as the problem, without which slavery could become mild and acceptable, he saw slavery as the driver of the trade. To all who owned slaves he wrote: “You are the spring that puts all the rest in motion. . . .”⁷ Slavery itself was incontrovertibly wrong. Regardless of harsh or mild conditions, the very foundations of creation and human nature, the law of nature, contradicted slavery: “Liberty is the right of every human creature, as soon as he breathes the vital air: and no human law can deprive him of that right.”⁸ In looking at the entire issue of slavery and the slave trade, he said, “I strike at the root of this complicated villainy: I absolutely deny all slave-holding to be consistent with any degree of natural justice.”⁹

Nothing could justify enslaving others, not economic necessity, the need for a strong labor force, or seeing Africans as sub-human or inheriting slaves.¹⁰ Nothing. He appealed to any who owned slaves:

⁴Wesley, *Works*, Vol. XI, 145, “A Serious Address to the People of England With Regard to the State of the Nation” 1788.

⁵“Never was anything such a reproach to England since it was a nation, as the having any hand in this execrable traffic.” Wesley, *Works*, Vol. XI, 145.

⁶Wesley, *Works*, Vol. XI, 77, “Thoughts Upon Slavery.”

⁷Wesley, *Works*, Vol. XI, 78, “Thoughts Upon Slavery.”

⁸*Ibid.*, 79.

⁹*Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁰Wesley’s strong opposition to the pragmatic argument for slavery can be found in “Thoughts Upon Slavery,” 72. The full range of his argument against slavery, including his view of the idea of racial inferiority, is found in my forthcoming book, *Social Justice Through the Eyes of Wesley*, chapter 3.

O, whatever it costs, put a stop to its [slavery's] cry before it is too late: Instantly, at any price, were it the half of your goods, deliver thyself from blood-guiltiness! Thy hands, thy bed, thy furniture, thy house, thy lands are at present stained with blood. Surely it is enough; accumulate no more guilt; spill no more the blood of the innocent! Do not hire another to shed blood; do not pay him for doing it! Whether you are a Christian or no, show yourself a man! Be not more savage than a lion or a bear! . . . Give liberty to whom liberty is due, that is, to every child of man, to every partaker of human nature.¹¹

The **myth**: Wesley was like most Christians of his culture. If the slave trade and abusive slavery could be ended, gentle, Christian, biblical slavery could be justified.

The **reality**: Wesley was unequivocally opposed to slavery. All slavery.

The **myth**: Africans are at least in need of the light of the gospel, and at most were created to be a servile class in the “chain of being.”

The **reality**: Africans, like all persons, are in need of the light of the gospel, but that requires the sending of missionaries, not enslaving, which demonstrates the opposite of the gospel of love. Africans are fully human and not inferior to Europeans. As such, they deserve full liberty. Immediately.

Wesley's Contemporaries

One reason such myths attach themselves to Wesley is that they do apply to some of his contemporaries. Several of these are worth looking at because of their close proximity to Wesley, particularly James Ramsay, John Newton and George Whitefield.

James Ramsay. James Ramsay served six years in the Royal Navy as a surgeon in the West Indies and then became a minister there for the next nineteen years, until 1781. He knew about slavery and the trade from firsthand experience; he had seen and treated the “collateral damage.” He is significant because of his writing about slavery and because he was a key influence in recruiting William Wilberforce to the anti-slavery cause.¹² With his tracts appearing about ten years after Wesley's

¹¹Ibid., 78–79.

¹²For a good study of Ramsay, see Folarin Shyllon, *James Ramsay, The Unknown Abolitionist*, Edinburgh, Canongate Publishing, 1977, especially 2-3, 89 and 125.

Thoughts Upon Slavery, it is informative to compare their viewpoints. While Ramsay, understandably, makes a strong case for better treatment of slaves, he also makes a case against slavery. However, he is not as consistent or clear as one might hope on opposing the actual institution of slavery. In this he is in step with eighteenth-century culture. He holds that it would be better to continue slavery for a time than to free slaves if they are not adequately prepared for emancipation. "To make a slave free, who cannot earn an honest living, would be inhuman and impolitic. It is letting loose on society a thief in despair."¹³ He proposed a "new shape" of slavery which involved voluntary submission to temporary slavery. Slaves would be brought from Africa, work, and eventually purchase their freedom. In the process they would become civilized and a boon to society.¹⁴

In terms of the anti-slavery cause, it seems that Ramsey would have added more weight had he been clearer in his opposition, especially in light of his years of exposure to slavery. He read Wesley's 1774 tract *after* writing his tract and commented that, had he read Wesley before writing, he would have "written in a more warm and decisive manner."¹⁵

Myth: Ramsay was a single-minded abolitionist, opposed to slavery in principle.

Reality: James Ramsay was completely opposed to the slave trade because of the horrors he had seen. While he believed that slavery was wrong in principle, he also believed that moderate and temporary slavery could serve to civilize and evangelize Africans. It could serve as the means to eventual freedom.

In this context, we must remember Wesley's clear statement: "Instantly, at any price . . . deliver thyself from blood-guiltiness! . . . Give liberty to every child of man, to every . . . partaker of human nature."¹⁶

John Newton. John Newton is a fascinating character, partly because of his complete honesty and partly because of how he is so mis-

¹³See Ramsay's *Essay on the Conversion and Treatment of African Slaves*, 1784, 283.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 291-293.

¹⁵Folarin Shyllon, *James Ramsay, The Unknown Abolitionist*, 89, quoting a letter from Captain J. S. Smith, 21n., British Library, Add MMS 21254, fol. 14.

¹⁶Wesley, *Works*, Vol. XI, 79.

understood, or misrepresented. He is significant to this study for several reasons. He was in touch with Wesley when he was trying to enter the ministry. He was influential in Wilberforce's life at a critical juncture, when young Wilberforce was considering leaving Parliament because of his new-found Christian faith. Newton also wrote for the anti-slavery cause and gave evidence to the House of Commons in 1789 and 1790. His wonderful hymn, *Amazing Grace*, has inspired many and has encouraged interest in his life and ministry. But what is myth and what is reality about John Newton? Note the following statements:

- John Newton was a slave trader, the captain of a slave ship.
- After becoming a Christian he gave up his involvement in the slave trade.
- His conversion caused him to actively attack the evils of slavery and the slave trade.
- He wrote a tract condemning slavery.

Only *one* of those statements is true.

John Newton did become the captain of a slave ship. He led three slaving voyages as captain. Newton was converted in his mid twenties. Conversion and his hope to marry his childhood sweetheart inspired him to seek "respectable" employment. He found it in the slave trade. He was offered command of a slave ship, but decided instead to serve as First Mate. Following that voyage he served as captain on three slaving voyages. All of this was done as a conscientious Christian, with no twinge of conscience, Middle Passage and all. In fact, he considered his new career "the appointment Providence had marked out" for him.¹⁷ Each of his slave voyage journals begins with the words, ". . . voyage intended (by God's permission) . . . to Africa."¹⁸ When he finally left the slave trade it was for reasons totally unrelated to his faith and conscience. Two days before his fourth voyage, he was suddenly taken ill (probably a minor stroke) and resigned command on the eve of departure. Converted slave ship captain? Yes, and in that order.

¹⁷John Newton, *Letters, Sermons, and a Review of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. I, 95, "Authentic Narrative," and *The Works of the Rev. John Newton*, Vol. V, 486, "Letters to a Wife," Aug. 18, 1754.

¹⁸John Newton, *The Journal of a Slaver Trader 1750–1754*, eds. Bernard Martin and Mark Spurrell (London, 1962), 3, 66 and 87.

If this seems confusing, it was to Newton as well. Many years later his journal reflects confusion and anguish at how he could have been involved in the slave trade as a Christian without any sense of doing wrong. But this was years later. At the time, he felt no conflict and is completely honest about that.¹⁹ It was not for some thirty-four years that he actually wrote for the antislavery cause. In 1788 he wrote *Thoughts Upon the African Slave Trade*. But what must be considered is that although he wrote against the slave trade, it was in response to others' encouragement,²⁰ not a driving force within him. Another significant factor is that while the tract is very clear in condemning the slave trade, it does not address the institution of slavery. It could be reasoned that the purpose of the tract was related to the focus of Parliament, ending the slave trade, not slavery. While that is true, there is nothing in all of Newton's writing that speaks against the institution of slavery.

¹⁹I take issue with those who explain this anomalous behavior by seeing Newton as an insensitive man. His letters to his wife are deeply sensitive, as are the hymns he wrote, some, reputedly on board the slave ship (probably, *How Sweet The Name of Jesus Sounds To The Believer's Ear*). It seems best to accept this as an anomaly and acknowledge Newton's own response of confusion and anguish that he genuinely did not feel what he was doing was wrong. Newton's journal reflects his honesty and authenticity and offers no defense. When he published his *Letters to a Wife*, he attached a footnote regarding slavery: "The reader may perhaps wonder, as I now do myself, that, knowing the state of the vile traffic to be as I have here described, and abounding with enormities which I have not mentioned, I did not, at the time, start with horror at my own employment as an agent in promoting it. Custom, example, and interest had blinded my eyes. I did it ignorantly: for, I am sure, had I thought of the slave trade then, as I have thought of it since, no considerations would have induced me to continue in it. Though my religious views were not very clear, my conscience was very tender, and I durst not have displeased God by acting against the light of my mind. Indeed, a slave ship, while on the coast, is exposed to such innumerable and continual dangers that I was often then, and still am, astonished that any one, much more so many, should leave the coast in safety. I was then favoured with an uncommon degree of dependence upon the providence of God, which supported me; but this confidence must have failed in a moment, and I would have been overwhelmed with distress and terror if I had known, or even suspected that I was acting wrong." *The Works of the Rev. John Newton*, Vol. V ("Letters to a Wife") 406-7, n.

²⁰Wilberforce was one who encouraged Newton to write. His unique perspective from being involved in the slave trade was thought to be substantive in persuading people. The two years following publication of his tract (1788) he gave evidence on the slave trade in the House of Commons.

Myth: John Newton was a slave trader who, after his conversion left the slave trade and fought against slavery.²¹

Reality: John Newton was a Christian captain of a slave ship, who left the trade for reasons of health. Many years later he opposed the slave trade. We have no record that he *ever* opposed the evils of slavery.

By contrast, John Wesley observed but was never personally involved in slavery or the trade. Even without Newton's direct involvement, Wesley preached and wrote against both the slave trade and slavery.²²

George Whitefield. The third contemporary of Wesley that we consider is his friend, colleague and sometime antagonist, George Whitefield. They both regarded themselves as "Methodists," evangelists and theologians. Although they had some theological conflict, they considered themselves co-workers in building God's Kingdom. Their work in the Georgia colony exposed them to American slavery. In contrast to Ramsay and Newton, there seems to be little or no myth related to Whitefield's relationship to slavery. His views do, however, clarify the uniqueness and significance of Wesley.

We receive a helpful description of Whitefield's response to slavery from Anthony Benezet. Benezet was the Philadelphia Quaker whose tract reached Wesley in 1772 and was a major factor in his joining the anti-slavery cause. Although Wesley never met Benezet, Benezet was a close friend of George Whitefield and indicates that they had discussions about slavery. In 1774, four years after Whitefield's death, Benezet wrote two

²¹This myth has been kept alive by inaccurate statements that refer to Newton as the "converted slave trader," with no clarification that his conversion occurred before he became captain of a slave ship. Fortunately, *Christian History*, Issue 81, Winter, 2004 does not make this inaccurate generalization (pp. 19–21). Unfortunately, the accompanying Christian History Society Newsletter, (Winter, 2004, 4) does continue the overgeneralization that Newton opposed the institution of slavery: "Many years later, he would denounce slavery in his *Thoughts Upon the African Slave Trade*." In fact, Newton denounced only the slave trade, not slavery in that tract. *Christian History* (28) and Newsletter (4) indicate that it was an epileptic seizure that prevented his fourth slaving voyage, rather than a minor stroke as I suggest.

²²Wesley appealed to all who were involved to end their involvement immediately. One wonders what Newton would have thought and done had he, as a sensitive new Christian, been exposed to the ideas in Wesley's tract. Wesley's tract did not appear for another twenty years and it was fourteen years after Wesley's tract that Newton finally wrote against the slave trade.

letters to Selena, Countess of Huntingdon, Whitefield's patroness. In those letters we learn of Whitefield's views, and Benezet's response.²³

Early on, 1739, Whitefield was opposed to slavery and expressed that opposition in a published letter to the inhabitants of Virginia, Maryland, and both Carolinas. However, the next twelve years in Georgia changed his position. He struggled to make ends meet at the orphanage, Bethesda. He believed the 640 acres on which the orphanage was located should be able to support it, but the hot climate made that an overwhelming task. He eventually began to think that white persons were not capable of intense labor in such heat, but black persons were. Further, having slaves whom he could treat lovingly would add the other providential benefit, evangelization of these slaves. After the Georgia prohibition of slavery was rescinded, Whitefield and Bethesda owned some fifty slaves.

In 1751 Whitefield wrote a letter to Wesley. It clearly documents his views: if Georgia permits slavery, it may be (in God's plan) for the slaves' evangelization; Abraham of the Old Testament had slaves; the New Testament refers to servants who probably were slaves; slavery may not be so disagreeable to those who have never known liberty; hot countries cannot be cultivated without Negroes; and if some are successfully converted, this "swallows up all temporal inconveniences whatsoever."²⁴

It would be difficult to find more contrasting views of slavery than those of Wesley and Whitefield. Wesley actually counters Whitefield's argument that slaves are needed because Europeans cannot work in the heat. He cites his own labor in Georgia and states experientially that they can and he did work under such conditions.²⁵ He goes further by stating

²³For a more detailed study of Whitefield and Benezet's letters to Selena, see my "Wesley, Whitefield, A Philadelphia Quaker, and Slavery," in *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, Fall, 2001.

²⁴Benezet to Selena, 1774, two letters in Haverford Collection, Haverford College, Haverford, Pennsylvania.

²⁵Wesley, *Works*, Vol. XI, 73, "Thoughts Upon Slavery." "For white men, even Englishmen are well able to labour in hot climates; provided they are temperate both in meat and drink, and they inure themselves to it by degrees. I speak no more than I know by experience. It appears from the thermometer that the summer heat in Georgia is frequently equal to that in Barbadoes, yea, to that under the line. And yet I and my family (eight in number) did employ all our spare time there, in felling of trees and clearing of ground, as hard labour as any Negro be employed in. The German family, likewise, forty in number, were employed in all manner of labour. And this was so far from impairing our health that we all continued perfectly well, while the idle ones round about us were swept away as with a pestilence. It is not true, therefore, that white men are not able to labour, even in hot climates, full as well as black."

that even if the climate and labor requirements necessitated a slave labor force, that does not justify it. It would be far better to have no labor accomplished than to enslave the innocent.²⁶

In this case there is no myth, only clear reality. Wesley opposed slavery and rejected all justifications for it. Whitefield justified slavery for economic and evangelization purposes. Wesley appealed to all who owned slaves to liberate them. Whitefield moved so far away from opposing slavery that he became a slave owner.²⁷

The contrast between Wesley and Whitefield is not necessarily surprising since they clearly had different opinions on several issues. Their views on slavery are also separated by years. Whitefield's letter was written twenty-one years before Wesley began his anti-slavery battle. Whitefield died four years before Wesley's tract appeared. While it is interesting to imagine a conversation between them on the topic, we have no evidence that they ever had one, or that Whitefield was fully aware of Wesley's position. However, this is not the case with two other contemporaries of Wesley, his specific deputies to America.

Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury

Two men in particular felt great loyalty to Wesley and the responsibility to carry on his work. Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury saw themselves in line with his theology and his social application of the gospel. Specifically, they both opposed slavery. In 1779, five years after Wesley's tract was published, Asbury's journal reflects strong enough opposition to slavery that he believed "if the Methodists [did] not . . . emancipate their slaves, God [would] depart from them." Asbury wrote a letter, promoting

²⁶Wesley, *Ibid.*, 73.

²⁷It is interesting to note Benezet's response to Whitefield's position, especially because they were friends, but so different in their views. In his letter to Lady Huntingdon, Benezet describes both his relationship to Whitefield and how he believed Whitefield moved from opposition to support of slavery: "I have more than once conversed on this interesting subject with my esteemed friend George Whitefield deceas'd. [. . .] after residing in Georgia & being habituated to the sight & use of Slaves, his judgment became so much influenced as to paliate, & in some measure, defend the use of Slaves. . . ." In other places Benezet explains that this is the same process by which many move from opposition to support of slavery. See especially his Epistle of 1754, paragraph 6, and *Short Account*, p. 4.

emancipation, to be read in the Societies, and he believed that one reason God kept him in America was to help bring about the end of slavery.²⁸

Thomas Coke, who would support ministry to slaves in the West Indies, was in league with Asbury in opposing American slavery. At the Christmas Conference in Baltimore, the organizational meeting for American Methodism in 1784, both Coke and Asbury pushed the agenda of complete emancipation. This was reflected in the Discipline. The response of the Methodist people was clear. "Coke and Asbury were threatened and slave owners would no longer allow ministers access to their slaves."²⁹ While concern for their safety would have been an issue, Coke and Asbury were probably even more concerned about having continued ministry to the slaves. According to Vickers:

It was a difficult and soul searching time for the Methodist leaders; they were convinced that slavery was wrong, but even more committed to evangelism. It appears that Asbury's fear of God departing from Methodists was forgotten or at least suspended. Coke explains, "We thought it prudent to suspend the minute concerning slavery for one year, on account of the great opposition that has been given it, especially in the new circuits, our work being in too infantile a state to push things to extremity. . . . But we agreed to present to the Assembly of Maryland, through our friends, a petition for a general emancipation, signed by as many electors as we can procure."

The leaders of American Methodism also found a way to retain access to slaves and not offend slave owners, perhaps saving their own lives. It was by modifying their message. Coke relates, "I bore a public testimony against slavery, and have found out a method of delivering it without much offence, or at least without causing a tumult: and that is, by first addressing the negroes in a very pathetic manner on the duty of servants to masters; and then the whites will receive quietly what I have to say to them." They also found ways to more effectively touch their black hearers. It appears that

²⁸In *From Wesley to Asbury* (Durham, North Carolina, 1976), 121-122, Frank Baker notes that some of Asbury's statements on slavery, including the above quote, were in Asbury's original journal, but have been deleted from the later edition. These are related to entries for Feb. 23, March 27, and April 23, 1779.

²⁹Brendlinger, *Social Justice Through the Eyes of Wesley*, 55. Frank Baker deals with the Christmas Conference in *From Wesley to Asbury*, 151-152.

Asbury took a preaching companion with him on his ministry tours, one “Black Harry.”³⁰

The hard truth of this scenario is that Wesley’s American apostles shared his conviction about slavery, but were in a situation that forced what they considered a pragmatic choice. Should they hold unbendingly to the conviction and possibly lose the means to extend Methodism? Or should they hold their conviction, but acquiesce on enforcing the rules among Methodists? At first it seemed a difficult call, but Coke’s words indicate that he believed he had found a workable balance. In reality, this move separated Methodism from the ranks of those who univocally opposed slavery and refused to tolerate its practice among its members.

The question remains, what would Wesley have done had he been in the position of Coke and Asbury? Since there is no extant correspondence between them on the topic, the best we can do is speculate from other situations and writings of Wesley. Wesley’s authoritarian style of leadership, his refusal to soften his message even when being physically attacked, and his rejection of acquiescing on a moral principle for pragmatic reasons (what he termed “necessity”) indicate that he would not have chosen the path that Asbury and Coke took. Two years before his death, five years after the Christmas Conference, he addressed the matter of discipline among Methodists. In his sermon “Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity,” he states clearly that it is a sin to retain members who do not live up to the biblical standard. In effect, the leaders participate in their sin and it reduces the Spirit’s influence on the entire community. If this meant smaller numbers, it must still be done: “Who will meet me on this ground? Join me on this, or not at all.”³¹ Such statements were made in regard to issues that Wesley considered far smaller moral issues (use of money and dress) than the “sum of all villainies.” In 1775 Wesley pointed out the hypocrisy of colonists who called for freedom from England’s tyranny while maintaining the practice of slavery: “one is screaming Murder! Slavery! the other silently bleeds and dies!”³² Would he be less direct

³⁰Brendlinger, *Social Justice Through the Eyes of Wesley*, forthcoming (Joshua Press), with first quotation from John Vickers, *Thomas Coke, Apostle to Methodism*, London, Epworth Press, 1969, 98, citing Coke’s Journal, American Edition, 397ff., and second quotation, Vickers, 96.

³¹Wesley, *Works*, Vol. VII, 287. Sermon, “Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity.”

³²Wesley, *Works*, Vol. XI, 81, “A Calm Address to our American Colonies.”

with Methodists who preached freedom in Christ while holding others in bondage?

The myth is that the early American Methodist leaders were not strongly opposed to slavery. The reality is that they deeply opposed it, but chose to muffle their message to maintain unity and promote growth. A second reality is that Wesley would have probably opted for a harder line against slavery, and one factor of the eventual split of 1843 would have been fully addressed half a century earlier. His strength in formative years may have caused the conflict to be addressed in the church's infancy, rather than when it was larger and entrenched, on the eve of the Civil War. There was continuity between Wesley's position and those of Coke and Asbury, but I hold that there was discontinuity between their actions and what he would have done.

Wesley and the Ending of British Slavery

Finally, we turn to the question of Wesley's actual influence on the eventual ending of British slavery. How significant was his influence? In order to answer this question, we consider three areas, his direct influence on individuals, his indirect influence on individuals, and the extent to which he effected a change in public attitudes, what I term the "climate" of England. Due to the scope of this paper, I shall only briefly mention the first two categories, and then move on to the climate issue.

Among the first generation of Wesley's followers were Coke and Asbury. Although their later position weakened, their earlier position clearly reflected Wesley's influence. Thomas Rankin was one of the first preachers Wesley sent to America (1773) and was the first Methodist recorded to preach against slavery (1775). He also addressed the Continental Congress, pointing out the hypocrisy of Americans holding slaves in bondage while crying out for liberty for themselves. This was the theme Wesley developed in his *Calm Address to our American Colonies* in 1775. In England, Samuel Bradburn had been almost like a son to Wesley. As a Methodist preacher he adopted Wesley's message and style. In what appears to be either a conscious or an unconscious tribute to Wesley, the year after Wesley's death Bradburn wrote his own tract against slavery. He also protested slavery on the personal level by not using West Indian products, supporting the Manchester boycott.³³

³³See Bradburn's *An Address to the People Called Methodists; Concerning the Wickedness of Encouraging Slavery*, London, 1792, 19 (included in an appendix in my *Social Justice Through the Eyes of Wesley*).

Other individuals formed an interactive network that directly affected the development of the legal process to end the slave trade and slavery in Britain. These were also influenced by Wesley: John Newton, Henry Venn, and William Wilberforce. After Newton left the slave trade, he served as a tide surveyor and then responded to a call to the ministry. Initially he was not encouraged by the Church of England. Wesley tried to help at this time and even encouraged Newton to serve as a Methodist itinerant preacher.³⁴ Methodists, particularly Whitefield, nurtured Newton's evangelicalism and he corresponded with Wesley on theological matters. As will be seen below, Newton's evangelicalism made him a desirable counselor during Wilberforce's spiritual quest. Newton's evangelicalism was at least nurtured by Methodism and even Wesley.

Henry Venn was the preacher of the Clapham Sect, the small group of committed Christians, including Wilberforce, who repeatedly and tirelessly put social issues, particularly the slave trade, before Parliament. Wilberforce would have heard Venn's sermons and interacted personally with him about the Christian responsibility to change society. The Clapham sect was a major influence in the antislavery victories. What is of interest to us is that Venn felt a spiritual kinship with Wesley, had been helped by Wesley's preaching and writing, and asked Wesley for a personal commission as he entered a new pastorate. That parish was Clapham, the "heart" of the evangelical group, the "Clapham Sect" that influenced Parliament to end the slave trade.³⁵

Wilberforce had numerous lines of connection with Methodism and Wesley. From the age of nine he lived for three years with an aunt who was a Methodist and admired Whitefield. Wilberforce professed conversion at age twelve. Eventually Wilberforce inherited this "Methodist home," and it was there that the life-changing conversation with William Pitt occurred (to take up the slavery cause in Parliament). The teenage faith of Wilberforce lapsed, but at age twenty-six he again embraced evangelical Christianity. At this time he heard sermons by Henry Venn (1785) and sought the advice of John Newton because he was concerned that it may be incompatible to be a politician and a Christian. Newton advised him both about his spiritual quest and encouraged him to remain in politics. It is interesting to note that Newton had been a friend of

³⁴Wesley, *Works*, Vol. II, 531 (Journal, March 13, 1760).

³⁵John Telford, *A Sect That Moved the World*, London, n.d., 19. Venn's request occurred on 21 March, 1754.

Wilberforce's aunt and uncle for many years³⁶ and that Newton and Wilberforce had been in contact for some eight years (since 1777). For the present argument it must be remembered that both Venn and Newton had been greatly influenced by the evangelical revival, of which Wesley was an integral part. Wilberforce himself felt not only sympathy for, but was a part of this movement. In 1786 he wrote in his journal, "Expect to hear myself now universally given out to be a Methodist: may God grant it may be said with truth."³⁷ Within the next three years Wilberforce paid a visit to Wesley, now eighty-six years old. Wesley journaled, "Mr. W. called upon me and we had an agreeable and useful conversation. What a blessing it is to Mr. P[itt] to have such a friend as this!"³⁸

Wilberforce was a key factor in the fight against slavery and his life was touched both indirectly and directly by Wesley. Not only was Wesley crucial to the movement that convinced Wilberforce to enter the cause, but Wesley himself interacted with Wilberforce. Deeply concerned about slavery, Wesley had become aware of the role political figures could play in abolishing this evil. To that end, he desired to encourage Wilberforce and the last letter he wrote, only days before his death, speaks eloquently to this:

Dear Sir, Unless the divine power has raised you up to be as *Athanasius contra mundum*, I see not how you can go through your glorious enterprise in opposing that execrable villany, which is the scandal of religion, of England, and of human nature. Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them together stronger than God? O be not weary of well doing! Go on, in the name of God and in the power of His might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it.³⁹

³⁶Robin Furneaux, *William Wilberforce* (London, Hamish Hamilton, Ltd., 1974), 32–53. Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760–1810*, (London, Macmillan Press, LTD., 1975), 251 n., mentions that Wilberforce had been in contact with Newton since 1777.

³⁷Furneaux, 41 n., citing Wilberforce's journal, June 12, 1786.

³⁸Wesley, *Works*, Vol. IV, 445-6 (Journal, Feb. 24, 1789). Wilberforce's respect for the Wesleys can be seen in his providing an annuity for Sarah Wesley, the widow of Charles.

³⁹Wesley, *Letters*, (Telford), Vol. VIII, 264-265 (February 24, 1791).

Having been spiritually nurtured by Methodists and hoping to live up to the epithet "Methodist," Wilberforce must have been deeply encouraged by a letter from the revered founder. Especially was this the case because that founder was also unequivocally and publicly committed to the cause which had become Wilberforce's life work.

Beyond such individuals, Wesley's influence also touched the broader population. With the spread of Methodism and the evangelical revival came social developments, including education, the spread of democratic principles, the popularization of Arminianism, and increased awareness of Christian social responsibility.⁴⁰ These developments would create a climate that would encourage the populace to support reform by means such as boycott and petitions and by electing politicians who embraced values in harmony with Christian principles. How such changes in society relate to specific influences and social reform can be illustrated by particular developments. One case in point is the 1807 Parliamentary election. It was extremely close, with Wilberforce in danger of losing his Parliamentary seat in York. Aware of the danger, the common folk rallied in support of Wilberforce; Methodists comprised a substantial part of the voters and probably saved Wilberforce.⁴¹ Had Wilberforce lost, the absence of his voice in Commons in the crucial year of 1807 (abolishing of the slave trade) and the subsequent battle for emancipation would have been dramatic.

Sixteen years earlier Wilberforce himself had appealed directly to Wesley's influence. In 1791 he was trying to secure signatures for petitions against the slave trade. At the first Conference following Wesley's death he supplied Methodist ministers with Parliamentary "Evidence." Some 352,407 signatures were obtained. Significantly, 65 percent were from Methodists, with the remaining 35 percent from the rest of the non-conforming groups combined! Wilberforce was aware of Wesley's influence and knew how to utilize it. Interestingly, it was the first time public opinion was used to influence the House of Commons on slavery.⁴²

⁴⁰For a fuller development of these areas, see my *Social Justice Through The Eyes of Wesley*, chapter 6, especially 146 ff.

⁴¹See Furneaux, pp. 268–271 and Stuart Andrews, *Methodism and Society* (London, Longmans, 1970), 52. Andrews holds that without the Methodists Wilberforce probably would have lost (Eyes, 145).

⁴²Richard Butterworth, *Wesley Studies by Various Writers*, 190 (London, Charles H. Kelly, n.d. [probably 1903 or 1904]) cites these numbers. E. M. Hunt holds that this kind of public response reflects religious conviction, not political or economic considerations because these people had nothing to gain. See Hunt's *The North of England Agitation for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1780–1800*, ii, 156, 107 (unpublished M.A. thesis, Manchester, 1959).

Probably the most graphic demonstration of Wesley's influence on slavery relates to the battle *after* the 1807 fight to end the slave trade. In 1833 Parliament successfully waged war against slavery itself. How fitting that Wesley's influence should come into focus here, in what he called "the root of this complicated villany."⁴³ It is also interesting that a number of factors coalesced in the same period. In the last third of the eighteenth century the new, literate public began to emerge as a political force. It would begin to influence Parliamentary struggles. Previously, little or no influence came from the outside. And it was in these years that Wesley's followers grew to be a significant portion of the population. Several events show the crescendoing effect.

In 1788 Wesley published the *Resolutions* of the Manchester Antislavery meeting and encouraged readers to petition Parliament. The petition campaign of 1791-92 was very successful.⁴⁴ In 1814 the populace successfully brought pressure on Parliament. While France had agreed to end their slave trade in five years, they were not moving toward that end and England's Viscount Castlereagh seemed ready to ignore France's lack of action. English abolitionists launched a petition campaign, securing three quarters of a million signatures in slightly more than a month. Castlereagh responded and pressured France. For the next twelve years Methodists "became the main driving force in the campaign for amelioration and emancipation."⁴⁵ As the final surge for emancipation developed from 1830, Methodists not only became involved, but saw their involvement (especially regarding petitions) as an expression of their faith.⁴⁶ Clearly, they had caught Wesley's vision of the inseparability of theology and life, of the Christian's responsibility to the downtrodden. So responsive and infectious were Methodists to a West Indian atrocity that someone observed, they "have not only caught fire themselves, but have succeeded in igniting the whole country."⁴⁷

⁴³Wesley, *Works*, Vol. XI, 70, "Thoughts Upon Slavery."

⁴⁴Wesley, *The Arminian Magazine*, May, 1788, Vol. XI, 208-9. See Robert William Fogel, *The Rise and Fall of American Slavery, Without Consent of Contract* Norton, 1989), 212.

⁴⁵Robert William Fogel, *The Rise and Fall of American Slavery, Without Consent of Contract* Norton, 1989), 217, quotation from 225.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 225-226.

⁴⁷Zachary Macaulay to Brougham, 13 May, 1833, quoted in Roger Anstey, "The Pattern of British Abolitionism," citing the Brougham MSS, 10544. Anstey's essay is in *Antislavery, Religion and Reform*, ed., Christine Bolt and Seymour Drescher, Archon Books, 1980, 28.

By early 1833 one in seven adults were calling for emancipation of all English slaves. With most of these coming from dissenting churches, Methodists were a major factor. This evangelical influence had earlier even brought about the pressure for Parliamentary candidates to commit to support the abolition of slavery. As a result, some two hundred candidates pledged to support emancipation.⁴⁸ According to anti-slavery writer Robert Fogel, the voting behaviour of members of Parliament, especially those who were members of dissenting churches, was influenced by religion, and they tended to support emancipation. However, this group of MPs was too small to sway the outcome on major issues. Therefore, the more complex factor involved broader political issues and the government's concern to secure a large part of the voters. Methodists were the largest part of dissenters and were known to be united in support of emancipation. As a political move the Grey government strategized that, by supporting emancipation, they would win the support of Methodists and other dissenters. They needed this Methodist and dissenting support for other issues which they considered more important than emancipation.⁴⁹ For this political reason, the government took decisive action; the Emancipation Act was passed and was signed by the King on 28 August, 1833, becoming operative on 1 August, 1834.⁵⁰ Thus, it appears that emancipation was passed in order to secure Methodist and other dissenting support for the government.

The deeper and more subtle issue related to Wesley is that Methodists were in agreement on emancipation; more than 95% of Wesleyan Methodists signed petitions in the 1832–33 petition drive.⁵¹ Wesley's followers had grown sufficiently to be considered important enough to be courted by the government. His influence had worked to change society, even in ways he may not have predicted.

Conclusion

Was Wesley the single most important factor in ending British slavery? The answer is probably “no.” Such a statement would fall in the

⁴⁸Fogel, 227. Fogel, 230 indicates that dissenters comprised 21% of the electorate by 1832 and Methodists were the largest segment of this group.

⁴⁹Fogel, 229-230.

⁵⁰Ibid., 228.

⁵¹During the 1832-3 petition drive Wesleyan and other Methodists supplied more than 79% of the nearly 300,000 signatures (236,592 of the total 297,672). Baptists supplied 11.64 % and Congregationalists 8.87%. See Seymour Drescher, “Two Variants of Anti-Slavery *From Slavery to Freedom*, NYU Press, 1999, 40.

realm of myth. Was Wesley a very significant factor in the abolition of British slavery? The reality is a clear “yes.” He and his movement directly influenced those in political leadership, such as William Wilberforce. He and the movement also influenced many of those who would be in Parliament a generation later when the issue was decided. And more broadly, the masses of English, the “common folk” who signed petitions and elected members of Parliament were greatly influenced by Methodism, which had become the largest dissenting group in England.

The contrast is seen in America where Methodist leadership were not as consistently opposed to slavery and the cross-section of American lay Methodists were not of one mind on slavery. Also, American Methodist leadership did not have the level of influence in government that their English counterpart had. The result was that America would postpone addressing slavery for more than a generation after Britain and then mainly because of the threat of secession. Wesley’s influence in Britain was much stronger and resulted in earlier, more decisive action. His influence does become apparent in his American followers in the 1840s when American Methodism split predominantly over slavery; Wesley’s personal position was cited as the official stance of both Wesleyan and Free Methodists.

Application for the 21st Century

Words and ideas can change the world; they have and they still can. John Wesley’s words and ideas changed his world. His principles of justice, love, and social action can influence our ideas and words. It behooves his followers to determine the present “sum of all villainies,” to seek out the malignancies that infiltrate human society, and to address them with the same commitment with which Wesley attacked slavery. At the age of sixty-nine, Wesley believed he *must* do something. So must we. Once again, realities will overpower myths. Once again, there is the possibility that the world can be changed.

BOOK REVIEWS

Lee, Sung-Duk. *Der deutsche Pietismus und John Wesley*. Gießen: Brunnen Verlag, 2003.

Reviewed by Kenneth J. Collins, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY

Demonstrating that the current revival of Wesley studies is not merely an Anglo/American phenomenon but an international one, Sung-Duk Lee, a Korean Methodist pastor, has produced a significant contribution to the field in his *Der deutsche Pietismus und John Wesley*. Originally a dissertation undertaken at the University of Münster, this carefully argued work has recently been published as part of the church history monograph series offered by Brunnen Press.

After parsing the two major strains of German pietism that influenced Wesley, that is, those that hailed from Halle and Herrnhut, Lee contends that the former has been under-appreciated and the latter overemphasized. Marshalling considerable evidence for his view, Lee observes that Wesley had already come into contact with the pietism of Halle while he was a fellow at Oxford through becoming acquainted with some of the key texts of the movement. Thus, in 1733 Wesley read August Francke's *Nicodemus* (which he later took with him to Georgia) and the following year he mastered the *Fußstapfen* in A. W. Bohme's English translation. Beyond this, Wesley studied Francke's *Manuductio* with evident satisfaction, most likely because it offered a vision of the practical Christian life that Wesley himself found congenial. This considerable corpus of Halle Pietists likely provided some of the wherewithal for Wesley's later criticism of the Moravians, for "it is no accident," Lee points out, "that the objections which Wesley raised in the letter to the Herrnhuter Brethren,

composed soon after his return to London, corresponded exactly to those of the Halle Pietists.”

Utilizing newly available material in Frank Baker’s critical edition of Wesley’s letters, Lee builds on this evidence and challenges earlier interpretations of the extent of the influence of Moravian pietism on John Wesley, especially those put forward in Martin Schmidt’s classic theological biography. To illustrate, Schmidt maintained that a generational difference existed between Zinzendorf and Böhler such that the views of the former were exemplified in the quietism of Molther, but the latter’s were not. Lee questions this interpretation, not only in light of the conversation that took place between Wesley, Spangenberg, and Böhler on May 2, 1741, but also in terms of Zinzendorf’s “dominating personality.” Indeed, when this conversation is compared to the one that Wesley had with Zinzendorf at Gray’s-Inn Walks a few months later on September 3, 1741, it is clear that the theological understandings of the Moravian leaders in each instance were remarkably similar. Trading on a distinction between imputation and impartation, Spangenberg (and presumably Böhler as well) argued that the “new man” is clean and the “old man” is corrupt and both exist simultaneously in believers. More to the point, in Zinzendorf’s reckoning, this distinction emerged in the claim that believers are holy, to be sure, but not in themselves, *only* in Christ—a claim that Wesley deemed problematic due to its antinomian implications.

The cash value of this insight for Lee is that Wesley’s Aldersgate experience should not be seen as either a conversion to Herrnhut Christianity or to orthodox Lutheran theology. In other words, Wesley’s understanding of the *via salutis* was dynamic and processive, more akin to the *Ordnung Gottes* (order of God) found in Francke’s works (with its unfolding as prevenient grace, convincing grace, *Bußkampf*, justification, and sanctification) than to the *Minuten Begnadigung* (minutes of pardon) in Böhler and Zinzendorf’s statements that suggested strong themes of imputation, not simply with respect for forgiveness, but also in terms of holiness. In fact, Zinzendorf specifically rejected Francke’s way of salvation with its emphasis on *Bußkampf* (struggle of repentance) as a “legal conversion.”

While it can be granted that Wesley’s *via salutis* is indeed similar to that of Halle, rather than “the simplification” of Herrnhut, nevertheless Böhler’s contribution remained considerable. To illustrate, the young Moravian leader impressed upon Wesley not only that saving faith is

marked by two fruits that ever accompany it, namely, happiness and holiness, but also that conversion is instantaneous, with the theological consequence that a strong emphasis must be placed on the *actualization* (not simply the possibility) of grace. Lee's work, then, helps readers to understand why that realization of grace for Wesley, in terms of the beginnings of holiness, must be conceived in terms of impartation rather than imputation and, equally important, why such grace must be seen in the context of a larger dynamic process both before and after.

Overall, this is a fine contribution to the field. No doubt it will help scholars as well as students come to a greater appreciation of the influence of German pietism on Wesley's life and thought. It also offers a few helpful correctives along the way.

Thomas Jay Oord and Michael Lodahl, *Relational Holiness: Responding to the Call of Love* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2005). ISBN 083-412-1824

Reviewed by Rob L. Staples, Emeritus Professor of Theology, Nazarene Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Missouri.

I suppose most old professors delight in seeing their former students produce worthwhile books and articles that build upon but go beyond what they were taught in their classes. That was certainly my reaction as I read this volume by two of my former students. These first cousins, Tom Oord and Mike Lodahl, have each previously published books and articles, but this is their first effort at co-authorship.

The title *Relational Holiness* is explained in part by the subtitle: *Responding to the Call of Love*. By “relational holiness” the authors mean a view of holiness that sees things and persons as deeply interconnected. This is an understanding prevalent also in fields other than theology, including the natural and social sciences. It is an almost universally accepted worldview in postmodern societies. The authors are driven by two passions, (1) to present holiness in a way that present and future generations will find believable, relevant, and truly good news, and (2) to make holiness understandable today, which entails setting aside specialized technical language and using relational categories. “Our first passion” they say, “fuels our second passion” (p. 21).

Of course, Oord and Lodahl are not the first Wesleyan theologians to develop relational understandings of holiness. One thinks of the work of Mildred Bangs Wynkoop and H. Ray Dunning, to name only two. But this may be the first successful attempt to put this understanding far down on the “bottom shelf” so that it can be grasped by a person with little or no theological background. This availability is enhanced by a list of “Questions to Stimulate Discussion” and a lengthy bibliography “For Deeper Study” at the end of each of the six chapters.

Near the beginning of the book is this sobering observation: “Perhaps the fundamental identity of the Holiness Movement—its theological distinctive—is . . . becoming extinct. Perhaps it is only the organizational machinery that keeps the tradition alive, while its theology no longer exerts influence” (p. 27). This is reminiscent of Keith Drury’s paper just over a decade ago titled “The Holiness Movement is Dead” in which he said much the same thing. The authors then proceed to show the diverse

meanings found in Scripture of such terms as *sanctify*, *sanctification*, *holy*, and *holiness*, demonstrating that Scripture contains a variety of meanings for these words, namely (1) following rules and ethical codes, (2) being pure and without blemish, (3) being set apart, (4) total devotion or complete commitment, (5) perfection, and (6) love.

In a careful analysis, these two systematic theologians insist that this variety of meanings is helpful only if a common theme underlies or ties together this rich diversity. In searching for this common theme they examine each of the above meanings and find them, with but one exception, to be “contributing” distinctives but not the “core” distinctive. The core distinctive is *love*. In this claim they are faithful to the first epistle of John as well as to John Wesley whose shortest, and perhaps best, description of holiness was “love excluding sin.” As William Greathouse points out in his Foreword, the book tilts more to John than to Paul. But in doing so it is in company with Wesley for whom John was the favorite New Testament writer.

In chapter 3 love is defined as “intentional response to others—especially God—that promotes well-being.” This definition seems rather nebulous and imprecise, even with the examples they give of love’s response in concrete situations. Upon reading this chapter, what I found missing was the sacrificial cross-bearing love of Matt. 16:24, the radical discipleship of Luke 14:26 and 16:13, and of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s challenge that “when Christ calls a man to follow him he bids him come and die.”

I breathed easier in reading the next chapter where that weakness is largely overcome, as the authors beautifully ground the relational view of holiness in the Trinity, showing how we can share in the inter-trinitarian love of God. This involves the Johannine assertion that we know love by the fact that Christ laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for one another (1 John 3:16). Another chapter depicts what it means for love to play out in the inter-personal and community relationships within the church. In the final chapter the authors return to the contributing distinctives enumerated in chapter 2 to show that they all can be meaningful and valid if seen as expressions of love.

One might wonder why some other “contributory distinctives” were omitted, such as the doctrine’s claim to cleanse the heart from inward sin. It might be vaguely implied in the discussion of purity, but a more pointed treatment would have been helpful. Or perhaps the authors mean it to be understood that the core distinctive (love) “excludes sin,” as Wesley

believed. This could have been affirmed more clearly.

There is no mention of the instantaneousness and “secondness” of entire sanctification, which have also been distinctives of the Holiness Movement. To be sure, these omitted distinctives, like the others, should be seen as “contributory,” and must give way to love as the “core.” But one may wonder why they were not dealt with to the same degree as the other so-called contributory distinctives. If they were ruled out as lying more in the realm of structure than of substance, that might be a valid methodology. But the authors do not tell us.

Finally, the question can be raised: By making love the core distinctive of holiness, do Oord and Lodahl, contrary to their intention, actually leave holiness doctrine with no distinctive at all? Although Wesleyan theology, more than most traditions, has stressed the centrality of love, could any Christian finally disagree? Although other theological traditions may emphasize different doctrines, would any of them disparage love as being at the heart of the Christian life? To do so would be a violation of our Lord’s Great Commandment. What then does the Holiness Movement have to say to the universal church that is not said in most, if not all, its various traditions? If the core distinctive of holiness is, in fact, found in Christianity as a whole, what contribution is left for the Holiness tradition to make to that whole, other than merely to say “we do it best”?

Perhaps what we need to receive from this book (both from what it says and what it does not say) is that the most profound meaning of love, for the Holiness Movement as well as for the individual Christian, lies in the very self-emptying, the *kenosis*, of the One who made himself of no reputation and became obedient unto death. Could that be what God wants of the Holiness Movement—to empty itself, to lose itself, and thereby to find itself, to die in order to live on a wider expanse? In this way, if, as the authors claim, the theological identity of the Holiness Movement is becoming extinct and only kept alive by organizational machinery, perhaps from its ashes there may arise, Phoenix-like, a refined, chastised, and truly relevant message. In this way, if (as Drury claimed) the Holiness Movement is dead, it will not have died in vain. And in this way, maybe—just maybe—Oord and Lodahl will have helped to facilitate a resurrection.

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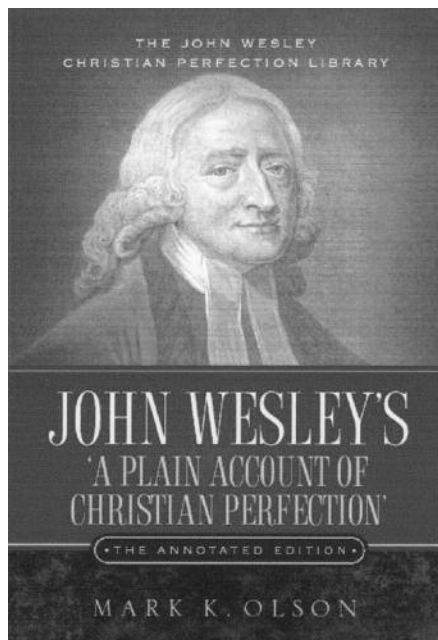
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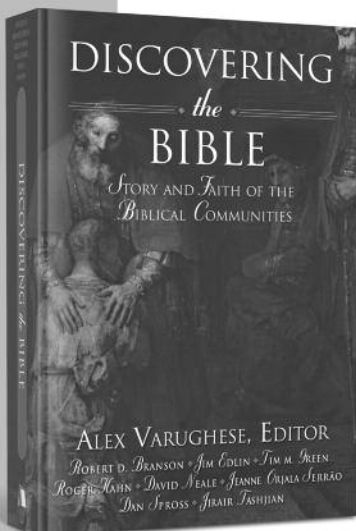


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