

# ***Wesleyan Theological Journal***

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

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

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Barry L. Callen, 1993 to present

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(Organized 1965)

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 Wesleyan Theological Society met on the campus of Olivet Nazarene University in March, 2007. With Diane Leclerc as program chair, the many issues considered centered around the theme of suffering and holiness.

The Society's president, Carl Campbell, delivered his presidential address. Frances M. Young, a leading Methodist voice in Christian theology, keynoted the meeting by reflecting on the nature of God and God's actions with relation to pain—she is the mother of a man with severe disabilities. In this issue, then, Campbell and Young are joined by ten others who explore the meeting's theme from various disciplines and subjects.

Whatever information is needed about the Society is readily available. The WTS web site is [Wesley.nnu.edu/wts](http://Wesley.nnu.edu/wts). The past issues of the journal, 1965-2005, are now on a searchable CD. The email addresses of all current officers of the Society are found in this issue. Also found is an application for membership. Here are the officers to contact for particular needs you may have:

1. If you wish to apply for society membership—Dr. Sam Powell
2. If you wish to write a book review—Dr. Richard Thompson
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Barry L. Callen  
Anderson, Indiana  
March, 2008





# SUFFERING AND THE HOLY LIFE

by

Frances Young

The year 1755 was the year of the Lisbon earthquake and a symbolic date in the history of European thought. Leibnitz had suggested in 1710 that this was the best of all possible worlds. This was his way of justifying the ways of the Creator, or offering a theodicy (a term he apparently originated). After 1755 in Lisbon, however, it became increasingly impossible to offer a credible theodicy. Too many innocents had been destroyed. This tragic event generated a massive shift in European philosophy, the consequences of which are still with us. Eighteenth-century reactions included those of Voltaire (*Candide*, 1759) and David Hume (*Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, 1779). To some extent, they were picking up the 17<sup>th</sup>- and 18<sup>th</sup>- century Deists who espoused natural religion and denied providence, miracles, and revelation as science discovered the ordered patterns of creation and claimed to be thinking God's thoughts after him. But, after the Lisbon quake, not even that seemed rational; they pressed the question of whether a good God could have even created a world like this.

So people increasingly admitted that Nature is red in tooth and claw. The problem of evil and suffering became, and remains today, the biggest apologetic issue for believers. Indeed, suffering is the problem that generates much of modern atheism. Recent events like the Tsunami and Hurricane Katrina only confirm the reality that there are constant examples of inexplicable natural events that are horrific evils. It seems as if God either does not exist or is a devil. In the nineteenth century, Dostoyevsky wrote his searching novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, posing the question of

whether we would build a human world at all if even one child were inevitably to suffer torture. A Jewish colleague of mine once stated: “If I were God, I would not let my children do to each other what human beings do.” The Holocaust, the industrialized violence and wars of the twentieth century, and the genocides and horrors that continue to this day, all reinforce this protest. The problem of evil and suffering haunts the academic philosopher of religion and the ordinary watcher of TV news alike. But 1755, whether people realize it or not, lies behind these protests. Since then, in European thought, suffering has demolished the intellectual standing of religious faith.

### **The Wesleys and the Problem of Suffering**

The year 1755, tragic in Lisbon, fell in the middle of John Wesley’s life. That was the year in which he first devised a Covenant service for his followers, and the annual conference debated whether it was lawful to leave the Church of England. Was John Wesley even aware of the big event in Portugal which was to have such a profound impact on religious thought? What did he make of disaster and innocent suffering? In fact, Wesley did react to news of the Lisbon earthquake.<sup>1</sup> He published a pamphlet in 1755 entitled “Serious Thoughts Occasioned by the Earthquake at Lisbon.” In 1756 Charles Wesley added an extra hymn “occasioned by the destruction of Lisbon” to a collection of hymns originally published in 1750, which had itself been occasioned by an earthquake that had occurred in Britain on March 8 of that year.

So, did Lisbon make any difference? Charles’ hymns suggest it only confirmed what he already thought about natural disasters. We will examine the collection to see what he thought. Experience of the 1750 earthquake generated thanks for escape from disaster and pleas to turn to God in the face of his judgment:

Rising in Thy dreadful might  
 The wicked to rebuke,  
 Thou hast with unwonted fright  
 Our sleeping bodies shook;  
 Earth did to her centre quake,  
 Convulsive pangs her bowels tore;  
 Shake, our inmost spirits shake,  
 And let us sleep no more.

---

<sup>1</sup>I was rescued from ignorance by Brian Beck, to whom I am most grateful for supplying copies of the relevant material.

Jesus, Lord, to whom we cry,  
The true repentance give,  
Give us at Thy feet to lie,  
And tremble and believe;  
On the Rock of Ages place  
Our souls, till all the wrath is o'er;  
Ground and stablish us in grace,  
And bid us sin no more.  
(Hymn II, vs. 2 & 4)

The following hymn regrets the blindness of people in general to what was happening:

The crowd, the poor unthinking crowd,/ Refuse Thy hand to see;  
the rich and great dance to hell; while the praying remnant  
pleads to be spared: Our land if yet again Thou shake . . . / A  
merciful distinction make,/ And strongly save Thine own.

Hymn IV shows confidence in that outcome:

Should the earth this moment cleave,  
And swallow up the just,  
Jesus would their souls receive,  
And guard their sleeping dust:  
Though their dust the whirlwind sweep  
To earth's profoundest centre driven,  
Soon, emerging from the deep,  
They rise, they mount to heaven!  
(Hymn IV, v. 5)

Charles Wesley next turns to the question of why, and lambasts “smooth prophets” who explain it all away by offering natural causes and refuse to see that the elements obey God: “God is in the earthquake now” (Hymn V, v. 3). The answer to the question of why is that here we see God’s chastisement. So we come to the additional hymn, based on chapters 16 and 17 of the book of Revelation and responding specifically to the Lisbon earthquake. It begins with woe to all who do not dread God’s wrath, and a call to expect these things and prepare for them: “The cities of the nations fall,/ And Babel’s hour is come” (v. 3). The following describes the Second Coming:

Jesus descends in dread array  
     To judge the scarlet whore:  
 And every isle is fled away,  
     And Britain is no more!  
 She sinks beneath her ambient flood,  
     And never more shall rise;  
 The earth is gone, on which we stood,  
     The old creation dies!  
 Who then shall live, and face the throne,  
     And face the Judge severe?  
 When heaven and earth are fled and gone,  
     O where shall I appear? (verses 4-5)

The message is that we should prepare now, “For lo! The everlasting Rock/ Is cleft to take us in.” So let lightening glare, mountains melt, celestial bodies roll and shrivel—nothing matters since this is the preparation for the new Jerusalem to descend and the new creation to arise. The final lines are, “when Thou dost in glory come,/ My Lord, remember me!”

There follows the second part of the original 1750 collection. The first expresses surprise that the event is so quickly forgotten, and most have gone to sleep again! But the congregation offers praise and confesses the nation’s sin:

Accepting our deliverance, Lord,  
     Our long, or short, reprieve,  
 Thy wondrous goodness we record,  
     And to Thy glory live.

We never will the grace forget,  
     But thankfully improve,  
 And still in songs of praise repeat  
     Thy providential love.

(Hymn I, verses 9-10)

The rest of the collection continues to see in the event a wake-up call. Hymn VI suggests that the people turn at last to God, humbly bearing the correction of past sins. Earthquakes show the latter times beginning and “quicken our hope” and trust in Providence (Hymn XII). By faith, believers are superior to these earthly storms, and rise up like Elijah in the

whirlwind. So they go on singing of God's love and saving power (Hymn VIII), while pleading for the Lord's Coming to take his Kingdom (Hymn XIII). For Charles Wesley, then, Scripture had provided answers to the questions long before the Lisbon earthquake, which only confirmed what he already thought about natural disasters. He quite literally took them to be acts of God, and saw them in the perspective of God's educative Providence, preparing the righteous for the coming of the Kingdom.

What about John Wesley? I quote from the second paragraph of his "Serious Thoughts Occasioned by the Earthquake at Lisbon":

And what shall we say of the late accounts from Portugal? That some thousand houses, and many thousand persons, are no more! That a fair city is now in ruinous heaps! Is there indeed a God that judges the world? And is he now making inquisition for blood? If so, it is not surprising he should begin there, where so much blood has been poured on the ground like water! Where so many brave men have been murdered, in the most base and cowardly as well as barbarous manner, almost every day, as well as every night.

Clearly, John Wesley did not believe that those who died were innocent. Indeed, his opening paragraph sketched the way in which modern Christians are no better than ancient heathens, and suggested that God is not pleased with this, instancing various disasters, including the destruction of Catania in Sicily by an eruption of Mt. Etna, not to mention hundreds of thousands swept away in war in Europe within half a century. The Lisbon earthquake is not some unique event—it must be put in context, a context in which Wesley perceives God's displeasure at work, even in Britain. He cites "pestilential sickness broken in upon our cattle," presumably the outbreak to which Charles also referred, and mentions an earthquake felt "not in one or two places only, but almost from one end of the kingdom to the other"—presumably the 1750 earthquake which occasioned Charles' hymns. John mentions violent storms, which apparently coincided with a production of *Macbeth* at the theatre, which was deeply significant for Wesley!

John Wesley refers back to the affair of Whitson Cliffs, and provides a lengthy and graphic description of what happened "on March 25<sup>th</sup> last" in Yorkshire: terrible noises were heard, and then over the next few days huge pieces of rock were apparently torn off the cliff and thrown into the valley. On June 1, Wesley visited the site and made careful observations,

described at length. He then explored the cause. It couldn't be fire—there was no sign of it; nor water, for the same reason; so was it imprisoned air? Wesley explains why he is sure it could not have been. Having exhausted natural explanations, he proclaims that God alone could have been the cause. Then he instances other events that fall into the same category.

Basically, Wesley wants to affirm that it is not chance that governs the world. He wants people to acknowledge the hand of the Almighty in what had happened in Lisbon or Catania, and before it happens in London. He challenges all attempts to attribute these events to natural causes, at least if the implication is that they are not providential. As so often in his writings, he no doubt has the Deists in mind. If the Bible is true, he argues, it cannot be the case that natural causes are a sufficient explanation. Indeed, no one can demonstrate that God does not work in or through natural causes. And you cannot doubt that God does so work if you allow that Scripture is of God.

Wesley then offers another objection, namely that to attribute everything to natural causes is extremely uncomfortable. If it is all the result of blind chance, what hope is there for the poor people who suffer from these events? Rich people can get around the worst of the effects, but not entirely escape, and when there is no help for it, to whom can they pray if God has nothing to do with the events that cause the problem? Needless to say, my summary comes nowhere near the rhetoric of John Wesley himself! But I submit that such an argument would raise all kinds of critical questions these days! Wesley himself, however, is relentless. Even if a Lisbon-like earthquake does not hit London, there were other possibilities. Halley's comet was due to return in 1758, if Isaac Newton's calculations were correct. A comet is 2000 times hotter than a red-hot cannonball, and Halley predicted that the orbit of his comet would bring it on the same line as earth. Wesley quotes him, 'Who can tell what the consequences of such a contact might be?' He graphically answers Halley's question!

If our own wisdom and strength are not sufficient to defend us, be not be ashamed to seek farther help. Let us even dare to own that we believe there is a God; nay, and not a lazy, indolent, epicurean deity, who sits at ease upon the circle of the heavens, and neither knows nor cares what is done below; but one who, as he created heaven and earth, and all the armies of

them, as he sustains them all by the word of his power, so cannot neglect the work of his own hands. With pleasure we own there is such a God, whose eye pervades the whole sphere of created beings, who knoweth the number of the stars and calleth them all by their names; a God whose wisdom is as the great abyss, deep and wide as eternity; . . . whose mercy riseth above the heavens, and his faithfulness above the clouds; who is loving to every man, and his mercy over all his works. Let us secure him on our side; let us make this wise, this powerful, this gracious God our friend. Then need we not fear, though the earth be moved, and the hills be carried into the midst of the sea.

Wesley turns to the question of how to secure the favor of this great God, and answers by worshipping him in spirit and in truth. God is love, he insists, and so we must love God. We must love humankind, and then God is our God, our Father and our Friend.

In its essential arguments, John's expansive rhetoric parallels the versification of Charles. So, clearly, the Lisbon earthquake did not create the same kind of philosophical crisis for the Wesley brothers that it did, sooner or later, for European thought overall. Two features of their reaction are noteworthy: (1) The Lisbon earthquake was just another example of the sort of event we know about already, and have already learned from; (2) The clues to understanding are to be found in Scripture. We might comment that there was also a long tradition going back into the Church Fathers which is reflected in their response and their reading of Scripture. Because they were so steeped in this, there was no crisis of belief. Their pre-modern traditions satisfied the Wesleys.

But does this help us at all? Can we resurrect such responses to disaster after the modernist challenges of the atheist critique? Don't we find God's direct involvement in natural disasters a denial of divine love? I was asked to speak personally, and this is the place to turn to my testimony (a good Wesleyan tradition).

### **Passing through Modernity and Discovering Pre-modern Wisdom**

I faced modern struggles over theodicy as a student of theology in the 1960s. I shall never forget the legendary eccentric professor, Donald Mackinnon, agonizing at the blackboard, expounding with some anguish the case for an ultimate dualism, exploring the significance of tragic drama. Later I found helpful John Hick's more optimistic approach in *Evil*

*and the God of Love.*<sup>2</sup> This was not so profoundly disturbing as the Quest for the Historical Jesus! I could accept the ancient distinction between natural and moral evil, recognise the usefulness of pain and the significance of accident, and fall back on the free-will defence to explain sin.

But then there was Arthur. My first-born son was deprived of oxygen and nourishment in the womb because the placenta was insufficient; so, although a full-term baby, he was premature in weight, and it soon became apparent that he had an abnormally small head and an underdeveloped brain. At fifteen months he developed epilepsy, and now aged forty he has no mobility, no self-help skills, and no language. My husband and I are still caring for a small adult with the capabilities of a child of 12-14 months. I did not react by asking, why me? Already a theologian, I was thrown back to the more fundamental issue, why at all? How could I go on believing in a good Creator God with a moral purpose for humankind when, in the very act of creating a new human person, something went so wrong that moral development seemed out of the question. My particular circumstances generated the universal anxieties of modernity.

The years from 1968 to 1980 may be termed my wilderness period: yes, I was teaching theology and attending church, coping with a growing family and building a career, but I was bleak inside—the anguish and loss was very profound. Arthur's distress was a constant strain on family life, but it was not just that. My faith in what had made sense of life was completely blown apart, and prayer became an experience of facing a blank wall. I was indeed passing through modernity, intellectually and emotionally. Yet I could not simply let go. It is not true to say that we did not have fun—my husband was the family mainstay, and we determined to live normal lives and take our other two sons camping, enjoying the outdoor life we loved. There were a number of significant moments which by hindsight anticipated my restoration; and even when I thought I was restored I found it easy to slip back into anguish, although each time there was further movement forward, until I could begin to say that *suffering is not a problem, but a privileged place in which one is led deeper into the fundamental truths of Christianity.*

It is impossible to spell out the riches I have received in a brief presentation. Some have been published in *Face to Face*,<sup>3</sup> but that book was

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<sup>2</sup>London: Macmillan, 1966.

<sup>3</sup>London: Epworth, 1985; expanded edition, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990.



written from the perspective of working through modernity's problems with theodicy; sometime I must concentrate on writing my swan song, the integration of all I have learned through the experience of Arthur and of being immersed in the pre-modern world of classical antiquity and the Church Fathers, particularly their exegesis of Scripture. One important element is all that I have received from the L'Arche communities,<sup>4</sup> founded in the 1960s by Jean Vanier. These are places (now 130 communities all over the world) where people commit themselves to living in community with those who have learning disabilities. I list ten themes in outline that have been profound learnings.

1. The importance of being limited: our creatureliness ("all flesh is grass"), mortality and our vulnerability—brain damage as simply an accident, like losing a leg. This insight demands a prophetic critique of the success-values of our culture, and recognition that the greatest values of a truly human life are the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5.22-23).

2. Thanksgiving (there must be someone to say "thank you" to); receptivity and dependence—human beings are not self-sufficient and autonomous. One of those significant moments was when I "heard" a voice say, "It makes no difference to me whether you believe in me or not!" It was a huge relief to realize that God's existence did not depend on me! Later, I discovered that Thomas Merton had been converted by discovering the concept of God's "aseity"—God simply is *a se*, "of the divine self," and does not require anything from us mere creatures. The divine transcendent otherness means we cannot presume on God; but we are made to offer God thanks and praise.

3. Atonement as the only theodicy we are offered. In John's Gospel the cross is the hour of glory, and the Bible shows God constantly at work bringing good out of evil, order out of chaos, etc. (e.g., Genesis 45:5 where Joseph affirms that God used his brothers' sinful act in order to save lives). There is something in the Medieval phrase *felix culpa*—happy the fault that led to redemption! This is far more important than seeking explanations and justifications of all that seems wrong with life.

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<sup>4</sup>Some of the following themes have been worked out in unpublished papers specifically written for the L'Arche community.

4. Christ as the only true Image of God (Adam marred the image); and so those who live with suffering and disfigurement should be seen as essential to the wholeness of the Body of Christ. It is not as individuals that we are made in God's image, then, but as a corporate community. We depend on one another in mutuality; patronizing "do-gooding" is not true charity, which is found in communion with one another.

5. Foot-washing and physicality: God in the most ordinary. We who daily deal with the basic needs of feeding and defecating, washing and dressing, discover the sanctity of bodies. The L'Arche communities have developed foot-washing as a para-liturgy to express this sacramentally (partly because, being ecumenical yet rooted in the Roman Catholic Church, some communities cannot share the eucharist).

6. Mary as a "type." For me, she has become important as a mother who suffered through her son, and as a disciple who responded to God's call.

7. Welcoming and respecting the "other." The Bible shows how the Israelites were to honor and respect the "resident alien"; they had the "soul" of an alien, because they knew what it was like to be an exile in a foreign land like Egypt. This biblical model is played out in the L'Arche communities, which, having welcomed those who are different because of their learning disabilities, have discovered that they have to cross other boundaries—from Roman Catholic roots to ecumenical and even to multi-faith communities.

8. The book of Job; judgment as the flipside of love's coin; suffering as discipline.

9. Fall and Redemption as ringing true to the overarching history of humanity and the story of one's own journey through life; sin as more than conscious morality, rather a kind of pollution that spreads if not dealt with; the complexity of sin's relationship with suffering—we do reap the whirlwind of our own lifestyles; the importance of discerning "signs" and symbols of renewal and hope, even in natural cycles like winter and spring, but also in human stories.

10. The spirituality of letting go, by contrast with our desire to control, a kind of *apatheia* through a displacement of self from the center of concern, which means letting go even of guilt, which can itself become a temptation to focus on oneself.

I testify to having passed through modernity and emerged, not by finding neat and simple answers, but by rediscovering pre-modern wisdom. Two things here are parallel to what we found in the Wesleys: (1) A wider historical perspective which indicates that that's the way life is; (2) A return to Scripture and tradition as providing the clues to insight into events. Some of my rediscoveries are genuinely a re-embracing of my Wesleyan heritage, but having passed through modernity, I cannot simply repeat the kind of things we have seen the Wesleys saying.

John Wesley never faced modernity's challenge, and from our perspective could be accused of looking for the God of the gaps, failing to identify the moral case against God, and reading the Bible with pre-critical naivety. We now know that earthquakes are caused by the shifting of the continental plates, that volcanoes are the means whereby life was generated on this planet (perhaps uniquely), that ice and water can split rocks and that mountains are constantly eroding, that hurricanes, storms, and floods are being exacerbated by global warming for which we are collectively responsible, that persons with Down's Syndrome have an extra chromosome in every cell of their body, and that damaged brain cells do not recuperate in the same way as the cells in most of our bodies. So, Arthur's healing would be unnatural, and even if his brain were miraculously healed, he has missed out on nearly forty years of learning experiences, so he could never be "normal." The creation is a far more complex thing than pre-moderns could ever have imagined; we can cite causes for many effects.

I do not, therefore, accept Wesley's analyses of the events he discusses. Yet I now find it impossible not to entertain Wesley's notion that God can work through natural causes, indeed that God is at work constantly, creating good out of what seems to us to be negative, destructive, even sinful; and that often, although not inevitably, the greatest goods emerge from suffering. This reminds us: that we are not in control of our lives; that we are mutually dependent and dependent on God; that we are creatures; that our vulnerability and mortality is essential to our being—suffering is simply unavoidable given our creatureliness, and it is the place where we are formed for the holy life. I even suggest that crises are a kind of judgement (*krisis* in Greek). How we respond to adversity exposes us for what we really are, and offers opportunities for new stages on our road towards Scriptural holiness. The Wesleys were not so wide of the mark as might be suggested in the light of post-modernism's first impressions.

## John Wesley on the Holy Life

The 44 standard sermons have always been my main access to John Wesley's thought. They are full of sketches of Scriptural holiness or Christian perfection. Dipping into a few in the order in which they published may provide us with a quick reminder:

*Sermon I: Salvation by Faith.* Salvation from guilt, fear and the power of sin produces holiness and good works, rather than undermining them.

*Sermon IV: Scriptural Christianity.* The collages of texts, mostly Pauline, demonstrate that faith brings the Spirit of adoption whereby we cry, "Abba, Father," the love of God being shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit; and this love of God involves love of others, including one's enemies. It is clear that this is what Wesley means by holiness, and the holy life is one where actions reflect that love.

*Sermon X: The Witness of the Spirit.* "God hath given us to be holy of heart, and holy in outward conversation"; and later, "We must be holy of heart and holy in life, before we can be conscious that we are so; before we can have the testimony of our spirit, that we are inwardly and outwardly holy. But we must love God before we can be holy at all; this being the root of all holiness." Wesley is clear that none of this can happen until we know God loves us—so the prevenient grace given through the Spirit undergirds all holiness.

*Sermon XIII: The Circumcision of the Heart.* Inner change is contrasted with outer signs: the distinguishing mark of a true follower of Christ is "a right state of soul, a mind and spirit renewed after the image of Him that created it." Holiness means being cleansed from sin and renewed in the spirit of our mind so as to be perfect as our Father in heaven in perfect. This implies humility, faith, hope and charity. The Spirit of holiness will dwell in the temple of the body of one who has been purged of lusts, envy, malice and wrath, from every passion and temper that is after the flesh; and that involves the vigilance and discipline of a soldier. But it is love of God and neighbor which constitutes holiness, and produces good works.

This sermon, however, reveals that even though this is God's gift through the Spirit, one cannot expect just to relax and let it happen—it takes effort and struggle, indeed, constant self-denial, taking up the cross daily, striving and *agonizing*. So we begin to see the place of suffering in

Wesley's thought. It is not something that needs to be explained, but rather properly belongs to this world of inner struggle for holiness. Faith and hope provide the anchor which keeps the Christian "steady in the midst of the waves of this troublesome world, and preserved from striking upon either of those fatal rocks—presumption or despair." Wesley does not expect the holy life to be easy.

In the following sermon (*XIV: The Marks of the New Birth*) Wesley anticipates sermons that appear later when he observes that those who mourn are blessed, for they shall be comforted, and quotes 1 Peter on the joy and hope of the Christian despite "heaviness through manifold temptations" and the "trial of your faith." "When sufferings most abound," he declares, "then the consolations of His Spirit do much more abound" (cf. the same affirmation in *XXIV: Sermon on the Mount IX.27*). Nor does "heaviness" destroy holiness (*XLI: Heaviness through Manifold Temptations*), though it is sorrow and grief caused by temptations: these include bodily disorders, acute diseases, violent pain of all kinds. Wesley implicitly admits that not many are Stoics and explicitly that the soul is affected by the body; then calamity is not easily ridden, and Wesley outlines the harsh lives of many who live in poverty and hard labour; and bereavement is distressing—indeed, we ought to be affected with sorrow; but the crucial thing is that these temptations do not become occasions for "unbelieving or blasphemous or repining thoughts." God permits these things as trials of faith; like gold, faith is refined through such experiences, which purify and confirm faith, hope and love, and bring advancement in holiness.

In a previous sermon (*XI: The Witness of Our Own Spirit*) Wesley had affirmed that Christian joy is not a natural joy—the Christian "rejoiceth always," not because of bodily health or ease, for "it is equally strong in sickness and pain; yea, perhaps far stronger than before"; indeed many have experienced incomparable joy filling their soul, "when the body was wellnigh worn out with pain, or consumed away with pining sickness." Still less does this joy come from outward prosperity, popularity or wealth; for the children of God have "rejoiced in Him" most of all "when their faith has been tried with fire, with all manner of outward afflictions," and a collage of biblical allusions simply reinforces this. The meek are not those sheltered from the shocks of life by insensibility; love endures all things and is not destroyed by suffering; the pure in heart are persecuted (*XVII/XVIII: Sermon on the Mount II/III*). Suffering is not the really serious thing. Rather, it is sin. Suffering may be evil in the eyes of

humankind, but “in the language of God, all is blessing: it is precious balm prepared by the wisdom of God, and variously dispensed among His children, according to the various sicknesses of their souls.”

“Take, therefore, just as much as He gives thee today: today, do and suffer His will! To-day, give up thyself, thy body, soul and spirit to God, through Christ Jesus: desiring nothing, but that God may be glorified in all thou art, all thou doest, all thou sufferest; . . . pursuing nothing, but to love Him, serve Him, and to enjoy Him at this hour, and to all eternity!”  
(*XXIV: Sermon on the Mount IX*)

In a previous paper,<sup>5</sup> I argued that Wesley owed much, including his doctrine of Christian perfection, to “Macarius”<sup>6</sup>—extracts of the Macarian homilies appeared in the very first volume of the Christian Library. This use shows how perfection is earthed in the reality of struggle. From that study we may add a little to what we have seen in the 44 sermons, noting for example (1) Wesley’s essay, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, where perfection is defined as perfect love and as being never secure in this life—it is certainly not something to boast of, and always there remains the possibility of further struggle, temptation and future fall; (2) his sermon on *Christian Perfection* (no. XXXV), where he affirms that it is both limited by our creatureliness and never wholly free of temptation; and (3) his sermon on the *Fullness of Faith*,<sup>7</sup> where he states that the process of sanctification involves two principles at war within us: flesh vs. spirit; nature vs. grace—this struggle is not incompatible with Christian perfection—we have the first-fruits, but the harvest is not yet; indeed, Christians are open to attack precisely where their strength lies, by concentrating on their guilt and sinfulness rather than the hope of the Gospel, letting faith in God’s salvation wane. I concluded that a “spirituality of peace, love and joy needs the mettle of contest and struggle if not to become merely sentimental.”

Here is something of the wisdom of the Bible and tradition which came naturally to Wesley and which, in the post-modern situation, I have won with so much struggle! I am chastened that I have so easily fallen into all the traps that Wesley identifies!

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<sup>5</sup>Published in *Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality*, ed. S. T. Kimbrough.

<sup>6</sup>Wesley assumed that Macarius was the famous ascetic of the Egyptian desert; but modern critical scholarship associates these homilies with the Syrian monastic tradition. They date from the 5<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>7</sup>This is not among the 44; text in Outler, 274.

### Conclusion: Suffering and the Holy Life

“The power of the saint differs from the power of the hero”;<sup>8</sup> and “Which do we prefer, comfort or courage?”<sup>9</sup> In conclusion, I present these quotations for reflection, as we face two questions: What do we mean by suffering? What do we mean by the holy life?

The holy life has been seen traditionally in terms of separation from the world, as involving asceticism and purification. But Wesley democratised it, and earthed it in the everyday lives of ordinary people by defining it in terms of the two great commandments: love God and love your neighbor. Scriptural holiness/entire sanctification issues from the inner struggle to re-orient our lives towards objects other than our own self-concern. Purification from the inner demons of self-pity and self-interest will only be successful if the Holy Spirit enters the heart and produces the fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

A modern definition of suffering would be anything that blocks fullness of life, self-fulfilment, enjoyment. Could we redefine it now as something tough that generates the fruit of the Spirit, is redemptive for ourselves or for others, enables transformation and refinement through trial and testing, and calls for the love and compassion which lies at the heart of the holy life?

But that is rather individualistic and there remains, perhaps, the challenge of disaster. Atheistic modernity will not like this response, but set in the perspective of history, even disasters look different, and set in the perspective of eternity, transient. The human race as a whole might learn things from disasters, from the crises that show us up collectively for what we are. It is amazing how often inspiring stories of transformation come from the most terrible experiences. And the Bible enables us to discern that, despite appearances, God is constantly at work creatively bringing order out of chaos, good out of evil, beauty out of brokenness, joy from sorrow, love from pain, riches from loss, heaven from hell—if only we let it happen!

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<sup>8</sup>Samuel Wells, *God's Companions: Reimagining Christian Ethics*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2006, 207.

<sup>9</sup>John Dominic Crossan, *The Dark Interval: towards a Theology of Story*, Sonoma, California: Polebridge Press, 1988, 105.

# **“CRUCIFIED TO THE WORLD”: SUFFERING, ITINERANCY, AND TRANSITIONS IN AMERICAN METHODIST ECCLESIOLOGY**

by

**Douglas M. Koskela**

In their explanatory notes to the 1798 Methodist *Discipline*, Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke articulated the orienting goal of the Methodist ministry: “Our one aim, in all our economy and ministerial labours, is to raise a holy people, crucified to the world and alive to God.”<sup>1</sup> Implicit in this compact statement is an ecclesiological presumption: the church is a holy people set apart from the world. The language of crucifixion is particularly suggestive, indicating that holiness might well entail ridicule, renunciation, and suffering. Without a doubt, Asbury in particular understood the rigors of the itinerant ministry as a sign of faithfulness to this calling.

The hardships faced by early Methodist itinerants were not only reflective of the rugged North American terrain, but also of the inevitable suffering involved in the call to lead a holy and marginalized people. Yet over the course of the first half of the nineteenth century, the itinerancy underwent a number of transitions. In what follows, I offer a theological interpretation of these well-documented transitions. In particular, I argue that the movement toward localization and increased professionalism in the Methodist ministry was one signal of a change in the ecclesiological

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<sup>1</sup>*The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America with Explanatory Notes by Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury* (Philadelphia: Henry Tuckness, 1798), 151.



self-understanding of American Methodists. Borrowing from Martin Luther, this change might best be characterized as a shift from an *ecclesiology crucis* (“ecclesiology of the cross”) to an *ecclesiology gloriae* (“ecclesiology of glory”). Where the struggles of the early itinerants were reflective of a church whose understanding of holiness was cruciform, a more settled ministry befitted a church that lived and worshiped to a great extent in the mainstream of American society.

### Early Methodist Itinerant Ministry in America

The itinerant ministry was certainly not the only important embodiment of early American Methodist ecclesiology. Indeed, local preachers, lay exhorters, class leaders, and other lay members served crucial roles in living out what it meant to be the church. Yet, an exploration of the traveling ministry provides unique insight into the church’s self-understanding, both because ministers were expected to serve as exemplars of the Christian vocation and because they were responsible for cultivating that collective vocation among the membership.

Throughout that 1798 *Discipline*, the bishops made clear that a central expression of the church’s calling was holiness. They understood the holiness of God’s people to be marked in part by renunciation of worldly pleasures and sharing in the sufferings of Christ. The notes to Chapter II/Section VIII, on the minister’s authority to exercise discipline toward “disorderly persons” in the society, are striking in this respect:

Our original design in forming our religious Society renders the existence of this authority in our ministers absolutely necessary. But what was this design? *To raise a holy people*. Our plan of economy shuts us up from the influence of any other motive in respect to our ministerial labours. It is impossible for us to *enrich* ourselves by Methodist-preaching. Again, we hear a constant testimony against *the pleasures* of the world, and therefore should be esteemed, even by our own people, as the greatest of hypocrites, if we indulged ourselves in them, and would soon be excluded the connection by the various means of trial to which *all of us* are subject. And *as to honour*, we are almost the only despised people in Christendom, as a religious body. The secondary rank of mankind and the poor are the only persons (with a few exceptions) who receive the Gospel. The rich and great, in general, even those who have not embraced the favourite doctrines of the times, will not

submit to the way of the cross, but, on the contrary, look down on the Preachers of it as the greatest enthusiasts. And shall we thus sacrifice all that the world holds dear and at the same time lose the only aim of all our public labours, by false complaisance? No. *We will have a holy people, or none.* In every part of our economy, as well as doctrine, we aim at crucifixion to the world and love to God. *This must be the price of our labours.* We require not riches, honours or pleasure, *but a holy people.*<sup>2</sup>

Two features of this passage emerge with particular force. First, the holiness of the church is characterized by the way of the cross and cannot easily be cultivated in those who hold tightly to the promise of earthly success. Second, this way of the cross is expected not only of the preachers, who have sacrificed “all that the world holds dear,” but also of the entire membership. The struggles and labors of the ministers were to be rewarded with the cultivation of a holy people walking together on the way of the cross. Anything that threatened such holiness could render the sacrifice of the ministers in vain.

What was the nature of the ministers’ sacrifice? Donald G. Matthews has suggested that the itinerant life was seen by many Methodists with a certain romantic heroism. He writes, “If one had the stamina for such a life, a sense of the dramatic, a vivid experience of grace and the gift for making people feel God’s presence and forgiveness, he could become the personification of the universal mission of Christianity and therefore a romantic figure in the eyes of the faithful.”<sup>3</sup> Yet that qualifier—“if one had the stamina”—was substantial. In the words of one interpreter, “the Methodist itinerant ministry was scarcely a bed of roses for those who devoted their lives to it.”<sup>4</sup>

The sheer rigor of the travel required of the typical circuit rider demanded full commitment to the cause. A four-week circuit in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century might entail the traversal of some

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<sup>2</sup>Coke and Asbury, *Doctrines and Discipline*, 158-59.

<sup>3</sup>Donald G. Matthews, “Evangelical America—The Methodist Ideology,” in Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt, eds., *Perspectives on American Methodism: Interpretive Essays* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood, 1993), 21.

<sup>4</sup>David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 110.

300 to 500 miles, with numerous preaching appointments along the way.<sup>5</sup> The travel demands placed upon presiding elders were even greater. For precisely the same pay as the rest of the circuit riders, presiding elders had to travel through their entire districts, supervising their preachers and overseeing quarterly and camp meetings.<sup>6</sup> Lest one imagine that the bishops escaped the rigors of the itinerancy, the 1798 *Discipline* again used the image of crucifixion to describe the ruggedness of episcopal travels:

And with this salary [sixty four dollars a year] they are to travel about six thousand miles a year, “in much patience,” and sometimes “in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in labours, in watchings, in fastings,” through “honour and dishonour, evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold,” they “live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things;” and, we trust, they can each of them through grace say, in their small measure, with the great apostle, that “they are determined not to know any thing, save Jesus Christ and him crucified; yea, doubtless, and count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus their Lord: for whom they have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that they may win Christ.”<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, Asbury traveled over 250,000 miles in his career and approached his ministry with single-minded focus. His own astonishing record of travel and preaching served as a model for the itinerant preachers under his oversight.<sup>8</sup>

Along with the grueling pace of travel, Methodist itinerants faced the financial uncertainties that attended their vocation. As noted above,

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<sup>5</sup>See the description of typical circuits in John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven By Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 35, 58-60.

<sup>6</sup>Wigger, *Taking Heaven By Storm*, 36.

<sup>7</sup>Coke and Asbury, *Doctrines and Discipline*, 40-41.

<sup>8</sup>Wigger, *Taking Heaven By Storm*, 43-44. Wigger cites Nicholas Sneath, who defended Asbury during the James O’Kelly controversy, as one who recognized Asbury as a model for Methodist preachers. Sneath writes: “In him we see an example of daily labour, suffering, and self denial, worthy of the imitation of the young preacher.” See also E. Dale Dunlap, “The United Methodist System of Itinerant Ministry,” in *Perspectives on American Methodism*, 419-20.

Asbury regarded it as “impossible for us to enrich ourselves by Methodist-preaching.” Even if it were possible, Asbury believed that worldly wealth would only distract ministers from their fundamental calling. “In his vision of the brotherhood of preachers,” writes David Hempton, “fraternity and purity were dependent upon, and guaranteed by, equality and poverty.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, an equal salary was given to all ministers in the connection: \$64 beginning in 1796, \$80 beginning in 1800, and \$100 beginning in 1816. Not only was this significantly lower than the pay received by ministers in other ecclesial traditions, but it was also a best-case scenario—it was common for Methodist itinerants not to receive their full salary.<sup>10</sup>

Many circuit riders also proclaimed—or were they complaining about?—the dependence on God fostered by their lifestyle. As James Quinn wrote, “this plan [Methodist itinerancy] calls for men to cut loose from the world, and cast it behind. Let us have the men who are constrained by the love of Christ, moved by the Holy Ghost—men who can walk hand in hand with poverty, for twice twenty years; then leave their widows to trust in the Lord, and their fatherless children to be provided for and preserved alive by him.”<sup>11</sup> Quinn’s reference to wives and children also raises the issue of familial ties. Most early American itinerants were celibate, and Asbury regarded this as fitting given the realities of life on the circuit. It was not long, however, before significant numbers of ministers married and (in most cases) settled. Those few preachers who married and remained itinerant faced increased financial pressures to support their families and the growing temptation to localize.<sup>12</sup>

Beyond the rugged travel and financial pressures, early American Methodist itinerants also faced ridicule from a number of quarters. The suspicions of Loyalism among Methodists during the Revolutionary War are well documented.<sup>13</sup> Even after the Christmas Conference of 1784 formally cut Anglican ecclesial ties, sporadic persecution of varying degrees was leveled against Methodist ministers.<sup>14</sup> A number of preachers even

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<sup>9</sup>Hempton, *Methodism*, 121.

<sup>10</sup>See Hempton, *Methodism*, 121, and Wigger, *Taking Heaven By Storm*, 61.

<sup>11</sup>Cited in Wigger, *Taking Heaven By Storm*, 38.

<sup>12</sup>Hempton, *Methodism*, 122.

<sup>13</sup>See the helpful summaries in Wigger, *Taking Heaven By Storm*, 57-58, and Hempton, *Methodism*, 92-94.

<sup>14</sup>Hempton, *Methodism*, 98.

faced opprobrium from within their own families. Parents of traveling ministers commonly lamented the vocational choice of their sons, largely because Methodists lacked the social respectability of many other traditions.<sup>15</sup> Not only did Methodist leadership recognize this, but Asbury and Coke regarded the lack of status as part of the crucifixion to the world that was necessary to cultivate holiness. They wrote, “And *as to honour*; we are almost the only despised people in Christendom, as a religious body.”<sup>16</sup>

The idea that itinerant ministry among a marginal people should serve as the paradigmatic example of the way of the cross seems to have found its way into the language of the preachers as well. After turning down an appointment to a circuit, Freeborn Garrettson later lamented that he “suffered much in my mind; wishing many times afterward that I had taken up the cross.”<sup>17</sup> Most itinerants moved forward despite the sacrifices involved—and perhaps even impelled by their struggles. One recent interpreter has suggested that “opposition was as much enabler as it was destroyer of the Methodist cause.”<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, the struggles of the itinerancy were often understood as a crucial part of the spiritual journey, lending both theological meaning and encouragement to ministers as they pressed on.<sup>19</sup> They were sustained in the belief that they were not only “crucified to the world,” but also were “alive to God.”

By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, few would have described Methodists as a people crucified to the world. Numeric growth, economic prosperity, and increasing roles in social and political life all signaled that Methodists had—generally speaking—moved toward the mainstream in American society. The nature and practice of the “traveling” ministry was certainly not isolated from these transitions. Indeed, Asbury’s vision of the itinerant ministry as “a celibate, self-sacrificing, and ascetic brotherhood of preachers” gave way in the second generation of American Methodism to a notably different ethos.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Wigger, *Taking Heaven By Storm*, 58.

<sup>16</sup>Coke and Asbury, *Doctrines and Discipline*, 158, also cited above.

<sup>17</sup>Cited in Wigger, *Taking Heaven By Storm*, 45.

<sup>18</sup>Hempton, *Methodism*, 99.

<sup>19</sup>Russell E. Richey, with Dennis M. Campbell and William B. Lawrence, *Marks of Methodism: Theology in Ecclesial Practice* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2005), 51.

<sup>20</sup>Hempton, *Methodism*, 111.

One major change was that “traveling” preachers simply did not travel as much as their predecessors. John Wigger notes that “in most regions of the country circuits became more compact, closer to one another, and less difficult to travel, while salaries increased and became more dependable—in short . . . the itinerancy did not demand the same sacrifices that it once had.”<sup>21</sup> Largely for these reasons, it became far more common for ministers to marry and remain within the itinerancy. Furthermore, in an 1841 edition of the *Christian Advocate*, Thomas Bond called attention to the financial and spiritual consequences of the increasingly common practice of dividing circuits into station appointments.<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps the most important transition involved the length of time that itinerants remained in a particular charge. The duration of appointments gradually lengthened, both in terms of the formal limit outlined in the *Discipline* and in common practice.<sup>23</sup> This was a very significant shift, as much of the rationale for the itinerant system rested in the conviction that too much time in a particular charge could attenuate a minister’s effectiveness. In his “Valedictory Address to William McKendree,” Asbury had anticipated the increasing temptation for ministers to locate. Pointing to the model of itinerant bishops in the apostolic era, Asbury implored bishops, presiding elders, and preachers to remain on the move. He also pointed to the strict time limits for presiding elders and preachers in the *Discipline*, implying the dangers of a practical localization by means of long appointments.<sup>24</sup> Despite Asbury’s concerns, an unmistakable pattern of geographical “settling” characterized the itinerant ministry in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Alongside the localizing trend, a simultaneous pattern of professionalization emerged in the Methodist ministry. The practice of reading care-

<sup>21</sup>Wigger, *Taking Heaven By Storm*, 69.

<sup>22</sup>Thomas Bond, “Itinerant Arrangements—Stations and Circuits,” in Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt, eds., *The Methodist Experience in America: A Sourcebook* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2000), 2:248-50).

<sup>23</sup>See the helpful summary of this gradual shift in Dunlap, “The United Methodist System of Itinerant Ministry,” 424-427. Dunlap offers a concise summary statement: “The simplest description of what has happened to the system of itinerancy in American Methodism is that it has undergone a slow but steady change from radical itinerancy to localism.”

<sup>24</sup>Francis Asbury, *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury: In Three Volumes*, edited by Elmer T. Clark (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1958), 3:492.

fully-crafted sermons, for example, became increasingly common—much to the chagrin of older itinerants who valued the revivalist zeal and homiletical fire of earlier days. The topics of sermons shifted as well, with a noticeable trend away from the doctrine of sanctification.<sup>25</sup> Plainness of dress among ministers became the exception rather than the rule.<sup>26</sup> Even the liturgical life of Methodist congregations reflected an increasing tendency toward refinement and connection to the surrounding culture.<sup>27</sup>

Complaints about the transitions in the itinerant ministry were quite common by the middle of the nineteenth century. In fact, those leveling such complaints earned the nickname “croakers.” The primary complaints of the croakers centered on the upward mobility and cultural accommodation of the Methodist people and—perhaps more pointedly—Methodist preachers.<sup>28</sup> They recognized that the qualities that were deemed important for Methodist ministers were changing. Physical endurance, an ability for plain speech, frugality, and a capacity for zealous preaching gave way to educational and intellectual attainment, careful preparation in preaching, reputable status, and an awareness of cultural trends as markers of effective ministers.<sup>29</sup>

It is noteworthy that by the last decade of the nineteenth century, John Miley could assume that his audience expected such qualities in a minister. In the section of his *Systematic Theology* on the “Divine Vocation of the Ministry,” he cautions: “Mental gifts and acquirements, refinements of culture, and the power of persuasive speech are of great value in the work of the ministry, but cannot in themselves warrant the assumption of its sacred duties.”<sup>30</sup> That Miley needed to remind his audience that such traits alone did not constitute a call to ministry is striking. Here was one prominent Methodist theologian who did not understand the ministry as a vocation resembling anything like crucifixion to the world. The cruciform vision expressed in the notes to the 1798 *Discipline* was a century—and indeed a world—away.

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<sup>25</sup>Wigger, *Taking Heaven By Storm*, 182-184.

<sup>26</sup>Wigger, *Taking Heaven By Storm*, 182.

<sup>27</sup>Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, *American Methodist Worship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 270-81.

<sup>28</sup>Wigger, *Taking Heaven By Storm*, 184.

<sup>29</sup>Hempton, *Methodism*, 126-27.

<sup>30</sup>John Miley, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1893, reprint edition Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989), 2:415.

## Marks of the Ecclesiological Transition

How, then, can we make theological sense of these developments? The transitions we have explored in the itinerant ministry clearly corresponded with transitions among the broader Methodist people. These shifts have long been recognized and analyzed helpfully by means of various historical and sociological methodologies.<sup>31</sup> But what do these developments suggest about the way that American Methodists thought about the nature of the church? I would suggest that one helpful characterization is a shift from an *ecclesiology of the cross* to an *ecclesiology of glory*. By ecclesiology of the cross, I have in mind an understanding of the church as living in tension with the world, accepting redemptive suffering with the hope of eternal reward. We might describe an ecclesiology of glory, by contrast, as a vision of the church which is fundamentally oriented toward the created order and which finds its purpose in the present life.<sup>32</sup> These categories help us make some headway in understanding the transitions in the itinerancy and in the broader Methodist movement over the first half of the nineteenth century. The expectation that ministers and—to a lesser extent—Methodist people were called to redemptive suffering on the way of the cross gradually diminished. In particular, we might mark three features of this ecclesiological development: (1) a shift from sacrifice to service; (2) a shift from holiness to civility; and (3) a shift from ridicule to respectability.

**1. Sacrifice to Service.** A crucial dimension of ministry within the framework of an ecclesiology of the cross is sacrifice—indeed, the very kind of sacrificial life that Asbury envisioned for his itinerants. This is not to be understood as sacrifice for its own sake, but rather a distinctly Christological sacrifice that is oriented toward cultivating a people “alive to God.” Thus, the language of crucifixion sprinkled throughout the notes to the 1798 *Discipline* can be connected to the particular calling of itinerant ministers in this vision of the church. As an ecclesiology of glory came gradually to the fore, the notion of sacrifice faded in favor of the

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<sup>31</sup>See Hempton’s helpful summary of such analyses in chapter eight of *Methodism*.

<sup>32</sup>I readily admit that any parallel between this pairing and Luther’s *theologia crucis* and *theologia gloriae* is somewhat rough. Luther was primarily concerned to address how God is revealed—he pressed for the apprehension of God in and through the cross rather than in and through the created order. Yet, there is at least an echo of this in the ecclesiological terms as I have described them.



primacy of service.<sup>33</sup> Rather than envisioning the ministry as a walk on the way of the suffering, Methodists came to see it as a professional vocation of service to the church and society (the line between which was blurring). Like other professionals, a Methodist preacher needed the right combination of abilities and training. At a convention of Methodist men in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the following description was recorded:

The minister of today must be a community leader, broad minded, progressive, and aggressive. The age insists that he be a good preacher, an efficient pastor, a true leader of men. For these lofty requirements the minister must be well equipped. He must dress acceptably, for he is a leader; he must attend many assemblies, for service and the deepening of his spiritual intellectual impetus and resourcefulness. The high requirements on the part of the public make necessary heavy expenditures for adequate equipment.<sup>34</sup>

It would be difficult to find a better account of the role of a minister as understood by an ecclesiology of glory.

**2. Holiness to Civility.** A second mark of the ecclesiological transition is the shift from holiness to civility. As noted above, Asbury and Coke had understood the task of their itinerant preachers as cultivating a people set apart from the world. “We will have a holy people,” they insisted, “or none.” The language they used to parse what they meant by holiness suggested tension with and distinction from the workings of a fallen created order. Methodists were to be “crucified to the world and alive to God.” Yet, we have seen the ways in which Methodists gradually became more involved with that world, just as many were complaining that sanctification was no longer being preached in Methodist pulpits. In this light, the notion of civility aptly captures the aspirations of a people shaped by an ecclesiology of glory. While holiness is a category that suggests distinction from the world, civility is a category that suggests an ability to flourish in the world. For an upwardly mobile people increasingly moving toward the mainstream, the church can be understood as a

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<sup>33</sup>This is certainly not to suggest that “service” would be an inapt description of the work of the early circuit riders. I simply mean that the term service has a more refined and professional resonance than sacrifice—and thus these terms are fitting descriptors of the respective visions of ministry.

<sup>34</sup>Cited in Hempton, *Methodism*, 126.

community that enables them to function well in society. It is clear that an ecclesiology of glory includes a formative role, but that role is ultimately oriented toward cultivating qualities that are appreciated rather than derided by the surrounding culture.

**3. Ridicule to Respectability.** The relation between the church and society constitutes a third feature of the movement from an *ecclesiologia crucis* to an *ecclesiologia gloriae*: the shift from ridicule to respectability. The harassment faced by early circuit riders waned as the social status of both ministers and members increased. As Methodism gradually made its way from the margins toward the mainstream, its conception of the nature and role of the church underwent a corresponding change. John Wigger describes the change in the following way: “As Methodists grew progressively more comfortable in American society, they inevitably relaxed their discipline. The church simply could not be both respectable and countercultural.”<sup>35</sup> And respectable they became. What Asbury and Coke had regarded as “almost the only despised people in Christendom” came in many respects to be the quintessential American church. Rather than understanding their ecclesial calling as demanding crucifixion to the world, Methodists gradually understood their important place within society as central to their collective vocation.

It is important to recognize that the two ecclesiological categories I have described are abstract types. While I have argued that American Methodism in the nineteenth century moved away from the *ecclesiologia crucis* pole and toward the *ecclesiologia gloriae* pole, it would be a clear mistake to regard this movement as either complete or universal. Indeed, there are crucial qualifications to these ecclesiological transitions that must be registered.

First, it would be too strong to suggest that early American Methodism—even at the height of Asbury’s power—was an entirely world-denying movement. Along with “spreading Scriptural holiness over these lands,” the Methodists recognized their mission “to reform the continent.” Perhaps the best way to reconcile this with the cruciform language of Asbury and Coke is to understand such language as an account of *how* the continent might be reformed. In any case, it is clear that crucifixion to the world involved a missionary orientation toward the world rather than a withdrawal from it.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Wigger, *Taking Heaven By Storm*, 188.

<sup>36</sup>Hempton notes that American Methodists were also “relatively free from the millenarian fantasies of other populist religious strains,” in *Methodism*, 31.

A second important qualifier involves the recognition that not all American Methodists moved from the margins to the mainstream in the nineteenth century. As Douglas M. Strong argues in an important essay, we must also account for “the equally large number of miscellaneous Methodists who, for varied reasons, could not identify with the urbane values of the middle class.”<sup>37</sup> Indeed, there were many Methodists who either resisted or were excluded from many of the social transitions we have explored. The Holiness Movement, for example, was partially characterized by a concern to return to the heart of Methodism which some felt had been compromised by “New School Methodism.”<sup>38</sup> In some ways, the Holiness Movement embraced the ecclesiology of the cross that had marked mainstream Methodism a half-century prior.<sup>39</sup> These and other exceptions must be recognized in any account of Methodist ecclesiological transitions. Despite the discernable trend toward the “middle” of American society, many Methodists remained clearly on the “margins.”

Finally, recent interpreters have cautioned against regarding these developments as an indication of unqualified declension. Russell E. Richey, for example, suggests that we must “avoid the jeremiadic temptation” by recognizing that change is inevitable, both in North American society and in the church.<sup>40</sup> In a similar vein, Dale Dunlap affirms the flexibility of the itinerant system in responding to crises and adapting to the changing demands of the times.<sup>41</sup> In tracing these shifts, then, I would hesitate to take up the mantle of the croakers by championing an unqualified return to a pure ecclesiology of the cross. True, a valuable dimension of the Methodist heritage was captured by Asbury’s vision—namely, an overtly Christological understanding of the path to holiness. Even so, the

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<sup>37</sup>Douglas M. Strong, “Exploring both the Middle and the Margins: Locating Methodism Within American Religious History,” in Dennis M. Campbell, William B. Lawrence, and Russell E. Richey, eds., *Doctrines and Discipline* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1999), 235.

<sup>38</sup>“New School Methodism” was the title of the scathing critique of mid-nineteenth century Methodism written by B. T. Roberts. The essay played an indirect role in the emergence of the Free Methodist Church.

<sup>39</sup>See, for example, the description of the hardships faced by early Free Methodist itinerants in Leslie Marston, *From Age to Age to a Living Witness: A Historical Interpretation of Free Methodism’s First Century* (Winona Lake, IN: Light and Life Press, 1960), 431-32.

<sup>40</sup>Richey, *Marks of Methodism*, 57.

<sup>41</sup>Dunlap, “The United Methodist System of Itinerant Ministry,” 429-30.

concern of an ecclesiology of glory to take the created order seriously must also be part of the ongoing vision of the church's life and calling—particularly if buttressed with a robust Wesleyan pneumatology.

Perhaps a distinctly Methodist contribution to ecclesiology could involve a fruitful tension between these two frameworks. Such a contribution would insist that neither holiness nor cultural engagement can be neglected if the church is to realize its vocation. It would recognize that holiness requires discipline and renunciation on the part of a people walking the way of the cross. It would also implore the church to acknowledge and accept its charge “to serve the present age.” Equipped with such a vision, Wesleyan ecclesial bodies could draw the best from their heritage as they move forward in a contemporary setting.

# THE WESLEYAN THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY AS AN ANNUAL PILGRIMAGE

## The 2007 Presidential Address

by

**Carl Claudius Campbell**

In my congregation in Nassau, the Bahamas, during the time of notices, it is stated that we are always happy to extend our love, prayers, best wishes, and the grace of God to those celebrating birthdays and special events in their lives. I now invite you to note and reflect with me on some current anniversaries, nationally and globally. Their remembrance is important. Their interpretation is life giving. Among these are:

1. The 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Methodist Union in Great Britain.
2. The 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Methodist Church.
3. The 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Olivet Nazarene University.
4. The 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Primitive Methodism Church.
5. The 200<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Phoebe Palmer.<sup>1</sup>
6. The 200<sup>th</sup> death anniversary of John Newton, author of the popular hymn “Amazing Grace.”
7. The 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the act of parliament propelled by William Wilberforce that ended the British slave trade.
8. The 300<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Charles Wesley.
9. The 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the settlement of Jamestown, Virginia.

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<sup>1</sup>Susie Stanley, “Empowered Foremothers: Wesleyan/Holiness Women Speak To Today’s Christian Feminists,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 24 (1989), 104.

I am merely “a Methodist pilgrim.” Perhaps I should say that I am a Christian, a pilgrim in the Wesleyan/Methodist tradition of the Christian faith. I was told that, as president of Wesleyan Theological Society this year, my presidential address could be on any topic, develop any theme, even take the opportunity to “roast” the Society for what it is and what it ought to be. My years of attending this august body have taught me how to take advice, and I trust that I have learned my lessons well. Also, I remember the initiation Psalm of the theological college that I attended in Jamaica. Psalm 131:1 says, “Lord, my heart is not haughty nor my eyes lofty. Neither do I exercise myself with great matters, nor with things too profound for me” (NKJV).

I relish the memory of Henry Knight a few years ago beginning his presidential address with the words, “being President of the Wesleyan Theological Society has been the most exciting year of my life.” And I thought, “Wow!” Perhaps that is why I use the word “pilgrim” because I wanted to discover and know that joy which the office gave to him. Let me pause to thank the executive officers for the work that they consistently did over the past year—Drs. Sam Powell, Tom Oord, Diane Lelerc, Craig Keen, Stan Ingersol, Richard Thompson, and Barry Callen. In thanks to God, I recall the persons who founded and sustained the WTS over the past 42 years.

### **The Theme of Journeying**

Craig Keen is an astute theologian. Last year he gave his presidential address in an autobiographical form. Tonight, I will imitate him, but for different reasons. I would like to share thoughts on “The Wesleyan Theological Society as an Annual Pilgrimage.” I was privileged, as providence and grace would have it, to be born into a special family. Parents are the channel of life and living, and siblings are the fellowship of the womb. When I delivered this address to the WTS membership, present from the Bahamas were my eldest brother Lambert, youngest sister Rosamund, a niece Yasmin and a cousin Joy are with me to celebrate our family, our faith, and the influence of WTS in our midst.

The Bahamian scene from the dining room of the house in which I was born, spent my childhood, and where my 86-year-old mother still has her meals, is steps away from the water that form the inlet for Marsh Harbor, Abaco. Water was and remains a profound truth, symbol, and presence in our lives! Journeying was a constant scene before my young,

impressionable, and inquisitive eyes. I watched the boats come with supplies—they were a lifeline for the settlement. My father was one of the newly-installed customs officer. With the coming of airplanes, the cargo intake increased and broadened the horizon. Physical supplies meant food, academic supplies for schools and libraries, and developmental materials for infrastructure. Important also was the movement of people. Journeying was for the holistic development of life. The harbor was always an horizon.

Journeying appears in some circles to be synonymous with pilgrimage. The words pilgrim and pilgrimage are not archaic. Their prevalence in academia and religious settings validates their usage and interpretations. Historically, pilgrimages had a penitential dimension. Today, pilgrimages are not conceived as penitential as much as motion in a given direction. One definition affirms that a pilgrimage is spirituality in action. To paraphrase a Caribbean Roman Catholic priest from a recent interview, “a pilgrimage is not going to a shrine but going to meet Christ.”<sup>2</sup>

The ancient Hebrew Scriptures, in recording the history and rituals of the Hebrew people, celebrated the pilgrimages of the patriarchs and their own spiritual experiences as they chanted the psalms. The pilgrim was going to meet God. Their festivals were remembering, reclaiming, and personalizing the journeying of their fore-parents in faith. The voice of the prophets also heralds the pilgrim motif through exile, repentance, reform, renewal, and return. This was proclaimed both historically and eschatologically. The theologians of the New Testament also utter the pilgrimage narrative in Christology through the incarnation, kenosis, ascension and parousia.

John Wesley made a pilgrimage to the Moravians in the summer of 1738.<sup>3</sup> Our inquiring minds would find it interesting reading to note how Wesley might be interpreted as a pilgrim.<sup>4</sup> He thought of himself as a spirit from God who was returning to God. In my own personal understanding of faith, I have been greatly influenced in my journey by the thoughts of Phoebe Palmer. Pilgrimage is an aspect of the practice of

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<sup>2</sup>Interview with Fr. Richard Ho Lung, Jamaican Roman Catholic Priest, on STWN T.V., February, 2007.

<sup>3</sup>Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodist* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 82-83.

<sup>4</sup>On the concept of pilgrimage, I have found helpful the writings of Randy Maddox and Wolfhart Pannenberg.

healing and salvation. I am reminded of the missionary story where a couple was about to return home after years of service. In gratitude for their ministry, an indigenous church member came to bring a farewell gift. The couple was thankful for the gift, but noted how far their benefactor had traveled. The journey, they were told, was also a part of the gift.

Pilgrimage embodies the meaning of being a part of the community of faith. I am a part of the WTS community. To speak of WTS as my annual pilgrimage is a declaration of growth, spiritual stability, direction and development. It is spiritual maturity gained with gratitude; yet there is always a hunger to learn, a quest to know, to have that teachable spirit. It is being faithful to the ordination vows taken on being ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacrament in the Methodist Church of the Caribbean and Americas. I agreed to continually be a student. Thus, I made the vow to study the Bible, to study the teachings of the church, to be relevant with wisdom and practice as a contemporary practitioner of the Christian faith, stirring up the gifts and graces as a minister of the gospel.

As a pilgrim, formative factors are important to help one see the horizon, understand and assess the directions taken. My family tradition, as documented on my maternal side, has been steeped in Methodism since the 1830s when my great-great-grandfather, Thomas Archer (1788-1858), settled in Marsh Harbour, the Bahamas. Over the past 150 plus years many influences have contributed to the spiritual expressions of our household, including traditions from Canada, Jamaica, Guyana, England, and the United States of America. These influences have their streams through schooling, the itinerant ministry, visiting preachers and conferences—the Wesleyan Theological Society being the most consistent and innovative one.

These influences have given an insatiable appeal and maturing appreciation for the Wesleyan quadrilateral: Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. Our South American Wesleyan/Methodist family asks us to consider expanding the quadrilateral to include creation.<sup>5</sup> John Macquarie's formative factors in studying theology ask us to also acknowledge culture as formative in our theological framework. These truths have provided food for the pilgrimage. They have provided a balanced diet.

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<sup>5</sup>I refer to the paper "The Wisdom of God in Creation: Mission and the Wesleyan "Pentalateral"" by Wesley de Souza Luis presented at the 2000 conference of the World Methodist Historical Society.



## The Meeting and Embrace

How did I encounter the Wesleyan Theological Society? I came across the address of WTS through a friend's magazine. I inquired and received a welcoming reply. My first WTS meeting was in Kansas City, Missouri, at the Nazarene Theological Seminary in 1991. That first morning at the motel at breakfast some persons gave a wave and a big smile, and invited me to join their table. The impact and atmosphere was transforming—and that is why I am here tonight. I recall stating that I could not believe that I could sit erect so long as I sought to absorb everything. I went back home to share my impressions. It was Advent and I carried a song. I noted that potency of the meetings could fill a void in my life in terms of a structured, spiritual, practical, and academic reservoir of Wesleyan/Methodist studies in contemporary ministry.

The WTS pilgrimage has been valuable and continuous because local concepts, ideas, issues, and developmental goals soon escalate into global concepts, ideas, issues, and developmental goals. Therefore, I perceived that various experiences of the church, when seen through the many eyes of the WTS, can assist in the development of emerging theological minds and congregations without a sense of patronizing or condescending. In the interaction of the academy and the pews, I yearned for my members to learn, to interact, to share, to be nurtured with a practical, accountable faith.

Subconsciously, we reflect on our pilgrimage first as ice-breakers, the route that we took to arrive at the annual meeting venue. We exchange pleasantries on the landmarks we pass, the mileage, the duration, and we even compare the airfare, accommodations, etc. It becomes more intense when we consider immigration, visas, and customs. We cannot take the fellowship of our global annual gathering as an easy drive as we validate the uniqueness of each person and their contribution to the society.<sup>6</sup>

The various annual meeting sites of the WTS—at seminaries, universities, and colleges, all higher academic places of learning in the Wesleyan /Methodist traditions—added to the notion of pilgrimage and an understanding of sacred places and spaces. The physical structures spoke of sacrifice, spiritual encounters, academic transformation, and ebenezers of faith. The campuses spoke of God's grace and possibilities in human endeavors of faith.

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<sup>6</sup>Barbara Ambros, *Emplacing Japanese Pilgrimages Past and Present: Shikoku, Konpira and Kuman*, *Religious Studies Review* (Vol. 32), July, 2006.

## **The Wesleyan Theological Society and the Bahamian Connection**

I attempted two things in regards to the empowerment of WTS. One was to bring others to WTS and the second was to take WTS to the Bahamas. My returns home after the annual Wesleyan Theological Society meetings brought the joyful dissemination of information and the encouragement to learn, pray, and to grow. The task was to balance the academy and the congregation. The congregations were eager, open, and ready to participate. There was also curiosity as one church member queried, “Do you want to go into teaching?” As a pilgrim returning home, there is also gratitude for a safe return. There is a gentler approach to the souls of people, a greater confidence in the God we serve, and the eagerness to share the grace of another epiphany.

Undoubtedly, the extrinsic quality and intrinsic value would be my changing worldview, my Wesleyan development, my presentation of the gospel, and the relationships formed at WTS. This gift of new friendships and hospitality would be experienced in persons whom I met here at WTS and who kindly responded to the invitation to visit the Bahamas. I must add that, as a marriage officer, I have performed the marriage ceremony for a few dozen couples. But it took a WTS friendship to give a new dimension to the wedding rituals. This friend, Barry L. Callen, made me a part of his honeymoon destination . . . and I behaved myself. Those who came to the Bahamas to share in lectures were: 1995—Bill Ury and Randy Maddox; 1996—Ted Campbell; 1999—Kenneth Collins and Bill Ury; and 2002—Wayne Smith and Barry Callen.

Again, as providence and grace would have it, these visits began during a national Methodist autonomy crisis in the Bahamas within the Conference of the Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas. The purpose of the visits was not to polarize any side of the autonomy issue. The visits offered to both sides of the fragmented Methodist communion and the general public a quiet but firm voice saying that the Methodist ethos of Christian discipleship is valid, and an invaluable voice in church history, Bahamian history, and for contemporary society.

The celebration of the birth of John Wesley (1703–2003), under the auspices of WTS, was pivotal in the connection between WTS and the Bahamian community. The Bahamas Wesleyan Fellowship sponsored a two-day conference, with the theme “Faith Working Though Love: Wesleyan Traditions Today.” Five countries were represented—Belgium, Canada, U.S.A., Panama, and the Bahamas. Eight seminaries and univer-

sities were represented. Among those from WTS who were at the conference were Dr. Bill Kostlevy, Dr. Tom Oord, Dr. David Bundy, Dr. Randy Maddox, and Dr. Donald Dayton. A cultural event to highlight the celebrations was a painting of John Wesley in Caribbean colors by renowned Bahamian artist Antonius Roberts.<sup>7</sup> The painting became one of a series of local scenes as the Bahamas philatelically honored the father of Methodism. The Wesleyan Theological Society was noted in the issuance of the stamps. In 2004 a special thanksgiving service for the stamps was held and WTS friendship was there in the person of David Bundy. In 2004 Dr. Ralph Del Collie also visited the Bahamas as a result of the 2003 joint meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society and the Society for Pentecostal Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary in Kentucky. This year, 2007, we commemorate the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Charles Wesley, and the Bahamas will again issue commemorative stamps. One stamp will include the artistic work of George Lyons on the Wesley brothers as pictured in the Northwest Nazarene University's Wesley Center.

Our developing nation, the Commonwealth of the Bahamas, likes to hear of and applaud the achievements and accolades of its citizens. Being named president of WTS was an occasion for my country to celebrate. We had a public thanksgiving service and it was wonderful. There was national publicity both in the press and on television. An offering was taken which would enable others to attend WTS. I said to those assembled at the service that, if they saw me as a flame, they, my family, and the faith community were the sparks. Mrs. Ruby Nottage, an attorney at law and Chancellor of the Province for the Anglican Church in the West Indies, a theologian and loyal supporter of WTS, spoke on the topic "Theological Development In The Bahamas Today" at the service, saying, "the greatest of the 13<sup>th</sup>-century scholastic theologians, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), expressed the acid test for all theology as follows—"theology is taught by God, teaches of God, and leads to God."<sup>8</sup>

I must mention the names of some persons who have inspired and supported me and my WTS pilgrimage, especially those who have journeyed to the meetings with me—Nadeen Beneby, Hattie Brown, Eleanor

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<sup>7</sup>See David Bundy, "Tri-centenary of John Wesley's Birth, Conference in Nassau, The Bahamas, January 2003" (Wesleyan Theological Journal, Fall, 2003), 25.

<sup>8</sup>Ruby Nottage, "Theological Development in the Bahamas Today," April 23, 2006, Trinity Methodist Church, Nassau, Bahamas.

and Peter Campbell, Naomi Christie, Joy Sargent, Marie Hanna, Mavis Hanek, Wendi Hunter, Franklin Knowles, Paulette McPhee, Jan Knowles, Patricia Campbell, Louis Hanchell, Bricelle Pinder, Rosamond Carey, Danielle Hanek, Brenda Simms, Monique Glinton, Deborah Campbell, Thelma Thompson, Ruby Nottage, Cecil Newbold, Brian Seymour, Mark Seymour, Bill Higgs, Patrick Roberts, Charlie Bethel, Charles Lewis, Oswald Munnings, Yolanda and Gary Roberts, and Emmett Weir. Churches have included Wesley, Heritage of Redeeming Love, Rhodes Memorial, Trinity, Ebenezer and Nassau Methodist Church.

In all journeys, identification is important. WTS is made richer by the wealth of characters of its annual attendees. Each participant substantially contributes to the aroma of the annual experience. We glean from each other through the variety of our simple encounters. We all bring something to the table, partners in faith. We are characterized by our inquisitiveness, courtesies, respectfulness, our common dignity, and our historical, analytical, and hopeful minds. It is a life of faith. It is spirituality in action.

The pilgrimage is not sentimentality. We learn that faith leads and guides, opening life to us. We indeed go from faith to faith. The Caribbean theological maxims are found in titles given to books and express life transforming truth. For example, there are the titles “The Water Is Trouble,” or “The Troubling of the Water,” “With Eyes Wide Open,” and “Forever Beginning.” These help to illuminate the dynamics of contextual theology and the radical fervor that a WTS pilgrimage espouses.

The annual WTS pilgrimage awakens within one the vital importance and desire to know oneself—historically, spiritually, academically, and pastorally, and to demonstrate accountable discipleship. I have discovered in the pilgrimage that one commences by faith and is supported by faith. One becomes embraced by faith and is enhanced by faith and continues by faith. You take faith to meet faith. Crucial is the emphasis of Methodist emphases in contemporary society. The WTS pilgrimage is a passion that gives a valid hermeneutical interpretation of Christian discipleship in the Wesleyan/Holiness/Methodist tradition. It is this passion which teaches patience and compassion to interpret life and build each other up. To allow faith to carry me on a pilgrimage, I need to know and have an appreciation for the formative factors of the faith that upholds me.

## Caribbean Methodism

Methodism began in the Bahamas about 1783 when a freed slave, Joseph Paul, and his wife Susanna and their children went from New York to Abaco, Bahamas. They eventually settled in Nassau, where Mr. Paul became a well-known preacher. Mr. Paul was part of a fellowship with Anthony Wallace, his wife Susanna Wallace, and others such as Thomas Tanyard, Charles Randall, William Mitchell, and Henry Suttan. The group was known as “Methodist” that corresponded with Rev. William Hammett in South Carolina and the Methodist Church in England. Most of them were trustees of the first Methodist trust in the Bahamas and perhaps the first church trust in the Bahamas and the first black people in the Bahamas to own a trust. They were representatives of a nucleus of a faith community that was forward moving in a new freedom of both human and spiritual liberty.

The background of the rich history of my fore parents and the early beginnings of Methodism in the Bahamas has not been recorded and given its authentic and indigenous interpretation. The recorded documents are generally minutes of the synods, and letters and reports of the missionary clergy. The impact of the gospel on the lives transformed in transitory conditions was not recorded. Unfortunately, we have no recorded liturgy of the people in prayer or their biblical interpretations and inspiration that under-girded them in crisis. For example, what were their prayers in slavery, their emancipation prayers, their prayers and liturgy after hurricanes and dangerous voyages from island to island. Yet, in the courage and triumph of grace, they were faithful to God and I as a modern Bahamian am the fruit of their prayers and aspirations. Going back home as the pilgrim does, the task for me continues, to research, collect, collaborate and help to form that “means of grace” whereby others may grow.

Bahamian Methodism became an integral part of Caribbean Methodism in 1800. Caribbean Methodism was established in the region since 1760 when Nathaniel Gilbert and his family began to spread the evangelical gospel on the island of Antigua. It is on the island of Antigua that the Conference of the Methodist Church in the Caribbean and Americas has its headquarters. Historically, there were adult baptisms recorded by Wesley who were the servants of the Gilberts that they took with them to England.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodist* (Nashville: Abingdon Press 1995), 201.

The Caribbean Methodist is still steeped in the British tradition of Methodism. For example, after 40 years as an independent conference, the Caribbean Methodist conference still cherishes and uses the 1933 edition of the British Methodist hymnbook. The British Caribbean Methodist grew with the people through slavery, emancipation, colonialism, and independence. The growth of political parties and independence was parallel in many cases with the maturity of the church. The British Caribbean region was dominated by three denominations, the Anglicans, Baptists, and Methodists. The Moravians were in some quarters and the Catholic influence came later. The church was at the pulse of the culture of the people.<sup>10</sup>

The Methodist Church in the Caribbean has matured. Her sons and daughters have become world citizens as theological academicians and ambassadors of the church. Philip Potter has the distinction of being a part of the World Council of Churches since 1948 and has served as General Secretary. Still others, both clergy and laity, male and female have served the WCC. In the World Methodist Council, Winston Worrell serves in the World Evangelism Department. The Caribbean Council of Churches has been and continues to be served by the Methodist Church.

The American Wesleyan/Methodist denominations came into the region, but Methodism was understood in the Caribbean as the British Methodist Church. In recent decades, the outpouring of the Spirit has given freedom, liberty, and this has given a lot of interpretations to religious experiences and expressions. The American Wesleyan/Methodist denominations, holding their own, have continued to make invaluable contributions to personal and national development. Recent years are seeing the British and American Caribbean Methodist heritages meeting face to face and embracing each other.

In my pilgrimage, it is noted that the Wesleyan Theological Society has attracted the Caribbean Wesleyan/Methodist family from its American

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<sup>10</sup>Only in the 1940s and 1950s did scholars begin exploring seriously the cultural, racial, and religious traditions of the Caribbean area as an important field of study. More recently, scholarship has begun focusing attention on the Caribbean and the rich traditions for which it is now known. In 1995, the study of the Bible in the Caribbean saw new directions when the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) authorized a three-year consultation on Caribbean culture and traditions as a formal and structured way to engage issues related to biblical materials within this neglected region. Cf. *Religion, Culture and Tradition in the Caribbean* (London: Macmillan, 2000). See Philip Cash, Shirley Gordon, and Gail Saunders, *Sources of Bahamian History* (London: MacMillian Publishers Ltd., 1991).

origins. In my excitement of sharing WTS, my colleagues in the ministry did have their queries, however. Four things have been significant in presenting WTS to the Caribbean: (1) the visits of WTS members to the Bahamas; (2) the WTS Journal; (3) the John Wesley Conference; and (4) the award to Rev. William Watty. Last year, it was significant that WTS presented one of its first Pastor-Teacher-Scholar Awards to Rev. William Wilberforce Watty, a past president of the Conference of the Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas and a former president of the ecumenical theological college in Jamaica, The United Theological College of the West Indies.

### **The Journey's Future**

My WTS pilgrimage has been positive. The gospels portray the decisive and definitive act of God's grace in the person of Jesus Christ. John Wesley was a positive person about the gospel; his legacy is illuminary. The Wesleyan Theological Society is a positive gathering. WTS is continuously evolving. The humility of the WTS pilgrimage is evident in its membership, goals, and openness to the Spirit of God. In its global membership WTS acknowledges that the experiences and revelation of the love and power of God are not localized. Our great God is universal and has been working through His truth, empowerment, and revelations in all parts of the world. Therefore, WTS becomes a greater mosaic as we meet together and are inspired by our stories.

A question has been asked about the future of the theological task. How can the Christian faith, first experienced and symbolically articulated in an ancient culture now long out of date, speak meaningfully to human existence today amid a modern worldview that is dominated by natural science, secular self-understanding, and a cry for freedom? Young minds can profit from the WTS. The evolutionary development of WTS over the years reveals members who have been spiritually sensitive, scripturally sound, academically astute, globally aware, socially involved, futuristically confident, morally and ethically conscious, and hermeneutically articulate. These characteristics are stirring the WTS into greater relevancy and accessibility. It is also important to note the contribution of *Wesleyan Theological Journal* to contemporary scholarship in general and Wesleyan studies in particular.

The Caribbean clergy are still invited and expected to sit on government and private boards, to sit on institutional and academic panels, and

to assist in the national development of the people by maintaining moral, ethical, and spiritual consciousness. The prophetic role of the clergy is expected, watched, criticized and respected. The clergy is assumed to be learned and apt in addressing all conditions. Prayerful, the clergy is renewed and revived through avenues such as retreats and pilgrimages. I am confident that WTS can be an invaluable pilgrimage for many. It is a pilgrimage that will continue to inspire, inform, illuminate and transform in the saga of our life's spiritual narratives.

WTS continues to evolve. I have and am evolving through it in grace, wisdom, heart and strength. I believe that the gift and title of being president of WTS is a lifelong challenge in Christian nurture and service. I believe that I have to embrace and demonstrate a lifelong caliber of the highest integrity of Wesleyan/Holiness/Methodist spirituality, scholarship, spiritual friendship, evangelism, and social reform. To be called a past president of WTS is not the zenith of learning, but it is a clearer interpretation of a distinctive pilgrimage.

At Nassau Methodist, our church's prayer is "Lord, grow your church through me." Cyril of Jerusalem prayed, "even as Thy will is done by angels, so also on earth let it be done by me." What a glorious future!



# **TO BE A MEANS OF GRACE: A WESLEYAN PERSPECTIVE ON CHRISTIAN PRACTICES AND THE LIVES OF CHILDREN**

by

**Dean G. Blevins**

Traditionally, Christian educators and children's ministers struggle when reading contemporary interpretations of John Wesley's approach to child rearing practices. Methodist historian Richard Heitzenrater articulates this concern well when he writes:

Wesley's attitude toward children is often caricatured simply as a harsh reflection of this mother's dictum: "In order to form the minds of children, the first thing to be done is to conquer their will." It is true that he did say, "Break their will that you may save their souls," and the daily regimen for the students at Kingswood School seems harsh these days. Nevertheless, his views were very much in keeping with the prevailing English perspectives of the day. And his interactions with and concerns for children indicated a much more compassionate view that one might expect, given his writings on original sin and his strict regulations for Methodist schools.<sup>1</sup>

Contextual qualifications aside, Wesley's own words and actions, at best, send "mixed signals." Theorists are wise to recognize and name the prob-

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<sup>1</sup>Richard Heitzenrater, "John Wesley and Children" in Marcia J. Bunge (ed.) *The Child in Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2001), 279.

lems inherent in those aspects of Wesley's philosophy (including John's mother Susannah). In a nutshell, John was a disciplinarian who believed in bending or breaking the wills of children to make them pliable to their parents and educators, and therefore to God. As Heitzenrater notes, Wesley's methods reveal that he was not a particularly gifted educational theorist, nor a child psychologist.<sup>2</sup> Rather than relying on such educational approaches, ministers might do well to explore the spiritual practices of Wesley to understand with more appreciation his pattern of introducing children to Christian disciplines that impact their spiritual lives through the "means of grace."

To accomplish this new perspective, Wesley must first be understood in light of his more traditional views of child rearing and education. In particular, careful attention must be given to the close relationship between Wesley and the 18<sup>th</sup>-century educational structure that influenced him. Theorists then may turn to Wesley's means of formation, the means of grace, as well as his appreciation for the spiritual presence of children in the ecology of Methodism. This will yield a fuller appreciation for a Wesleyan approach to spiritual nurture and appreciation of children.

### **Wesley's Child Rearing and Educational Strategy**

In his sermon "On the Education of Children," Wesley writes, "A wise parent. . . should begin to break their will the first moment it appears. In the whole area of Christian education, there is nothing more important than this. The will of the parent is to a little child in the place of the will of God."<sup>3</sup> Wesley includes this observation in a list of practices for parents in order for them to correct the natural "diseases" apparent in children: atheism, self will, pride, love of the world, anger, dishonesty, and being unjust and unmerciful.<sup>4</sup> Wesley fashioned parental counter-measures against the diseases. To fulfill the biblical injunction to "train up the child," Wesley recommended: (1) regular conversation concerning God, (2) breaking the will, (3) refusing to praise the child and teaching them that they were fallen spirits, (4) teaching plainness and modesty in diet, dress, and possessions, (5) refusing to take revenge, (6) teaching veracity,

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>John Wesley, "On the Education of Children," in Albert Outler (Ed.) *Sermons*, Volumes 1-4, of *The Works of John Wesley*, Bicentennial ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988-1995), 3:354.

<sup>4</sup>Wesley, "On the Education of Children," *Sermons*, ed. Outler, 3:349-60.

sincerity, simplicity and openness, and (7) modeling both justice and mercy.<sup>5</sup> While many of the practices merit consideration, others, like refusing praise, raise questions of appropriateness.

Wesley's childhood influenced his advice on child rearing.<sup>6</sup> While his desire to "break the will of the child" resonates with other pietistic writings like those of August Hermann Franke, John's methods did appear to take a different approach.<sup>7</sup> However, Wesley also built upon William Law's *Serious Call to a Devout Life*, attempting to restore a person's rational nature through training. As Wesley writes, "begin their lives in the spirit of Christianity, in such abstinence, humility, sobriety, and devotion as Christianity requires."<sup>8</sup> Wesley believed that forming Christian character in children entails both a radical submission of the child's will and a rational instruction in the Christian virtues.

Wesley's understanding of child-rearing began with his mother, Susanna, a strict disciplinarian in her own home.<sup>9</sup> John explicitly acknowledged his mother's influence, reprinting her letter in his journal and using a select portion in his sermon "On Obedience to Parents."<sup>10</sup> Life in the Wesley household, however, was not totally oppressive. Susanna's writings reveal that each child was given special attention

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Joseph Seaborn, *John Wesley's Use of History as a Ministerial and Educational Tool*, Th.D. diss., Boston University School of Theology, 1984 (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1985), 28-80; Susan Etheridge Willhauck, *John Wesley's View of Children: Foundations for Contemporary Christian Education*, Ph.D. diss., Catholic University of America, 1992 (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1992), 17-96, 174-242.

<sup>7</sup>Marcia J. Bunge, "Education and the Child in Eighteenth-Century German Pietism: Perspectives from the Work of A.H. Francke," in Marcia J. Bunge (Ed.) *The Child in Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2001), 247-78. See also Marcia J. Bunge, "Introduction" in *The Child in Christian Thought*, 1-28. It is interesting that in Bunge's overview of both Francke and Wesley she chooses to overlooks this comparison either in her treatment of Franke (p. 15) and Wesley (pp. 25-26).

<sup>8</sup>Wesley, "On the Education of Children," *Sermons*, ed. Outler, 3:349. Wesley writes, "And is it not reasonable to suppose that a Christian education should have no other end but to teach them how to think, and judge, and act according to the strictest rules of Christianity?"

<sup>9</sup>Robert Monk, *John Wesley: His Puritan Heritage* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), 20-21.

<sup>10</sup>Wesley, *Letters*, ed. Baker, 25:330-31; Wesley's *Journal*, eds. Ward and Heitzenrater, 19:286-91; Wesley, "On Obedience to Parents," *Sermons*, ed. Outler, 3:361-72.

daily, and that there was a real concern for the child's religious state.<sup>11</sup> Samuel Wesley also influenced his sons through his devotion to scholarship and his Anglican sensibilities.<sup>12</sup> John's childhood offered a strong blend of Puritan devotion and Anglican sacramentality and churchmanship, all of which influenced his own educational practice.<sup>13</sup>

Wesley's position on child-rearing was framed through an anthropological understanding that children were, "by nature," willful and inclined toward self-sovereignty. This view was informed theologically by his view of sin in the early life of children. However, the need to break the will of the child need not be the same as destroying the initiative and personality of the child; Susanna's own children offer an example, where submission did not destroy capabilities.<sup>14</sup> Wesley offered a more charitable view of child-rearing in his sermon "On Family Religion."<sup>15</sup> He admonished parents that children are "immortal spirits whom God hath for a time entrusted in your care, that you may train them up in all holiness and fit them for the enjoyment of God in eternity."<sup>16</sup> Parents are to restrain children, yet use correction (physical punishment) only as a last resort. Children are also to receive instruction the first hour of the day, frequently and plainly.<sup>17</sup> For all of the perceived harshness of Wesley,

<sup>11</sup>Steven J. Harper, *Devotional Life of John Wesley: 1703-1738*, Ph.D. diss, Duke University, 1981 (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1982), 64.

<sup>12</sup>Maldwyn Edwards, *Family Circle: A Study of the Epworth Household in Relation to John and Charles Wesley* (London: Epworth Press, 1949), 31.

<sup>13</sup>Monk, 23, 139-254; Martin Schmidt, *John Wesley: A Theological Biography*, trans. Norman Goldhawk, 2 vols (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1961-1973), 1:47-63. Schmidt notes that the combined Puritan and Anglican factors gave Wesley's parents' faith "intensity and depth" (47). Schmidt, however, does not develop Susanna's interest in the Anglican tradition, choosing instead to continue his introduction with Susanna's interest in Roman Catholic mysticism through the writings of Lorenzo Scupoli and Juan de Castaniza (48).

<sup>14</sup>Seaborn, 34-36; John Wesley Prince, *Wesley on Religious Education: A Study of John Wesley's Theories and Methods of the Education of Children in Religion* (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1926), 116. Prince, like Seaborn, emphasizes Susanna's terms, "conquer," and "submit," as more appropriate expressions than John Wesley's use of the term "break."

<sup>15</sup>Wesley, "On Family Religion," *Sermons*, ed. Outler, 3:334-46.

<sup>16</sup>Wesley, "On Family Religion," *Sermons*, ed. Outler, 3:337.

<sup>17</sup>Wesley, "On Family Religion," *Sermons*, ed. Outler, 3:337-40. Wesley writes, "Use such words as little children may understand, just such as they use themselves. Carefully observe the few ideas which they have already, and endeavour to graft what you say upon them." (40). Wesley proceeds to illustrate plain teaching with an example of teaching by association for the reader.

these words communicate both an educational passion and assurance of God's abiding grace, courage and wisdom in the process.<sup>18</sup>

John Wesley also had distinctive views on formal childhood education. His own education, both in his childhood and college years, reveals the importance of schooling, yet also leaves questions concerning consistency. Susanna required six hours of formal education even for young children.<sup>19</sup> Wesley later attended the well-known grammar school Charterhouse, which probably influenced his view of education, but little is known of his formal schooling during this time, and few conclusions can be drawn from this period.<sup>20</sup> He began teaching children in Georgia, where he catechized children under his parish care.<sup>21</sup>

Even in this early period, Wesley provided education and support for the poor children of the colonies.<sup>22</sup> He gave his full support to Kingswood School (initiated originally by George Whitefield) as a response to the needs of poor colliers' children in a hamlet located just outside the seaport of Bristol.<sup>23</sup> The school went through a number of transitions, beginning in 1738, culminating with Wesley leading the way for construction of the permanent boarding site, "New House," in 1748.<sup>24</sup> The residents at Kingswood

<sup>18</sup>Wesley, "On Family Religion," *Sermons*, ed. Outler, 3:345. Wesley acknowledged that his message is challenging: "It is undoubtedly true that if you are steadily determined to walk in this path; to endeavour by every possible means that you and your house may thus serve the Lord; that every member of your family may worship him, not only in form, but in spirit, and in truth; you will have need to use all of the grace, all the courage, all the wisdom which God has given you."

<sup>19</sup>Seaborn, 32; see also Schmidt, 1:60-63.

<sup>20</sup>Leslie F. Church, *Knight of the Burning Heart* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1938), 23-30; Schmidt, 1:65-66; Seaborn, 41-44; H. F. Mathews, *Methodism and the Education of the People: 1791-1851* (London: Epworth Press, 1949), 25. John Telford, *The Life of John Wesley* (1899; reprint, London: Epworth Press, 1960), 21-27.

<sup>21</sup>Alfred H. Body, *John Wesley and Education* (London: Epworth Press, 1936), 69-71.

<sup>22</sup>Donald Tranter, "John Wesley and the Education of Children," in *Issues in Education: Some Methodist Perspectives*, ed. Tom Macquiban (Oxford: Applied Theology Press, 1996), 30.

<sup>23</sup>David Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Instructional Groups*, Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1980 (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI, 1981), 82.

<sup>24</sup>Michael Bishop, "Wesley's Four Schools at Kingswood," in *Issues in Education: Some Methodist Perspectives*, ed. Tom Macquiban (Oxford: Applied Theology Press, 1996), 42-61; Body, 71-77. Bishop gives an inaugural date of 1741 for Kingswood (49).

ranged from poor collier children, to Methodist children from various locations, Methodist ministers' children, and any others who would accept Wesley's standards.<sup>25</sup> In all, Wesley maintained a real concern for the poor.<sup>26</sup>

Rules for the school were strict, including early rising (4:00 a.m.), regular public worship, education, prayer, a fixed regimen of work, planned meals, and regular codes of conduct (including no play).<sup>27</sup> The school endured a stormy existence, both in funding and leadership.<sup>28</sup> Kingswood established an additional four-year academic regimen for an advanced degree once Oxford University rejected several of its graduates.<sup>29</sup> Wesley also initiated a Charity School in 1739 at the Foundry in London where the class schedule was equally arduous.<sup>30</sup> The school at the Foundry included not only the daily instruction of poor children, but also a weekly meeting between teachers and parents to connect the activities of home and school.

In addition, John wrote and edited a large amount of literature to support his educational efforts both with families and in formal settings, including the curriculum at Kingswood school and a collection of abridged books known as *The Christian Library*, recommended to Methodist ministers for reading.<sup>31</sup> Wesley wrote at least ten tracts, including *Lessons for Children*, *Instructions for Children*, and *Tokens for Children* (addressed later in this writing).<sup>32</sup> In his preface to *Instructions*, he

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<sup>25</sup>Body, 76-77, 87, 139. Kingswood's original site, The "Old House," included day classes for the collier's children, as well as evening and early morning classes for adults (139).

<sup>26</sup>Heitzenrater, 297.

<sup>27</sup>Body, 94-98.

<sup>28</sup>Mathews, 27.

<sup>29</sup>Body, 98; Wesley, "A Plain Account of Kingswood School," *Wesley's Works*, ed. Jackson, 13:296-99. Kingswood academy became an alternative college for Methodists, one that Wesley felt rivaled any program offered by Oxford.

<sup>30</sup>Body, 77-78; Victor E. Neuburg, *Popular Education in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Woburn Press, 1971), 31. Students began at five o'clock in the morning (with preaching) and stayed until five that evening.

<sup>31</sup>Body, 99-101, 139; John Wesley, *A Christian Library, Consisting of Extracts from and Abridgements of the Choicest Pieces of Practical Divinity which has been published in the English Tongue*, 30 vols. (London: T. Blanshard, 1819-1827); Wesley, *Wesley's Works*, "Minutes of Several Conversations," ed. Jackson, 8:314; Wesley, Preface to the 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., *Wesley's Works*, ed. Jackson, 1:ii. See also Body, 99-101.

<sup>32</sup>Gayle Carlton Felton, "John Wesley and the Teaching Ministry: Ramifications for Education in the Church Today," *Religious Education* 92, no. 1 (winter 1997): 98; Prince, 125-32.

reveals his desire that education penetrate to the level of the child's understanding.<sup>33</sup> His desire was that children truly comprehend material, as well as respond with appropriate behavior to strict guidelines. His efforts were extended by future generations of Methodists who sought to instill an educational ideal in their children.<sup>34</sup>

### 18<sup>th</sup>-Century British School Influence

While Wesley does deserve respect for his efforts with children, one must also note Wesley's limitation. As Heitzenrater asserts, Wesley was not unique in his view of children. Wesley's educational practices were actually extensions of the grammar and charity school movements that predated John's efforts. Research in the British schooling structure reveals a system that corresponded with Wesley's choice of curriculum and his methods of schooling. Three competing systems of elementary schooling were available in eighteenth century England: grammar schools, private-enterprise schools (or vocational schools) and charity schools, each system with different educational goals and objectives.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Wesley, *Lessons for Children*, 3-4, cited in Prince, 126 Wesley writes, "Above all let them not read or say one line without understanding or minding what they say. Try them over and over again; stop short, almost in every sentence; ask them, "What was it you said last? Read it again: what do you mean by that?" So that, if it be possible, they may pass by nothing, till it has taken some hold upon them. By this means they will learn to *think* as they learn to *read*; they will grow wiser and better every day" (emphasis in Prince).

<sup>34</sup>Sharon J. Hels (ed.), *Methodism and Education: From Roots to Fulfillment* (Nashville: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, The United Methodist Church, 2000); Sondra Higgins Matthaehi, *Making Disciples: Faith Formation in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000); Catherine Stonehouse, "Children in Wesleyan Thought," in Donald Ratcliff (ed.) *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research and Applications* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2004), 133-48.

<sup>35</sup>John Lawson and Harold Silver, *A Social History of Education in England* (London: Methuen and Co., 1973), 105-15. There were other forms of education as well which augmented or combined different elements of education. Petty schools were primarily designed to teach preschool and young children to read and write. English schools, a combination of petty and grammar, combined petty school efforts with advanced education (114). Many children, depending on resources, were also tutored at various points of their education or participated in apprenticeships. Each of these other forms of education, however, were not as important in understanding approaches to education as the Grammar, Private-enterprise and Charity schools. These three systems dictated much of the educational content and methodology of Wesley's day.

**Grammar Schools.** Grammar schools provided the first system of formal education. Educators did not use the term grammar school prevalently until the fourteenth century, but this approach to education existed as long as Christianity has been in England.<sup>36</sup> These schools originally provided training in both Latin grammar and literature since such knowledge was absolutely essential for communication in the earlier period and later.<sup>37</sup> Discipline remained severe and classes might run from seven to ten hours daily.<sup>38</sup> The schools procured payment from students from surrounding areas, though local laws often stipulated free education for local children. Students who wished to proceed to Oxford or Cambridge University (and to the colleges that supported these institutions) were mostly trained first in the local grammar schools. These “public” schools were the dominant form of traditional education from Queen Elizabeth’s reign to John Wesley’s day, often supported by endowments that gave them a sense of autonomy and security from education reform.<sup>39</sup>

The curriculum of these schools included Latin and Greek grammar, the classic literature of the day, social graces including appropriate forms of recreation, and some limited training in mathematics, geometry and other current subjects. Grammar schools were often the focus of critique and several unsuccessful attempts were made to reform their curriculum.<sup>40</sup> Often the teachers of smaller grammar schools had to support themselves with outside employment, usually to the neglect of the school.<sup>41</sup> While

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<sup>36</sup> Stanley J. Curtis, *History of Education in Great Britain* (London: University Tutorial Press, 1948), 2-5. Grammar schools (as well as song schools) probably began in the first cathedral church of Christ at Canterbury (2).

<sup>37</sup> Curtis, 4, 18, 24-28, 39-41; Lawson and Silver, 96, 115. Curtis notes that the early mediaeval expansion of the Grammar schools, “was checked by the Black Death of 1349 and plagues of 1361 and 1367” (18). Grammar schools expanded between the reigns of Henry VIII to Elizabeth, particularly from 1560-1640, though the Tudors probably did as much to harm education as to support local schools. Often catholic schools were “nationalized” during the early days of the Church of England (96). Other schools were created by benefactors who provided both land and an endowment to pay the Master-teacher and sometimes his usher-assistant (41-43).

<sup>38</sup> Curtis, 41-43.

<sup>39</sup> Curtis, 8-14. Curtis notes that originally these schools were described as “Free Grammar Schools,” but the nomenclature was gradually substituted to “public” (8, 14).

<sup>40</sup> Curtis, 54-58; Lawson and Silver, 155-176. Certain attempts occurred during the Puritan Interregnum, but these reforms ended with the Restoration. Grammar schools continued to be critiqued by such noted theorists as John Locke and others through the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, though Locke’s impact on grammar schools was small (175-76).

<sup>41</sup> Lawson and Silver, 196.



many Grammar school teachers were university trained, others were less qualified. Ultimately, many teachers came from other, failed, endeavors and were questionable instructors. Grammar schools as a whole declined to their lowest level in the eighteenth century and suffered losses in enrollment.<sup>42</sup> The narrow curriculum of these schools, however, continued to have tremendous influence on clergy and aristocracy.

**Private-enterprise or Vocational Schools.** Private-enterprise schools emerged out of several different streams of schooling. Their beginnings might first be traced to the English Restoration, when Charles II was restored as monarch after Cromwell (and his son) unsuccessfully attempted to establish a Puritan form of government. Two years after the Charles II restoration, the 1662 Act of Uniformity required all schoolmasters and ushers to declare their loyalty and conformity to the Church of England in order to be licensed by local bishops. Dissenters were evicted from their positions under pain of fine or imprisonment. Eventually, the nonconformists established dissenting academies. Later, these academies would help to establish a pattern of private, classical, schooling.

Other schools were established to focus on vocational subjects like modern languages, mathematics and navigation, to support the expanding trade and industrial growth in England.<sup>43</sup> Vocational schools (some of them also charity schools), designed to teach a trade, began as early as 1675, but flourished mainly in the late eighteenth century. These schools supported the expanding middle class of England and provided an alternative for a number of scientists and technical innovators who launched the Industrial Revolution. Private-education schools, as well as private tutors, sparked much of the debate between public (grammar) education and private education in Wesley's day.<sup>44</sup> While the quality of private-enterprise

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<sup>42</sup>Curtis, 58; Lawson and Silver, 178.

<sup>43</sup>W. H. G. Armytage, *Four Hundred Years of English Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 31-33; Lawson and Silver, 203-09; Armytage notes independent lecturers and societies often taught mathematics during this time.

<sup>44</sup>Stanley J. Curtis, *History of Education in Great Britain*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1954), 196. Not all private-education schools were well run or effective. "Dame" schools for very young children (similar to petty or primary English schools) were often run by local matrons as "inefficient baby-minding establishments." Curtis describes other teachers of these schools as ignorant, brutal, alcoholic, and dually employed. Curtis writes, "Often the schoolmaster was a man who had tried and failed at every occupation in turn and had taken up the charge of the school as a last resort."

schools could be mixed, they were often a viable alternative to the classical curriculum of grammar schools, which prepared students for advancement to the university, but little else.<sup>45</sup> A new understanding of the purpose of education emerged, one primarily for utility, helping persons to become better in their vocations.<sup>46</sup> Leaders of the private-enterprise schools sensed this change better than grammar schools leaders.

**Charity Schools.** Education for the poor was a concern of English society from the beginning. Grammar schools were often mandated to provide a certain amount of free education, either to the entire town or to a select number of poor children (primarily, if not exclusively, boys). Charity schools, however, were the dominant form of education for the poor, particularly by the eighteenth century.

Charity schools were founded in the philanthropy of the sixteenth century, prior to the Reformation. Charitable interests of this period typically found expression in the foundation of apprenticeships, petty schools, and traditional grammar schools.<sup>47</sup> There were various motives for this early expression of charitable education, including the desire to indoctrinate the poor with a respect for the political and social order of the day.<sup>48</sup> By the eighteenth century, people seeking to demonstrate care for the educational needs of the poor employed a different approach.<sup>49</sup> Pauperism (the condition of the poor or near poor) was at an alarming level in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Poverty, in itself, was not the problem, since it also provided cheap labor. The problem was that the

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<sup>45</sup>Lawson and Silver, 129-30, 197-218. Education was originally important if it moved a person into a new social station by providing an opportunity for appointment to a new position, often within the clergy. Attendance and graduation from a university tended to confer such an opportunity, so the grammar schools were important. By the eighteenth century, many positions were already secured by right of primogeniture (born to a social status), so for many of the aristocracy, education was merely a confirming act of acquiring social graces (197-98). Few students completed their university education, preferring to travel abroad (217-18).

<sup>46</sup>Lawson and Silver, 170-80.

<sup>47</sup>Curtis, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 194; Lawson and Silver, 103-04. Curtis notes that Dissenters claimed to have originated charity schools in 1687, but petty schools for the poor started as early as 1560.

<sup>48</sup>Lawson and Silver, 104.

<sup>49</sup>Lawson and Silver, 182. The traditional grammar schools often had a full enrollment from the middle class and upper class. Other grammar schools had decayed to the point that education was fruitless.

level of poverty now threatened the national economy and the social stability of the upper class.<sup>50</sup> The charity school movement created different schools, supported by new foundations to provide some income for the teacher as well. By 1699, a new organization, the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (S.P.C.K.), began to use subscriptions from its members to support charity schools.<sup>51</sup> Education for the poor was not always well received by the aristocracy.<sup>52</sup> Charity schools did, however, grow, and the movement continued to blossom until around 1780 when the need for child labor shifted educational interests to the Sunday school movement.<sup>53</sup>

The charity school curriculum resembled that of the sixteenth-century petty schools for the poor and other schools that stressed basic literacy and religious education.<sup>54</sup> Charity schools, however, were different in

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<sup>50</sup>M. G. Jones, *The Charity School Movement: A Study of Eighteenth-Century Puritanism in Action* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1938), 28-35. Children were particularly problematic since they generated no income and they were particularly at risk due to the appalling conditions of their living environment. Jones notes that two alternative educational strategies were recommended to improve the moral quality of children, the discipline of labor (via workhouses) and the discipline of religious indoctrination via catechetical instruction. Religious indoctrination through charity schools was accepted since it was actually cheaper, more traditional in approach, and it provided a means for strengthening the Protestant identity of the poor.

<sup>51</sup>Armytage, 40; Curtis, 41-46; Jones, 12-14, 23. Jones notes the use of subscriptions, a form of "joint venture" similar to joint-stock companies of the seventeenth century, allowed for people of modest means to participate in philanthropic activities (12-14).

<sup>52</sup>Armytage, 44, 46-47; Curtis, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 195-96; Lawson and Silver, 185. Bernard Mandeville argued that over-educating the poor was often self-defeating since the poor often could not use the education to improve their social position. Other critics charged that the charity schools were "breeding up traitors" (44) through the teaching of Jacobite and other High Church supporters. See also Wesley's *Journals and Diaries*, Ward & Heitzenrater, (eds.), 24:50. Wesley apparently did not view Mandeville's writings favorably.

<sup>53</sup>Armytage, 43; Curtis, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 186, 197. At least 460 schools existed in 1698 (186). The effectiveness of the S.P.C.K. in developing these schools appears self-evident from the numbers generated. Armytage writes, "in thirty-five years it (the S.P.C.K.) helped form, or reform, over 1,500 schools, whilst during the whole of the eighteenth century only 128 grammar schools were endowed" (43).

<sup>54</sup>Lawson and Silver, 104. Petty schools were philanthropic schools for the poor established between 1560 and 1640.

design.<sup>55</sup> They followed a course of study euphemistically called “The Literary Curriculum.” The majority of the six-hour school day was given solely to the catechesis of religious principles and their moral application.<sup>56</sup> Some time was also given to the “three R’s” (reading, writing and arithmetic); however, the amount varied and children often learned only how to read.<sup>57</sup>

Educators, following Locke, worked with the primary assumption that the minds of children were like blank paper or smooth wax “on which it was their duty to imprint ‘the fundamental duties of our Holy Religion.’”<sup>58</sup> Literary resources were almost entirely religious, including the Bible, Anglican catechism, the Book of Common Prayer, and devotional material such as Law’s *Whole Duty of Man*.<sup>59</sup> Charity schools also provided clothes to the children, but even these uniforms provided a message. As one historian notes: “The sober school uniform worn by the boys and girls in most of the urban schools was designed to drive home the lessons of poverty, humility and submission.”<sup>60</sup> In all, the charity schools provided needed religious, moral, and educational support to the lowest class. This support, however, did little to improve the social condition of that same class. Historian John Rule notes:

The best that can be said for the education available for the children of the eighteenth-century is that it managed to maintain the levels of the later seventeenth century. Even the much-vaunted “Charity School Movement” of the early decades seems only to have helped stop a poor level becoming worse.<sup>61</sup>

Later in the eighteenth century, the Sunday school movement replaced the charity school as children entered the industrial workforce. Beginning

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<sup>55</sup>Jones, 23. Jones notes that the schools “provide a particular kind of education for a particular class of children, financed in great part by a particular method, and, by so doing, they established the idea of elementary education not, as in earlier ages, as a stage preliminary to grammar schools, by which ‘boys of parts’ might climb to the universities, but as a system complete in itself.”

<sup>56</sup>Jones, 76.

<sup>57</sup>Jones, 75-78; Neuberger, 55.

<sup>58</sup>Jones, 77.

<sup>59</sup>Jones, 79-82.

<sup>60</sup>Jones, 75.

<sup>61</sup>John Rule, *Albions’ People: English Society, 1714-1815* (London: Longman, 1992), 142.

with Robert Raikes in 1780, the movement recorded 7,125 Sunday schools with 88,860 teachers; there were 844,728 pupils by 1803.<sup>62</sup> This movement, while playing a large role in popular religious education, did little to move the general populace into local churches and chapels for ongoing discipleship.<sup>63</sup>

All three forms of schooling, grammar, private-enterprise, and charity, co-existed in John Wesley's day. There were not always clear divisions between the schools. English schools might combine classical and private enterprise. Grammar schools often engaged in a form of philanthropic education with the poor. The later addition of the Sunday school movement expanded the original definition of charity schools.<sup>64</sup> The overall social impact of the philanthropic schools seems negligible. English social historian George Trevelyan summarizes that, while the charity schools and Sunday schools attempted to do good for all children, "they had the demerit of too great an anxiety to keep the young scholars in their appointed sphere of life and train up a submissive generation."<sup>65</sup> The three school systems, however, do provide a social taxonomy to investigate Wesley's pedagogical and social efforts through formal education.

### **Wesley's Schools in 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Curricular Context**

John Wesley was a product of the British school's of his day and his practices corresponded with the system. Undoubtedly he received his early training at home and in some form of grammar school. Charterhouse, once a charity school, had evolved into a traditional "public" or grammar school that trained Wesley in the classical curriculum of his day.<sup>66</sup> That Wesley's efforts resembled the curricular approaches of three school systems of his century is first evident in the activities and curriculum of Kingswood.

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<sup>62</sup>Curtis, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 197-200, especially 199.

<sup>63</sup>David Hempton, *The Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religion c. 1750-1900* (London: Routledge Press, 1996), 51.

<sup>64</sup>Jones, 142-54. Jones classifies the Sunday school as an extension of the charity school movement. He notes, "They were national institutions, in a sense in which the day charity schools, restricted in numbers, and able to instruct but a selected number of pupils, had never been" (154).

<sup>65</sup>George Trevelyan, *English Social History: A Survey of Six Centuries from Chaucer to Queen Victoria* (London: Longman, Green 1978), 315-16.

<sup>66</sup>Lawson and Silver, 202.

While the charity schools at Old House might have come close to the literary curriculum,” Kingswood school was a different issue. The original design of the general curriculum was quite extensive, including traditional grammar subjects, additional classes in biblical languages, as well as courses in geography, chronology and other trade school subjects. Many of the classes mentioned by Wesley did not actually appear in the detailed lists of coursework or in the daily schedule. Alfred Body concludes that the general design was actually based “on the traditional classical course of the better-class public schools of this day.”<sup>67</sup>

The original design of the Kingswood curriculum actually corresponded with the emerging vocational schools of Wesley’s day.<sup>68</sup> Several elements of the Kingswood curriculum, including geography, chronology, and physics, were not normally the primary concern of grammar schools. Wesley also did not mention in his writings James Rouquet’s 1753 additions: merchants’ accounts, trigonometry, surveying, mapping, gauging and mensuration.<sup>69</sup> These courses were of considerable interest to the shipping industry and other technical trades. The inconsistencies between Wesley’s original design (noted in his journal), the actual courses taught, and the occasional inclusion of a broader curriculum raise considerable question about the desired purpose of Kingswood.

Originally begun as a charity school for poor colliers’ children, Wesley probably envisioned Kingswood New House as a private enterprise boarding school that embodied both classical and vocational training. The curriculum, as published, would have also been attractive in seaport towns like Bristol. The real curriculum content, however, revealed a structure more similar to the grammar schools of Wesley’s youth, with the addition of Hebrew to enhance the religious and ethical training of students. A review of the sequence in the curriculum reveals that classical education occupied most of the teaching, with arithmetic and other subjects often falling at the end of the daily cycle.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>Body, 99.

<sup>68</sup>Arthur F. Leach, *Educational Charters and Documents, 598 to 1909* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), 505-06. Actually, some of the perceived “harshness” of Wesley’s curriculum, the early morning beginning, was a standard practice in other schools, including the Westminster school, as early as the sixteenth century.

<sup>69</sup>Tranter, 35.

<sup>70</sup>Wesley, “A Short Account of the School in Kingswood, Near Bristol,” *Wesley’s Works*, ed. Jackson, 13:283-89. See also Tranter, 36.

Wesley's concern for quality teaching also included his religious concerns. Although critical of existing grammar schools, his efforts mirrored the dominant schooling paradigm of his day.<sup>71</sup> His desire to offer free education to Methodist ministers' children is more reminiscent of the early, endowed grammar schools than the existing charity schools. Wesley's own education at Charterhouse and Christ Church probably influenced the actual implementation of the curriculum, particularly with his predilection to micro-manage Kingswood. While the world might have been Wesley's parish, the emerging Methodist movement, was his domain. Rather than working for free education in a city or region, he sought to provide free, public education to a particular group at Kingswood and to the Methodist movement at large.

When reviewing Wesley's educational efforts, it remains important to consider the relationship between the views of the privileged British social class and their motivation for philanthropy in the eighteenth century. Historian Alfred Body writes of the harsh division of classes, the rich and the poor, and the resultant rise of "benevolent despots" who helped the poor but maintained the class structure of the day.<sup>72</sup> Body, however, does not elaborate on this paradoxical issue of class structure and humanitarian despotism. The historian mentions only briefly that the British upper class was concerned that the poor were, by nature, inclined toward evil.

Charity schools like those at the Foundery, Kingswood Old House, and West Street, Soho, were usually designed around a modified version of the "The Literary Curriculum."<sup>73</sup> Wesley himself had probably been exposed to this design as early as his childhood at Epworth and Wroot. He was deeply interested in the welfare of poor children, and contributed greatly to philanthropic endeavors among the Methodists. Even so, his adoption and modification of the dominant schooling model may have impaired any real social improvement for the poor. E. P. Thompson has raised a similar concern regarding the charity schools and the Methodist

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<sup>71</sup>Wesley, "Of Separation From the Church," *Wesley's Works*, ed. Jackson, 13:255-37. See also Pritchard, 35-37.

<sup>72</sup>Body, 21-39. Body writes, "The education of the poor was undertaken, not only from motives of pure philanthropy, but as an insurance against the dangers which the aristocracy saw arising from the viscous and unregulated products of the by-streets" (39).

<sup>73</sup>Mathews, 22-23.

supported Sunday schools.<sup>74</sup> Wesley, to be sure, would have been sympathetic to the charity schools' goal for the poor, moral reform and Anglican orthodoxy. His concern, however, was blunted by the dominant philanthropic view of these schools.

In fact, Wesley's emphasis on religious training may have impaired any academic growth in other crucial subjects that would have enhanced vocational and social opportunity. If the charity school taught the poor such primary duties as subjection, gratitude and meekness, there is serious doubt if any such education would be exceptionally liberative.<sup>75</sup>

### **Wesley and the Means of Grace**

If Wesley's educational process remained limited from an historical perspective, perhaps his non-formal emphases merit closer attention, particularly his emphasis on Christian practice. Wesley's interest in the education of children went beyond formal settings.<sup>76</sup> He was an advocate of the emerging Sunday school movement, supporting the movement's efforts through visitations and writings.<sup>77</sup> Yet even these non-formal means provide a limited view of Wesley's potential. Instead, his emphasis on specific Christian practices, known as the means of grace, provide a deeper perspective on the role of spiritual nurture.

**The Means of Grace.** The best definition for the means of grace, a term associated with John Wesley, emerges in his sermon with the same title. By "means of grace," he understand outward signs, words, or actions, ordained of God to be the *ordinary* channels whereby he conveys to men, preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace.<sup>78</sup> The original preach-

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<sup>74</sup>E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1963), 350.

<sup>75</sup>Jones, 78, 142. Jones argues, "It [Methodism] provided no leaders, it established no organisation (*sic*), it was content to limit the instruction of the children in home, and class, and school to the Bible and catechism" (142).

<sup>76</sup>Willhauck, 179-82.

<sup>77</sup>Felton, 97-98, Mathews 36-38, Addie Grace Wardle, *History of the Sunday School in the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1918), 11-35; Willhauck, 234. Mathews notes that Wesley encouraged and supported the efforts of Hannah Ball in High Wycombe who began a form of Sunday school in 1869, eleven years before Robert Raikes. Wesley did secure a Methodist Sunday school in Bolton in 1785. By 1788 the Bolton Sunday schools greeted Wesley with close to a thousand pupils (36-38).

<sup>78</sup>Wesley, "The Means of Grace," *Sermons*, ed. Outler, 1:381



ing of this sermon was during a controversy with Moravians over the Fetter Lane society and culminates with Wesley's instructions to ministers to utilize various practices (and dispositions) for holy living. Wesley's detailed argument for the means of grace at Fetter Lane set the stage for his continued use of this phrase to emphasize an increasing number of sacramental practices. Wesley includes three "chief means" in this initial sermon—prayer, searching the Scriptures and participating in the Lord's Supper.<sup>79</sup> He includes church attendance in his second discourse on the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>80</sup> Ultimately, he provides another list of practices under particular headings in "The Scripture Way of Salvation."

The means of grace became a standard phrase in Methodist polity and ministry. In "The Nature, Design and General Rules of the United Societies," Wesley stressed that Society members should evidence their desire for salvation in three ways, by doing no harm and avoiding evil, by doing good, and by attending upon all the ordinances of God.<sup>81</sup> The "Larger" Minutes of 1778 may be one of the most important documents to demonstrate how Wesley incorporated the means of grace as a part of the regular examination of all lay ministers.<sup>82</sup> He encouraged his ministers to view their "helpers" as pupils and to encourage them in using all the means of grace.

Wesley also maintained a certainty about the effects that accompany the faithful practice of any means of grace. He wrote, "Never can you use these means but a blessing will ensue. And the more you use them, the more will you grow in grace."<sup>83</sup> Wesley's taxonomy of instituted and pru-

<sup>79</sup>Wesley, "The Means of Grace," *Sermons*, ed. Outler, 1:381. Wesley actually described the various practices in the means of grace using different categories in sermons and other writings, particularly in key documents of Methodist polity. Wesley's practice of the Eucharist is an example of his continued advocacy and emphasis of the means of grace. See also Dean G. Blevins, *John Wesley and the Means of Grace: An Approach to Christian Religious Education*, Ph.D. Diss., Claremont School of Theology, May 1999 (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms Incorporated, 1999).

<sup>80</sup>Wesley, "Sermon on the Mount," second sermon, *Sermons*, ed. Outler, 1:496.

<sup>81</sup>Wesley, "A Letter to the Reverend Mr. Baily, of Core," *Wesley's Works*, ed. Jackson, 9:69-73.

<sup>82</sup>Wesley, "A Short History of the People Called Methodist," *Wesley's Works*, ed. Jackson, 13:299, 322-24.

<sup>83</sup>Wesley, "A Short History of the People Called Methodist," *Wesley's Works*, ed. Jackson, 13:324.

dential means allows for diversity in understanding the activity of God. The power of God, however, is not restricted by these categories.<sup>84</sup> The instituted and prudential categories, however, bear careful consideration in order to understand how Wesley conceived the diversity of God's activity in creation through Christian practice.

**Children and “the” Means of Grace.** It is clear that Wesley valued and endorsed various Christian practices under the title “means of grace.” Each practice in and of itself bears diligent observation and Wesley clearly intended their use with children as well as adults. He required all Methodist ministers to be involved in encouraging family devotion and in the training and care of children.<sup>85</sup> He records one famed confrontation with a Methodist minister who did not feel called to work with children. Wesley's straightforward response was that perhaps the man was also not to be a Methodist minister.<sup>86</sup>

The means of grace, as practices of spiritual nurture, provide a different approach to appreciating Wesley's efforts with children. Theologically, these practices were anchored in the sacraments, particularly the Lord's Supper. For children, however, baptism (like adult conversion) remained equally important as a gateway into a deeper Christian life.<sup>87</sup> For instance, Wesley published prayers specifically for children to pray. He offered to children printed prayers for each day and concluded with specific prayers for family members and friends, as well as prayers for both before “meat” and after meals.<sup>88</sup> Wesley also provided catechetical instruction (*Instructions for Children*) on the basic tenants of the Christian faith and an in-depth family guide to teach Scripture (*Lessons for Children*).<sup>89</sup> In addition, the Wesley brothers provided formation through children's hymns, published from 1741 to 1790 under the title *Hymns for Children*.<sup>90</sup>

The various resources reveal practices evident in the means of grace, including aspects of prayer, scripture, examination, accountability, and

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<sup>84</sup>Maddox, 195.

<sup>85</sup>Prince, 132-37.

<sup>86</sup>Prince, 135.

<sup>87</sup>Felton, 95.

<sup>88</sup>Wesley, “Prayers for Children,” *Wesley's Works* ed. Jackson 11:272.

<sup>89</sup>Felton, 99-100.

<sup>90</sup>Felton, 98.

altruism. Such practices mirror then current efforts to cultivate spirituality in children through Christian practices.<sup>91</sup> Wesley's desire that children participate in the means of grace surfaces in the very prayers children were encouraged to pray, "Bless to me thy word, O my heavenly Father, and all the means of grace, that I may not use them in vain or to my own hurt, but for instructing my mind, reforming my life, and saving my soul."<sup>92</sup> By participating in the means of grace and in Christian practices, Wesley expected even children to undergo transformation.

The means of grace were intended to promote growth in Christian truth and love.<sup>93</sup> The transformed lives resulting from these practices provided additional testaments to the power of God, and therefore, became means of grace for others. Wesley demonstrated in his use of such "testimonies" that children could inspire others toward the Christian life.

**Children "as" Means of Grace: Religious Witness.** John Wesley's interest in child testimonies as a means of grace may relate directly to Wesley's early experiences in Georgia as a catechetical instructor, and also his interest in the religious experiences of children.<sup>94</sup> As early as June 28, 1746, he began to publish a number of childhood conversion stories from children as young as two and a half years of age.<sup>95</sup> In later journals he includes more detailed accounts of deep transformation, including children, as well as those "venerable" saints that modeled exemplary holy living.<sup>96</sup> He took seriously the role of children in revivals and often displayed an appreciation for their "adult-like" expressions of the fruits of the Spirit.<sup>97</sup> Examples of child spirituality included a third-party account of a

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<sup>91</sup>Marjorie Thompson, *Family the Forming Center*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1997); Karen Marie Yust, *Real Kids Real Faith: Practices for Nurturing Children's Spiritual Lives* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2004).

<sup>92</sup>Wesley, "Prayers for Children," *Wesley's Works* ed. Jackson 11:260.

<sup>93</sup>Dean G. Blevins, "Faithful Discipleship: A Conjoined Catechesis of Truth and Love," in W. Stephen Gunter and Elaine Robinson (eds.) *Considering the Great Commission: Evangelism and Mission in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 197-210.

<sup>94</sup>Felton, 96; Prince, 82-87.

<sup>95</sup>Prince, 82-85.

<sup>96</sup>Wesley, July 14, 1744; May 7, 1785, *Journal and Diaries*, 20:35, 23:355-56.

<sup>97</sup>Richard Heizenrater, "Introduction" *Journals and Diaries* 18: 44-45.

five-year-old deathbed witness.<sup>98</sup> Wesley also recorded a first-person encounter with a child who walked two-miles to see him.<sup>99</sup> Wesley included a limited and tempered account of the spiritual lives (and deaths) of other children until 1744 as part of his resources for family instruction.<sup>100</sup> The lives of Methodist children provided a great resource for Methodists as a whole, including the life of Wesley's intended successor, John Fletcher.<sup>101</sup> Wesley's compassion toward children surfaced in other encounters, like that with Mary Cheesebrook on Nov. 22, 1747. Cheesebrook, with a dynamic testimony of her own, laid ill, but was still concerned for her eight-year-old daughter who "would have no friend to take care either of her soul or body." Wesley offered to care for the child.<sup>102</sup>

Wesley does not dwell solely on deathbed stories of child spirituality, though these represent the level of child mortality of Wesley's day, an issue many children were compelled to face. Even in the United States the Sunday School movement dealt with the issue of death with children (and adults) far more frequently than today.<sup>103</sup> He includes a number of revival stories, including the spiritual transformation of students, ages eight to fourteen, at Kingswood school which he supported.<sup>104</sup> These published events not only promoted the school but inspired readers to recognize the level of God's work in and through children. Wesley's publication of the testimonies and lives of children surfaced beyond his standard journals and notes. He utilized the Arminian Magazine as a vehicle for lifting the lives of children and youth before his readership.<sup>105</sup>

Overall, these different accounts contribute to a larger accounting of Methodist "saints" that dotted journals and other publications.<sup>106</sup> Wesley

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<sup>98</sup>Wesley, Jan. 20, 1777; *Journals and Diaries*, 23:41. See also John W. Prince, *Wesley on Religious Education* (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1926), 97-102.

<sup>99</sup>Wesley, May 18, 1785, *Journals and Diaries*, 23:358.

<sup>100</sup>Felton, 100-101.

<sup>101</sup>Wesley, "On the Death of John Fletcher," *Sermons*.

<sup>102</sup>Wesley, Nov 22, 1747, *Journals and Diaries*, 20:197.

<sup>103</sup>Robert W. Lynn and Elliott Wright, *The Big Little School: Two Hundred Years of the Sunday School* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 39-55.

<sup>104</sup>Wesley, April 27, 1768, *Journals and Diaries* 22:129.

<sup>105</sup>Wesley, Feb 27, 1744, *Journals and Diaries*, 20: see textual note on John Haines.

<sup>106</sup>Dean G. Blevins, "Holy Church, Holy People: A Wesleyan Exploration in Congregational Holiness and Personal Testament," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 39, no 2 (Fall 2004), 54-73.

intended the inclusion of these children's lives as part of the narrative of the people called Methodist, not only as a form of historical reporting, but also as a mean of grace for those who would read their accounts. Wesley believed that children's spiritual lives provided a valuable witness for the Kingdom of God.

## **Conclusion**

A number of scholars and educators have explored John Wesley's endeavors with children with more or less appreciation for his efforts to guide both familial child-rearing and institutional education efforts. Wesley was a man of his time. His theology afforded a mix of sin and grace that alternated between strong discipline and compassionate care. Nevertheless, the educational practices he employed were grounded in particular historical contexts, including those of his own family and also the 18<sup>th</sup>-century British school systems he traversed. While contemporary practitioners in child spirituality might appreciate his efforts, there are certain basic limits to these practices that must inevitably be acknowledged. "Breaking the will" or employing 18<sup>th</sup>-century educational curriculum does not translate in contemporary society.

However, Wesley's enthusiasm for basic Christian practices, known as the means of grace, afford a different view. His passion to see children participate in the means of grace (to pray, read scripture, account for their lives) offers a more redemptive approach to cultivating the spiritual lives of children. In addition, Wesley believed a child's spiritual experience provided a narrative to inspire and encourage adults as well as children. He saw within the testimonies a glimpse of the power of God at work in persons, including the children themselves. Wesley believed that children could participate in the means of grace in order to become a means of grace through their own lives. Perhaps this view offers a trajectory, consistent with contemporary practice, to guide future children's ministers in a Wesleyan spirit.

# CHRONIC SUFFERING, CHARLES WESLEY, AND PERSONAL CHOICE

by

James R. Cissell

Suffering seldom (if ever) is experienced as reasonable. More often it appears to make no sense. It is in the frustration of attempting to come to terms with chronic suffering that encounters with God often are best expressed. From the deep pits of angry pain and despair come the equally deep—and often unanswerable—questions regarding the purpose of being itself, as well as the value of relationships.

In moments of ecstasy, one seldom is moved to ask, “Why me?” It is not in rapturous joy that David prays, “Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence” (Ps. 139:7-14, KJV). The Psalm is one in which David is pleading for an intercession.<sup>1</sup> Reading through the Psalms is a means of acquainting oneself with what John Tyson names the “dungeons of despair.”<sup>2</sup> King David and others offer significant insights into the great range of human emotion, including those feelings of abandonment and desolation.

Charles Wesley was familiar with these same deep and agonizing pits of darkness. From time to time he slipped from the reality of “normal” experience into this alternate reality of a darkness that blotted out every positive experience, every hopeful aspiration, every word of encouragement, everything he knew to hold beauty and meaning. A sense

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<sup>1</sup>*New Oxford Annotated*, RSV, 761.

<sup>2</sup>John R. Tyson, *Charles Wesley: A Reader*, 6.

of this deep desperation is found in his journal upon his return from Georgia and what was a bitterly disappointing venture into ministry. He wrote,

Sat., December 18th. I began my twenty-seventh year in a murmuring, discontented spirit; reading over and over the third of Job.<sup>3</sup>

Reads Job 3:1, “After this Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth.”

This living in dual realities would plague Charles Wesley throughout his life. Even after the powerful assurance experience of May 21, 1738, from time to time Charles would re-enter this alternate world where doubt and hopelessness were powerful realities. Charles’s declining years were “full of illness and pain, and death weighed heavily upon his mind. In [the hymn ‘Thou to whom all hearts are known’] Charles’s longing for sanctification blends with his desire for death.”<sup>4</sup>

Charles’ hymns were written from the wells of personal experience. They offer a connection to those well acquainted with grief and suffering. The following is an attempt not only to identify Charles Wesley’s understandings of and approach to the nature and place of suffering, but also to present a broader “Wesleyan” teaching regarding that hope which is found only in making a connection between personal suffering and the suffering God is willing to assume. That there is a cosmic element to “my” hurting makes a difference in the choices “I” make regarding treatment and paths of healing.

### Examples of Suffering in Scripture

Our concern is the role played by chronic illness and the accompanying suffering generated by its presence. Two scripture references seem particularly appropriate. Gospel-writer Mark tells the story of the healing of a woman who for twelve years “had had a flow of blood.” Mark’s telling of this story is especially significant in that he includes information that both Matthew and Luke omit. Not only has the woman suffered with this unnatural and ritually unclean health problem. Mark relates that she also “suffered *much* under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse” (Mk 6:26; emphasis added; compare Mt 9:20-22; Lk 8:43-48).

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<sup>3</sup>*The Journal of Charles Wesley*, Northwest Nazarene University website.

<sup>4</sup>Tyson, *CW: A Reader*, 371.

The second reference is the apostle Paul's very brief account of his experience with less-than-perfect physical health. He reports having a "thorn in the flesh," but does not offer any specifics, describing it as "a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated" (2 Cor. 12:7). His imagery elicits a sense of pain, a chronic presence with him. For those suffering with chronic illness, Paul's image can provide an incredibly accurate summation of what life can be like. A "thorn in the flesh," depending somewhat on its location, is a source of pain and limitation. It impedes movement and effects possibility.

Those suffering with chronic, debilitating illness likely know something about the reality of Paul's image. It is his affirmation regarding prayer that becomes most important to those who suffer: "Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; but he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness'" (2 Cor. 12:8). The indication here is that, for whatever reason, healing is not going to happen. The suffering is going to continue.

When touching the hem of Jesus' garment is out of the question, and prayers for healing seem to be answered with, "My grace is sufficient for you," the question for the suffering believer becomes one of, "What do I do now?" In a blending of the Markan account and Paul's imagery there is the establishment of the long-term nature of suffering and the indignity of having suffered much under many physicians to no avail.

The pain, disorientation, frustration, and distress are real. What does Charles Wesley have to say in response?

### **Suffering in the Life of Charles Wesley**

Charles Wesley knew much about suffering. He was born two months premature. Even under the best of circumstances, his lungs would have been underdeveloped, leaving him highly susceptible to respiratory ailments of all sorts. It is within the limitations imposed by Charles Wesley's health that the best of Wesleyan theology regarding the nature of suffering in general, and chronic suffering in particular, is to be found.

The Wesleys consciously set out on a path leading to persecution. The brothers knew from their earliest experiences with the Methodists at Oxford that practitioners of serious faith were going to encounter opposition. They may not have judged accurately the extent to which that opposition might go in efforts to quash the threat of Methodism, but they did expect that the living out of faith would be no less risky for them than it had been for Jesus and the earliest believers.



Charles Wesley wrote in the preface to the 1762 *Short Hymns of Select Passages of Scripture*, “God, having graciously laid his hand upon my body, and disabled me for the principal work of ministry, has thereby given me the unexpected occasion of writing the following hymns.”<sup>5</sup> This statement puts into place the essential nature of his understanding of chronic, debilitating illness. It was not unusual for Charles to accept as opportunity what might otherwise have been viewed and experienced as disability or even curse—although that may not always have been the case.<sup>6</sup>

Charles and brother John left England for the colony of Georgia on the *Simmonds*, on October 21, 1735. On October 24, John recorded in his journal, “Having a rolling sea, most of the passengers found the effects of it. . . . My brother’s head ached much.”<sup>7</sup> The ship had not yet left English waters!

The brothers reached Savannah, Georgia, on February 6, 1736 where they were for a time together. Charles sailed on to Frederica where he had been appointed to dual duties as minister for the settlement and secretary to Mr. Oglethorpe. His journal begins on March 9, the date of his arrival. Following are excerpts from this experience.

Sun., March 21. At night I was forced to exchange my usual bed, the ground, for a chest, being almost speechless through a violent cold.

Thur., March 25th. At five I heard the second drum beat for prayer, which I had desired Mr. Ingham to read, being much weakened by my fever. . . . At half-hour past seven Mr. Oglethorpe called me out of my hut. I looked up to God, and went. He charged me with mutiny and sedition; with stirring up the people to desert the colony.

Sun., March 28, In my walk at noon I was full of heaviness; complained to God that I had no friend but Him; and even in Him could now find no comfort. I hastened to the water-side, where I found Mr. Ingham just put off. O happy, happy friend! . . . But woe is me, that I am still constrained to dwell with Meshech! I languished to hear him company, followed him with my eyes till out of sight

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<sup>5</sup>Tyson, *C W: A Reader*, 377.

<sup>6</sup>Tyson, *Charles Wesley On Sanctification*, 17.

<sup>7</sup>*The Works of John Wesley*, I, 18.

and then sunk into deeper dejection than I had known before.

Thurs., April 1<sup>st</sup>. Hitherto I have been borne up by a spirit not my own; but exhausted nature at last prevails. It is amazing she held out so long. My outward hardships and inward conflicts, the bitterness of reproach from the only man I wished to please, "At last have borne my boasted courage down." Accordingly, this afternoon, I was forced by a friendly fever to take my bed. My sickness, I knew, could not be of long continuance; but, as I was in want of every help and convenience, must either shortly leave me, or release me from farther suffering."

John arrived in Frederica on Saturday, April 10, having been summoned by letters, "pressing me to go thither."<sup>8</sup> Regarding his arrival he wrote, "Coming on shore, I found my brother exceeding weak, having been for some time ill of a flux; but he mended from the hour he saw me."<sup>9</sup> However, a month later, Charles left Frederica with secretarial duties and never returned. At the end of July he handed in his resignation as Oglethorpe's secretary and returned to England by way of Boston (where he spent a good amount of that time ill and had to be carried from his lodgings to the ship). As was noted earlier, on his birthday, December 18, he wrote in his journal, "I began my twenty-seventh year in a murmuring, discontented spirit; reading over and over the third of Job." A month after he reflected, "Sat., January 22d. I called upon Mrs. Pendarvis, while she was reading a letter of my being dead. Happy for me, had the news been true! What a world of misery would it save me!"

The above entries are representative of not just the struggles Charles had with chronic physical illness, but also the depths of depression that accompanied the physical complaints. The two would follow Charles throughout his life, and would be joined by other tragic experiences.<sup>10</sup> In some instances, medical healing was ineffective or unavailable, while in others apparently God was not inclined to intervene. Charles lived within the confines of chronic physical ailments and the accompanying melancholia for his eighty and one-third years.

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 29.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 30.

<sup>10</sup>Tyson, *CW: A Reader*, 325ff.

Throughout 1737, he records illness in his journal only on rare occasions (see Apr. 30, Nov. 30, and Dec. 1). Then, in 1738 as he considers a return to Georgia, his health worsens. He writes:

Fri., February 24<sup>th</sup>. At six in the evening, an hour after I had taken my electuary, the tooth-ache returned more violently than ever. I smoked tobacco; which set me at vomiting, and took away my senses and pain together. At eleven I waked in extreme pain, which I thought would quickly separate soul and body.

Fri., April 28<sup>th</sup>. No sooner was I got to James Hutton's, having removed my things thither from his father's, than the pain in my side returned, and with that my fever. Having disappointed God in his last visitation, he has now again brought me to the bed of sickness.

Thur., May 18<sup>th</sup>. In the approach of a temptation, I looked up to Christ, and confessed my helplessness. The temptation was immediately beat down, and continually kept off by a power not my own. About midnight I was waked by the return of my pleurisy. I felt great pain and straitness at my heart; but found immediate relief by bleeding. I had some discourse with Mr. Bray; thought myself willing to die the next moment, if I might but believe this; but was sure I could not die, till I did believe. I earnestly desired it.

Fri., May 19<sup>th</sup>. At five this morning the pain and difficulty in breathing returned. The Surgeon was sent for; but I fell asleep before he could bleed me a second time.

Sat., May 20<sup>th</sup>. I waked much disappointed, and continued all day in great dejection, which the sacrament did not in the least abate.

The practice of bleeding patients was common and was believed to rid an ailing body of impurities. Charles mentioned having taken his "electuary," a blending of medicinal powder with honey or sugared water. Later, John would begin to experiment with the use of low-voltage electricity as a method of treatment for many ailments. While neither brother mentions Charles receiving such treatments, it would not be beyond reason to assume that he did participate in "the virtue of this surprising medicine."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>*Works*: II, 388.

**Choice in the Suffering of Charles Wesley**

Why Charles Wesley lived beyond his 27<sup>th</sup> birthday is one of those mysteries enveloped by the grace of God. Cursing the day of one's birth is a desperate measure, giving some indication of the intensity of one's suffering. The following hymn reflects the despair with which Charles lived from time to time:

And am I born to die? To lay this body down?  
And must my trembling spirit fly, Into a world unknown—  
A land of deepest shade, Unpierced by human thought,  
The dreary regions of the dead, Where all things are forgot?

How did Charles deal with such persistent and threatening drama? His journal entry for March 29, 1736, begins with, "I was revived by those words of the Lord. . . ." He quotes the second reading for the morning from the Book of Common Prayer (1662), John 16:1-3, 33, which begins: "These things have I spoken unto you, that you should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service," and ends with, "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

This type of encounter with Scripture is far from an isolated incident. When John visited Charles in Frederica in April of 1736, Charles recounts his many miserable experiences, noting in his journal:

It were endless to mention all the scriptures which have been for so many days adapted to my circumstances; but I cannot pass by the evening lesson, Heb. xi. I was ashamed of having well-nigh sunk under mine, when I beheld the conflicts of those triumphant sufferers, of whom the world was not worthy.

On his journey from Boston back to England later that fall, Charles wrote the following in the midst of a threatening storm:

Mon., November 8<sup>th</sup>. My flux returned with great violence.  
Tues., November 9<sup>th</sup>. The men came down, and declared they could keep the water under no longer; it gaining upon them every moment. Therefore they desired the Captain would be pleased to lighten the ship. He told them he knew what he had to do; bade them return to their pumping, and ordered others to take in all the sails but the

mainsail. He stayed some time (as he since told us, that he might not discourage us), and then went up; and as we lay by stopped several leaks upon deck. This did considerable service; though it was still the constant business of four men to keep the ship from filling. During this time I often threw myself upon the bed, seeking rest, but finding none. I asked of God to spare me a little, that I might recover strength; then cast my eye upon the Word: “For my name’s sake will I defer mine anger; and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off.” (Isa. xlvi. 9) My soul immediately returned to its rest, and I no longer felt the continuance of the storm.

In times of illness and despair, it was not uncommon that Charles would turn to Scripture for guidance and care. He wrote in his journal on March 25, 1736, “I read the eighteenth Psalm, and found it gloriously suited to my circumstances. I never felt the Scriptures as now. Now I need them, I find them all written for my instruction and comfort.”

The practice was not an unusual approach for him. It was not that he simply opened the Bible randomly. He used the Book of Common Prayer, and found within it what so often appeared to be an orderly approach to his personal experience with life. He had grown up with Scripture. The Book of Common Prayer was a daily companion. And, as seen later in his life when he began writing hymns, Scripture flowed in a multi-faceted fashion through him with a natural movement. It would be equally as natural that, in these earlier times of suffering both physically and mentally, he would turn to a known and trusted source of possibility and hope.

The beneficent nature of Scripture was not the only source of care and relief for Charles. During his years at Oxford, he had discovered the strength of a companionship in like-minded believers. Holy companionship became a cornerstone in the development and strengthening of his faith. Noted earlier was Charles’ journal entry of March 28, 1738, lamenting the departure of Benjamin Ingham. Ingham, who along with Charles Delamotte had accompanied the Wesleys on their voyage,<sup>12</sup> was acceding to Charles’s request that he go to Savannah to bring John to Frederica.

During Ingham’s absence and in his on-going battle with illness and rejection, Charles apparently determined that he would either survive or

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<sup>12</sup>*Works*, I, 17.

die as God might provide.<sup>13</sup> The arrival of John and Delamotte two weeks later found Charles “so exhausted I could not have read prayers once more.” Only a visit from his brother John “softened Charles’ resolve to starve to death rather than accept aid from people he considered his antagonists.”<sup>14</sup> His journal entry for April 16th is, “My brother brought me of a resolution which honour and indignation had formed, of starving rather than asking for necessaries.”

The Psalm for April 11, the day following John’s arrival, was number 56, which Charles introduces with the comment, “What words could more support our confidence, than the following, out of the Psalms for the day?” He then quotes verses 1-5:

Be merciful unto me, O God, for man goeth about to devour me. He is daily fighting, and troubling me. Mine enemies are daily in hand to swallow me up; for they be many that fight against me, O thou Most Highest. Nevertheless, though I am sometimes afraid, yet put I my trust in thee. I will put my trust in God, and will not fear what man can do unto me. They daily mistake my words: all that they imagine is to do me evil.

Scripture and holy companionship provided for Charles through the few months of ever-increasing discord in Georgia. The same would rescue him from his decision to return in the spring of 1738. He recommitted himself to ministry in the colony even as family and friends urged him to reconsider. It seems that only physical disability prevented his departure, and spiritual turmoil and uncertainty accompanied his struggles (see Apr. 15, 1738).

In the deep and recurring internal gloom of the late winter/early spring before May of 1738, it is the prayer of the Moravian Peter Boehler and the encouragement of a certain Mr. Bray, “a poor ignorant mechanic,” as Charles describes him, yet one “who knows nothing but Christ,”<sup>15</sup> and other companions who consistently drew Charles from the darkness back toward what was at times at best a bare acceptance of living a bit longer. Charles had been raised from birth hearing the “Word of God.” His education was one founded on Scripture. At the center of Charles’s being was this vast compendium of biblical reference from which he would draw

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<sup>13</sup>Charles’ *Journal*, April 16, 1736.

<sup>14</sup>Tyson, *CW: A Reader*, 7.

<sup>15</sup>Charles’ *Journal*, May 11, 1738.

revival and around which he would construct somewhere in the neighborhood of 9,000 pieces of verse. “In hope of that immortal crown,” Charles would write, “I now the cross sustain, And gladly wander up and down, And smile at toil and pain.” “O what are all my sufferings here, If, Lord, thou count me meet, With that enraptured host to appear, And worship at thy feet!”<sup>16</sup>

Charles lived within the confines of his chronic physical ailments and the accompanying melancholia for his eighty and one-third years. Present with him after his assurance experience of May 21, 1738, was a willingness to die at any moment, confident that he was engaged in a true work of God, that he was faithful to his calling, “at peace with God and [rejoicing] in hope of loving Christ.”<sup>17</sup> Neither his faith nor his faithfulness would remove from him the plague of ill-health, but both *would* serve as foundational resources for continuing his ministry and in providing an assortment of expressions for future generations of believers.

Suffering—even chronic, recurring suffering—ought not surprise, ought not offend the believer. This does not mean that every travail, every germ, every microscopic attack on the immune system that comes along ought to be placidly accepted. Neither does it mean that a believer must accept without complaint the battles that wage both within and without body and spirit. What it does mean is that God provides in various ways the means of grace necessary to meet ongoing battles with pain and darkness. At some point, current and yet-to-be-developed medical know-how is going to fail. At some point, only God’s grace is going to be present. At some point, despite social expectations and regulations, the only possibility worth considering is the mercy of Jesus and the powerful grace of God.

What does that mean? It simply means that God allows for dying. Whereas modern “western” medical concepts struggle with and fight against the reality of death, pursuing ungodly avenues of keeping bodies alive long after the spirit has departed, God knows the finitude of human life. While God is with individuals in their suffering, God is not particularly interested in prolonging human suffering. Charles Wesley’s model for dealing with physical pain and mental anguish was two-fold: (1) allow for the appropriate power of Scripture, and (2) cultivate the blessing found in the holy companionship supplied through friends in the faith.

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<sup>16</sup>“And Let This Feeble Body Fail,” stanzas 2, 7.

<sup>17</sup>*Journal*, May 22, 1738.

**Suffering in the Music of Charles Wesley**

The hymns in this section are representative of Charles' experiences with chronic physical and emotional suffering as well as his "post-assurance" interpretations. There is no solid evidence of his having written verse prior to the "conversion hymn" he mentioned in this journal entry:

Tues., May 28, [1738]. I waked under the protection of Christ, and gave myself up, soul and body, to him. At nine I began an hymn upon my conversion, but was persuaded to break [off], for fear of pride. Mr. Bray coming, encouraged me to proceed in spite of Satan. I prayed Christ to stand by me, and finished the hymn.

Charles' expectation that personal suffering would continue for him is evident in the hymns. Also evident is the assurance that God's grace is sufficient for whatever the believer might face in this "mournful vale." Despite his continued suffering, Charles Wesley enjoyed a remarkable relationship with God and encouraged the singers of his hymns along the same path.

The following hymns are found on Northwest Nazarene University's website unless otherwise noted. The author has taken the liberty of suggesting tunes to which the hymns may be sung. The tunes intentionally offer a lilt to what otherwise might be wrongly interpreted as solemn or even dirge-like hymns.

Music: "Dove of Peace"; Tune: I Come With Joy

1. AND let this feeble body fail, And let it droop and die;  
My soul shall quit the mournful vale, And soar to worlds on high;
2. In hope of that immortal crown, I now the cross sustain,  
And gladly wander up and down, And smile at toil and pain:
3. I suffer out my threescore years, Till my Deliverer come,  
And wipe away his servant's tears, And take his exile home.
4. O what are all my sufferings here, If, Lord, thou count me meet  
With that enraptured host to appear, And worship at thy feet!
5. Give joy or grief, give ease or pain, Take life or friends away:  
I come, to find them all again In that eternal day.

Music: 888.888; Tune: "I'll Praise My Maker While I've Breath"

1. COME on, my partners in distress, My comrades through the wilderness,  
Who still [who still] your bodies feel;



- Awhile forget your griefs and fears, And look beyond this vale  
of tears,  
To that [to that] celestial hill.
2. Beyond the bounds of time and space, Look forward to that  
heavenly place,  
The saints' [the saints] secure abode:  
On faith's strong eagle-pinions rise, And force your passage  
to the skies,  
And scale [and scale] the mount of God.
3. Who suffer with our Master here, We shall before his face appear,  
And by [and by] his side sit down;  
To patient faith the prize is sure, And all that to the end endure  
The cross, [the cross] shall wear the crown.
4. Thrice blessed, bliss-inspiring hope! It lifts the fainting spirits up,  
It brings [it brings] to life the dead;  
Our conflicts here shall soon be past, And you and I ascend at  
last,  
Tri-umph- [triumph] -ant with our Head.

Music: "Gift of Love" (LM); Tune: "The Gift of Love"

1. God of my life, whose gracious power, Through varied deaths my  
soul hath led,  
Turned aside the fatal hour, Or lifted up my sinking head;
2. In all my ways thy hand I own, Thy ruling providence I see;  
Assist me still my course to run, And still direct my paths to  
thee.
3. Whither, O whither should I fly, But to my loving Saviour's  
breast?  
Secure within thine arms to lie, And safe beneath thy wings to  
rest.
4. I have no skill the snare to shun, But thou, O Christ, my wisdom  
art:  
I ever into ruin run, But thou art greater than my heart,
5. Foolish, and impotent, and blind, Lead me a way I have not  
known;  
Bring me where I my heaven may find, The heaven of loving  
thee alone.

Music: "Toplady" (77.77.77); Tune: "Rock of Ages"

1. Gracious soul, to whom are given Holy hungerings after heaven,  
Restless breathings, earnest moans, Deep, unutterable groans,  
Agonies of strong desire, Love's suppressed, unconscious  
[fire];
2. Turn again to God, thy rest, Jesus hath pronounced thee blest:  
Humbly to thy Jesus turn, Comforter of all that mourn:  
Happy mourner, hear, and see, Claim the promise made to thee.
3. Gently will he lead the weak, Bruised reeds he ne'er will break;  
Touched with sympathizing care, Thee he in his arms shall  
bear,  
Bless with late but lasting peace, Fill with all his righteousness.
4. Lift to him thy weeping eye, Heaven behind the cloud descry:  
If with Christ thou suffer here, When his glory shall appear,  
Christ his suffering son shall own; Thine the cross, and thine  
the crown.

Music: "Converse" (87.87); Tune: "What a Friend We Have in Jesus"

1. HAPPY soul, thy days are ended, All thy mourning days below:  
Go, by angel guards attended, To the sight of Jesus, go!  
Waiting to receive thy spirit, Lo! the Saviour stands above;  
Shows the purchase of his merit, Reaches out the crown of  
love.
2. Struggle through thy latest passion, To thy dear Redeemer's  
breast,  
To his uttermost salvation, To his everlasting rest.  
For the joy he sets before thee, Bear a momentary pain;  
Die, to live the life of glory, Suffer, with thy Lord to reign.

Music: "Terra Beata" (66.86D); Tune: "This Is My Father's World"

1. O what a mighty change, Shall Jesus' sufferers know,  
While o'er the happy plains they range, Incapable of woe!  
No ill-requited love, Shall there our spirits wound:  
No base ingratitude above, No sin in heaven is found.
2. No slightest touch of pain, Nor sorrow's least alloy,  
Can violate our rest, or stain our purity of joy;  
In that eternal day, No clouds or tempests rise;  
There gushing tears are wiped away, Forever from our eyes.

Music: “Germany” (LM); Tune: “Take Up Thy Cross, The Savior Said”

1. Shrinking from the cold hand of death, I soon shall gather up my feet;  
Shall soon resign this fleeting breath, And die, my father’s God to meet.
2. Numbered among thy people, I expect with joy thy face to see:  
Because thou didst for sinners die, Jesus, in death remember me!
3. O that without a lingering groan, I may the welcome word receive;  
My with my charge lay down, And cease at once to work and live!
4. Walk with me through the dreadful shade, And, certified that thou art mine,  
My spirit, calm and undismayed, I shall into thy hands resign.
5. No anxious doubt, no guilty gloom, Shall damp whom Jesus’ presence cheers;  
My Light, my Life, my God is come, And glory in his face appears.

Music: “St. Michael” (66.86); Tune: “Stand Up and Bless the Lord”

1. Thou very present Aid In suffering and distress,  
The mind which still on thee is stayed, Is kept in perfect peace.
2. The soul by faith reclined, On the Redeemer’s breast,  
’Mid raging storms, exults to find, An everlasting rest.
3. Sorrow and fear are gone, Whene’er thy face appears;  
It stills the sighing orphan’s moan, And dries the widow’s tears.
4. Jesus, to whom I fly, Doth all my wishes fill;  
What though created streams are dry, I have the fountain still.

Music: “He Leadeth Me” (LM with refrain); Tune: “He Leadeth Me”

1. -WHEN, gracious Lord, when shall it be, That I shall find my all in thee,  
The fullness of thy promise prove, The seal of thine eternal love?

*Refrain* (Charles’ stanza 3):

Thee, only thee, I fain would find, And cast the world and flesh behind;  
Thou, only thou, to me be given, Of all thou hast in earth or heaven.

2. A poor blind child I wander here, If haply I may feel thee near:  
O dark! dark! dark! I still must say, Amid the blaze of gospel day.
3. Whom man forsakes thou wilt not leave, Ready the outcasts to receive,  
Though all my simpleness I own, And all my faults to thee are known.
4. Ah, wherefore did I ever doubt! Thou wilt in no wise cast me out,  
A helpless soul that comes to thee, With only sin and misery.
5. Lord, I am sick, my sickness cure; I want, do thou enrich the poor;  
Under thy mighty hand I stoop, O lift the abject sinner up!
6. Lord, I am blind, be thou my sight; Lord, I am weak be thou my might;  
A helper of the helpless be, And let me find my all in thee!

### **Implications for Those Suffering Chronic Illness**

An adage instructs, “Let Go And Let God.” The better truth is, “Hang On, and Let God Go” (*not to be read* as “Let Go of God”). The model found in the life of Charles Wesley is one that accepts the dual realities of intensely personal pain and suffering (either one of which can rob an individual of self-worth, meaning, direction, and energy) while holding firmly onto the intensely personal grace and love of God. For one who claims to be or desires to be a believer, the absolute necessity of God’s Word—living and active—and holy companionship are essential. That the two together stand as portions of the very earliest structure of Methodism (the Holy Club at Oxford) is not accidental. Through the years, both Charles and John intentionally sought out and nurtured holy companionship as a means of sustaining and strengthening faith. They *chose*.

The Wesleys were quite clear that their intention *was not* that Methodism should or would separate from the Church of England. The essential nature of the movement was one of *renewal*, wherein the collective body of believers—the “Church”—would *choose* once again to take up the inclusive and healing ministry of Jesus that is so apparent in the gospels. Thirty percent—129 of 435 verses—of the first ten chapters of Mark are healing stories.

Charles’ music presents the very basics of Methodist belief, among which are the centrality of Scripture and the importance of *choosing* com-

mitment to and receiving from like-minded believers: holy companionship. For those suffering with chronic illnesses of varying sorts, the necessity of having a caring community close at hand is unarguable.

Methodism in its early years accused the Church of England of having neglected one of its primary roles as both a witness to the grace and love of God and a renewed standard of what discipleship is to be. The Church of England had abandoned a large part of the population, a specific portion *to which* Jesus had paid special attention: the poor and the suffering. The requirement of holy companionship was included by the Wesleys in the structural outline that the Methodists put into place as the means of support needed, particularly by the suffering. The “General Rules” identified Methodists as “a society [none] other than a company of men (sic) having the *form* and seeking the *power* of godliness, *united* in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and *to watch over one another in love*, that they may help each other work out their salvation.”<sup>18</sup>

Choice is critical. Holy companionship is an essential element of hope for those caught in chronic suffering. Unfortunately, very often those suffering with chronic illness are not able to choose. Physical or mental impairment thwarts the individual’s ability to seek companionship of any sort. Therefore, the church’s task is to seek the suffering. Jesus teaches, “The Son of man came to seek out and to save the lost.”<sup>19</sup> If the church is to maintain relevance, it (we) must offer to the suffering the ministry of Jesus: not merely an occasional side-trip to the local mission house or a simple monthly donation to the food pantry, but a presence that brings the reality of God’s grace and love into the brokenness and darkness where the suffering live.

The “church” in general fails in this work because it is easier to do other things: build and maintain physical as well as administrative structures, pay professional clergy and support staff, conduct worship, etc. While the need is for the Wesleyan approach in teaching and strengthening holy companionship, the “Church” is “anxious and troubled about many [other] things.”<sup>20</sup>

Personal choice is a viable option for the chronically suffering only to the extent that there is something from which to choose. Charles Wes-

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<sup>18</sup>*The Book of Discipline*, The United Methodist Church, 72.

<sup>19</sup>Luke 19:10, NRSV.

<sup>20</sup>Luke 10:38-42, RSV.

ley recognized the importance of the power of Scripture coupled with holy companionship in his own struggles for well-being. Knowing this, he committed himself and his ministry among the early Methodists to the work of providing both. In his active ministry, but much more through his hymns, he sought to share the reassurance and hope that he found in the grace and love of God by means of personal encounter with “the living and active” Word and the treasure of holy companionship.

### **Charles Wesley’s Intentionality Regarding the Nature and Place of Hymns**

Charles Wesley wrote using his experience as well as his knowledge. The hymns were written as (1) a source of Scriptural instruction, particularly for the benefit of those without access to formal education and (2) a means of expressing assurance and hope in the face of chronic suffering with little reason to believe that relief was likely. The hymns intentionally link knowledge and experience (feeling), a necessary linkage drawn from Charles’ own history.

That the several Methodist/Wesleyan traditions choose to include in their respective hymnals so few of Charles’ hymns brings a strong indictment against church becoming “church.” The vitality of the Methodist movement is captured (or, perhaps, set free) as individuals are drawn toward the saving grace of God and the Spirit-power that flows into and through those individuals as they grow in grace. Charles’ hymns provide the vehicle necessary for making and strengthening the connection between what is felt and what is known.

This is not to say that the hymns of others are not of value. Rather, when denominations with Methodist/Wesleyan heritage choose to eliminate Charles Wesley’s hymns, the risk of losing heritage (to say nothing of vitality) is heightened. Charles’ hymns present the heart of the intention and theology of being Methodist. The broad spectrum of Scriptural instruction included in Charles’ hymns, whether or not an individual might recognize a particular phrase as Scripture, provides a firm groundwork on which faith can be built. Scripture, apart from all other sources, has the power to speak (“the Word of God is *living* and *active*”).

The necessity of singing the hymns, particularly those that address suffering and holy companionship, is underscored in the early history of Methodism. To dismiss such hymns is to choose a path leading away from being truly Methodist.

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**RESPONSIBLE GRACE IN CHRISTOLOGY?  
JOHN WESLEY'S RENDERING OF JESUS  
IN THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS**

by

**Matthew Hambrick and Michael Lodahl**

for

**Jerry McCant<sup>1</sup>**

In all the literature of the New Testament, it is arguable that Hebrews offers the strongest connection between suffering and the holy life, informing its readers that God “disciplines us [through trials] for our good, in order that we may share his holiness” (12:10). Further, Hebrews distinctively argues that Jesus is the great Exemplar of this process of growth in character through suffering, offering the almost surprising proposition that Jesus, “although he was a Son, . . . learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, . . . became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him” (5:8).

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<sup>1</sup>Professor Jerry McCant served in the Department of Philosophy and Religion at Point Loma Nazarene University (San Diego, CA) from 1976 until his retirement in 2006. McCant’s work as a New Testament scholar and teacher, particularly in his rhetorical criticism engaging the writings of Paul, has exercised profound and lasting effect upon countless students, including (and perhaps especially) this essay’s co-author Matthew Hambrick. Hambrick and co-author Lodahl, a colleague of McCant, wish to dedicate this essay to Professor McCant in gratitude for his friendship, mentoring, support, and scholarship over the years.



Given this distinctive emphasis in Hebrews, we propose to offer: (1) an examination of the role that Jesus' faithful obedience plays, along with that of other, earlier Jewish figures, as a goad toward similar behaviors in the letter's first audience; (2) an indictment of Wesley's Christology as insufficiently attentive to the biblical and traditional witness to Jesus' true humanity, and thus as a significant step away from the Christology of Hebrews; (3) a probing of the problematic defense of Wesley's Christology offered by Randy Maddox in his masterful study of Wesley's thought, *Responsible Grace*; and (4) a careful analysis of the rhetoric of persuasion in Hebrews, which rhetoric both assumes and implies the unavoidable importance of human agency in responding to God's grace offered in Jesus Christ. It is this agency and responsibility that Maddox so persuasively argues to have been crucial to Wesley's soteriology—and yet, ironically and inconsistently, is so largely absent from Wesley's Christology.

### **Hebrews' Argument for Jesus as Our Great Model for Faithful Obedience**

Hebrews is nothing if not persuasive. Probably written as a sermon to be delivered to a particular congregation (a group of Jewish Christians), it is evident that its audience was under pressure to leave the newly emerging Jesus people in order to return to the faith of their mothers and fathers—a faith that held no place and saw no need for Jesus. The pressure they felt undoubtedly included rejection by family members and friends. Such rejection may or may not have been viewed as a form of persecution, but it was an experience that Jesus had already undergone before them. Being rejected by one's own people is something Jesus would have been familiar with, to say the very least.

Recanting the beliefs that make a person an outsider would seem an attractive option if it meant no longer being deemed an outcast. When the author of Hebrews writes that “we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin” (4:15), he is undoubtedly including among that range of testing Jesus' own temptation to commit apostasy, to free himself of the burden of the cross, the burden of rejection.

In comparison with the cross, the experience of rejection may come across as minor, but when one's life revolves around a particular commu-

nity of people (e.g., parents, friends, neighbors) then the hurdle can be difficult to overcome. Even in today's more pluralistic society, when a person converts to a faith other than the immediate family's, he or she often is berated or even ostracized. Accordingly, it is probable that the addressees of Hebrews were experiencing these sorts of pressure from family and friends. David A. deSilva writes,

While the believers were once content to lose their place in society (with the confiscation of their property, their subjugation to trial and disgrace 10:32-34), with the passing of time these longings resurface and pressure some of the believers at least to withdraw from associations that marginalize them and hinder their efforts to regain honor in society's eyes.

DeSilva argues, accordingly, that the author of Hebrews is attempting to move the social structure of honor and shame in his audience from a worldly system to "an alternative system of honor . . . which carries with it the promise of greater and lasting reward for those honored according to its standards."<sup>2</sup> Simply put, the audience for this sermon was tiring of persecution, no matter how minor that persecution might appear to those in more dire situations. Fortunately, the author of Hebrews holds out to his readers the ultimate example of holiness through suffering, Jesus Christ.

In Hebrews 2 Jesus is pictured as the abased Son of God. He had to suffer through his having been lowered to a level beneath the angels. He suffered crucifixion and death, but remained faithful in order to be the "perfect author of salvation" (2:10 NASB). Although his being a "perfect" sacrifice is important to Hebrews, the document also portrays Jesus Christ as a fully human being. A compelling example of this portrayal occurs in Hebrews 5:7: "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission."

While it is at least debatable as to whether Jesus' prayer was answered—at least in the way he would have most preferred!—according to Hebrews 5:7 he was heard because of his submission. Upon hearing this statement, the audience may have shunned the author's use of Jesus

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<sup>2</sup>David A. deSilva, "Despising Shame: A Cultural-Anthropological Investigation of the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 113 (Autumn 1994), 440.

as an example because of the humiliating death he suffered. However, according to deSilva, this was the author's goal. Jesus himself was the perfect example of moving oneself from the worldly system of honor and shame to that of the heavenly.

Hebrews 5:8 takes the argument up a notch by saying, "Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered." Given this statement, there is no denying the humanity of Christ. His existence as "a Son" of God cannot minimize his humanity to a level where he is unable to learn obedience through suffering—a kind of learning the audience is also called upon to undergo. Jesus' human nature is precisely what makes it possible for the audience to consider the goals the author has specified to be attainable. If Jesus Christ was exclusively divine to the author of Hebrews and his readers, then how could he provide the example of a faithful and obedient life that is, at least in principle, achievable by his followers? If we were to think that, because Christ is the Son with uniquely divine privilege and power, his perseverance is unattainable by others, the author quickly disabuses us of such notions, offering Christ as a role model for his disciples.

Indeed, Jesus is not the only figure in Hebrews portrayed as a faithful, obedient sufferer. The author repeatedly offers examples of people from Israelite history who are celebrated for their faithfulness to God, particularly in the face of adversity. The first such character is Moses, who "was faithful in all God's house" (3:2). The adversities Moses had to endure, according to Hebrews, were many, including the rebelliousness of the people he led (3:19). He also denied his royal adoption (11:24) for the sake of the "people of God" and chose to be readopted into their midst and "share" in their "ill-treatment" (11:25). The author continues, "By faith he left Egypt, unafraid of the king's anger; for he persevered as though he saw him who is invisible" (11:27).

Abraham suffered because he was childless—surely a source of socialized shame. Indeed, he and Sarah were without a child for so long that they had given up. But the author of Hebrews writes that because Abraham "patiently endured," he "obtained the promise" (6:15). In other words, because of his perseverance through suffering, he was given a son. But even Abraham, the great patriarch, was not enough to complete the list of illustrations.

Abel gave offerings to God by faith. He was killed—by his brother, no less, yet another trope of family tension and strife—but because of his

faithfulness “he still speaks” (11:4). Noah was faithful to God’s call and was saved from the flood and “became an heir to righteousness” (11:7).<sup>3</sup> And as if he were running out of time—getting dangerously close to noon, no doubt – the Hebrews sermonizer lists many in a short space. “And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets. . . .” Hebrews observes of them and others who were faithful, “They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented—of whom the world was not worthy” (11:37-38).

As if in anticipation of the audience’s concern with its ability to persevere through hardship, the author has portrayed not only the faithfulness of the patriarchs, but the ultimate model of suffering and perseverance, Jesus Christ. The author of Hebrews takes seriously the actions of human beings in this world as a means of responding to, and perhaps even of finding, God’s favor. Thus, the saints of old “were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection” (11:35). DeSilva claims that these “sufferings are recast as proof of the believers’ legitimate descentance from (or adoption by) God.”<sup>4</sup>

The author exhorts the addressees not to forget the message of Proverbs 3:11-12, “My child, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor lose heart when you are punished by him; for the Lord disciplines those whom he loves, and chastises every child whom he accepts” (12:5). DeSilva understands this exhortation as the author wishing to direct “believers’ sufferings and privations as God’s discipline, not in the sense of punishment but in the sense of instruction (the education of children).”<sup>5</sup> Hebrews encourages its audience not only to remain in the com-

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<sup>3</sup>Interestingly, it is in the Qur’an that one finds a version of the Noah story with the strongest, most decisive note of family strife and division arising out of deep allegiance to God. In Q11:42-43 we read that Noah spotted one of his sons outside the ark, to whom Noah calls to “embark with us” onto the ark and “not remain with the unbelievers.” His son refuses, replying that he will find safety atop a high mountain. Noah responds gravely, “Today, there is no protector from Allah’s Decree, except for him on whom He has mercy.” The onrushing waters rise between father and son such that “he was one of those who were drowned.” Noah is then commanded not to mourn, because this disobedient son had proven himself unworthy of the community of the faithful.

<sup>4</sup>deSilva, 457.

<sup>5</sup>deSilva, 447.

munity of faith, but also to grow in that faith and perseverance. Hence, its argument is designed in the hope of moving this audience of believers to a particular mode of thought and action, with an obvious assumption that these faltering disciples of Jesus really do have a say in the matter, really do have choices to make.

### **Docetism in Wesley's Christology?**

Given the stark acknowledgement in Hebrews of the truly human nature and existence of Jesus, it is natural to wonder about John Wesley's engagement with this document. We intend to demonstrate that, to the extent John Deschner adequately characterized it as "[Wesley's] beloved Epistle to the Hebrews,"<sup>6</sup> it is evident that Hebrews was not beloved by Wesley for its Christology.

Questions about the adequacy of Wesley's Christology go back at least as far as Deschner's doctoral dissertation at Basel under Karl Barth, initially published in 1960. To put it baldly, Deschner indicated that "one of the problems of Wesleyan Christology" is "the lack of emphasis on the human nature of Christ."<sup>7</sup> Admittedly, Deschner stopped short of charging Wesley with docetism. In the Wesley text "there is a clear teaching about the human nature, and he intends it to fall within Chalcedonian limits. But the accent lies elsewhere."<sup>8</sup> Our question regards how distant that accent lay from Jesus' true humanity, and how heavily it was placed "elsewhere." Our related concern is that Wesley's questionable Christology disallows appreciation for the power of Hebrews' message regarding the sufferings, struggles, and obedience of Jesus as the paradigm for Christian discipleship and growth in holiness.

Before examining the specifics of Wesley's interpretation of the figure of Jesus in Hebrews, it will be instructive to consider some of Deschner's evidence for Wesley's "absence of accent" on Jesus' humanity. In his *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, Wesley consistently took pains to qualify the humanity of Christ as reflected in the gospels. For example, consider his terse comment on Mark 6:6 ("He marveled because of their unbelief"): "As man. As He was God, nothing was

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<sup>6</sup>John Deschner, *Wesley's Christology: An Interpretation* (Dallas: SMU Press, 1960, 1985), 169.

<sup>7</sup>Deschner, 24.

<sup>8</sup>Deschner, 28.

strange to Him.”<sup>9</sup> Similarly, when in Mark 13:32 Jesus tells his disciples that no one, including himself, knows the time of the world’s end, Wesley commented: “Not as man: as man He was no more omniscient than omnipresent; but as God He knows all the circumstances of it.”<sup>10</sup> In both cases, Wesley undercut the human nature of Jesus immediately after acknowledging it ever so perfunctorily. He thereby compromised, and so effectively dismissed, the human limitations of the Nazarene. “Even more curious,” wrote Deschner, “is Wesley’s repeated explanation for Jesus’ escape from angry crowds: He simply becomes invisible (Jn. 8:59, Lk. 4:30)!”<sup>11</sup>

Wesley’s commentary on Jesus’ crucifixion follows suit, and will prove to have been inimical to appreciating the rhetorical appeal to Jesus’ suffering and death in Hebrews. Wesley commented on Matthew 27:50:

He alone, of all men that ever were, could have continued alive, even in the greatest tortures, as long as He pleased, or have retired from the body whenever He had thought fit. And how does it illustrate that love which He manifested in His death! inasmuch as He did not use His power to quit His body as soon as it was fastened to the cross, leaving only an insensible corpse to the cruelty of His murderers; but continued His abode in it, with a steady resolution, as long as it was proper.<sup>12</sup>

While it is certainly possible to discover comparable notions in the early church father Athanasius, it was this very drift toward a strong Word-body dualism in the writings of his protégé Apollinaris that would be rightly rejected and properly condemned. The Logos or divine nature, in this (heretical) case, occupies and manipulates the human body (*a la* “the

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<sup>9</sup>John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (London: Epworth Press, 1976), 157.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>11</sup>Deschner, 25. In Wesley’s defense, Deschner appears to us to have put this point a little too strongly. On Jesus’ escaping the Nazarene crowd in Luke 4:30, Wesley did not so much “explain” as “suggest”: “Perhaps invisibly; or perhaps they were overawed; so that, though they saw, they could not touch Him” (*Notes* 217). Similarly, he comments on John 8:59, “Probably by becoming invisible” (*Notes* 342). Of course, it is already sufficiently problematic that Wesley even countenanced such disappearing acts by Jesus “during the days of his flesh” (to employ the phrase of Heb. 5:7), even if he did not insist on them.

<sup>12</sup>Wesley, *Notes*, 134.

ghost in the machine”), relegating Jesus’ human consciousness to irrelevance if not outright non-existence. If Wesley were willing to imagine the possibility that the indwelling divine nature could even make Jesus’ body disappear on demand, his Apollinarianism becomes more extreme. We wonder if it really is “too much to say that Wesley’s is a docetic Christology.” If it is, it certainly is not *way* too much.<sup>13</sup>

Wesley’s problematic engagement with these New Testament texts bears comparable fruit in his treatment of traditional Christology. There are two glaring examples evident in his paring down of Anglicanism’s Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion to the Twenty-Five Articles for his Methodists. Article II, on the doctrine of the Incarnation, states that Christ “took man’s nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin, of her substance.” Wesley curiously deleted the phrase “of her substance.”<sup>14</sup> One can only wonder about Wesley’s reticence on this matter. Randy Maddox daringly suggests that, while Wesley “did not deny that Christ had a human nature,” he “apparently considered it a direct creation of God.”<sup>15</sup> That would seem to be the implication of Wesley’s subtle sidestepping, by silence, of the church’s traditional affirmation that Christ received of the very “substance” of his mother Mariam. Given an adequate appreciation for the solidarity of the human race, even to leave the door ajar to the notion of a uniquely created human nature in the person of Jesus is to

<sup>13</sup>Deschner, 28; cf. Robin Scroggs, “John Wesley as Biblical Scholar,” *Journal of Bible and Religion*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (Oct. 1960), 420.

<sup>14</sup>Thomas C. Oden, *Doctrinal Standards in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 112.

<sup>15</sup>Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 116. We must add that, while Wesley’s deletion of the phrase “of her substance” raises serious questions, it is not entirely clear that Wesley therefore necessarily believed Jesus’ human nature to be “a direct creation of God,” as Maddox suggests—even if it is difficult to formulate an alternative. In a footnote, Maddox directs the reader to consult Wesley’s *Notes* on Eph. 1:3 on this matter (Maddox 311, n.131). Here is Wesley’s comment: “[God] is [Christ’s] Father, primarily, with respect to His divine nature, as His only-begotten Son; and secondarily, with respect to His human nature, as that [human nature] is personally united to the divine” (*Notes* 702). The most that Wesley can be construed as claiming in this note is that, by virtue of the union of the Logos’ divine nature with human nature, the human being Jesus is properly denoted the Son of God. There is nothing we can find in this note *per se* to support the idea that Wesley believed Jesus’ human nature to be a direct creation of God.

remove him thoroughly from participation in our common humanity. It is to deny the incarnation itself.

We detect a similar reticence on Wesley's part in his editing of Article III, "Of the Resurrection of Christ," in which it is confessed that Christ "took again His body, with flesh, bones and all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature." In this case, Wesley omitted the phrase "with flesh, bones."<sup>16</sup> It is possible that Wesley was attempting to hew more closely to Paul's wrestling with the issue of the resurrection of the body in 1 Corinthians 15, where he finally arrives at the notion of a "spiritual body" (v. 44) and insists that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (v. 50). In other words, Wesley's sensitivities at this point may indeed be sound, if not solid. Nonetheless, the deletion certainly does underscore Wesley's distinct tendency to distance himself and his audience from the concrete humanity of Jesus. Deschner observes that, while Wesley's editing of the Anglican Articles in itself "do[es] not constitute a denial of Christ's exalted humanity," it nonetheless does "reveal a certain reserve, corresponding to Wesley's nervousness, if one may call it that, about Christ's human nature in general."<sup>17</sup>

Maddox is right to balk at Deschner's speculating that perhaps Wesley harbored "an attitude toward human nature, as such, which for[bade] him from taking with final seriousness the idea that the incarnation means an affirmation of human nature, not simply subjection to it."<sup>18</sup> After all, Wesley certainly voiced great hopes for actual human beings to be fully restored to the divine image, partaking of the divine nature, fully renewed in divine love.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Deschner himself suggested another possibility, a different angle, on Wesley's reservations regarding Christ's human nature. In the concluding section of his study, he offered an awkwardly phrased hint: "it may also be suggested that the emphasis on the divinity is the

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<sup>16</sup>Deschner, 41; Oden, 113.

<sup>17</sup>Deschner, 41.

<sup>18</sup>Deschner, 32; cf. Maddox, 117.

<sup>19</sup>But Deschner offers another observation, overlooked by Maddox, that may be more theologically significant, one that may well reflect his tutelage under Barth. Deschner asks, "Or. . . is it that [Wesley] has some concept of 'divinity' or 'holiness' which cannot be brought too close to his concept of human nature—an idea which, at least in part, he brings to rather than learns from the New Testament, and which clouds his vision of how Jesus Christ, the God-man, redefines 'divinity' in the lowliness of the man from Nazareth?" (Deschner, 32).



ground for the sovereignty of mercy displayed there.”<sup>20</sup> Maddox would effectively pick this up and amplify it in his masterful study of Wesley’s theology some 30 years later.

### **Responsible Grace in the Christology of Hebrews?**

“The sovereignty of mercy displayed” in a strong emphasis upon Christ’s divine nature, as Deschner suggested in 1960, becomes Maddox’s rationale for explaining (if not explaining *away*) Wesley’s problematic Christology. “Wesley’s consuming emphasis on the deity of Christ was an expression of his conviction that *God is the one who takes initiative in our salvation*,” Maddox postulates.<sup>21</sup> This in turn means that there is a “basic consistency of his Christological convictions with his broader theological commitments. By emphasizing Christ as the pardoning Initiative of God in salvation, Wesley has underlined the prevenience of *grace* to our *response*” (Maddox 118).<sup>22</sup>

This, however, should be seen at best as a mild-hearted defense of Wesley’s Christology. After all, as Maddox explores throughout his book and even specifically in the formulation immediately above, divine grace for Wesley never replaces or annuls human response, but in fact evokes and empowers such response. God initiates, of course; but God does not pre-empt human agency and responsibility. For there actually to have been a “basic consistency of his Christological convictions with his broader theological commitments,” Wesley of necessity would have taken Jesus’ human nature much more seriously than he apparently did. If Jesus is truly God *and* truly human, he must be not only “the pardoning Initiative of God in salvation” but also—and equally—the receptive and obedient response of the human being.<sup>23</sup> Hence, Maddox’s rationale at the same time underscores the deeper problem: Wesley’s Christology tended to conflict with his soteriology, which did indeed take seriously the element of real human responsibility. Wesley does not appear to have allowed the dimension of human response its full and proper place in Jesus. But Jesus cannot be an exception to this responsible relation to God

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<sup>20</sup>Deschner, 191.

<sup>21</sup>Maddox, 117.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 118.

<sup>23</sup>This is to say nothing of the receptive and obedient *covenantal* response of Jesus the *Jewish* human being.

and still be our representative and saviour. While this Christological principle is not unique to Hebrews, it is certainly decisively present in that document. We now turn our attention to it, and to Wesley's engagement with its Christology.

It is not particularly comforting to discover that Wesley followed a pattern in his commentary notes and preaching on specifically Christological passages in Hebrews that is relatively consistent with what we have already discovered in his other writings. That is to say, he officially upheld the church's teaching regarding the human nature of Christ, at least in broad terms, but also downplayed or even avoided Hebrews' strongest affirmations of Jesus' humanity. So on the one hand, in commenting on Hebrews 2:11, which insists that the one who sanctifies (i.e., Jesus) and those who are sanctified (Christian believers) "are all of one," Wesley added, "Partakers of one nature, from one parent, Adam."<sup>24</sup> Similarly, Wesley commented on the phrase "to be made like his brethren in all things" (Heb. 2:17), "[in all things] that pertain to human nature, and in all sufferings and temptations."<sup>25</sup>

On the other hand, Hebrews 2:10 says something more radical about Jesus that Wesley, by all textual appearances, studiously avoided. Here is Wesley's own translation of the verse: "For it became [God], for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the captain of their salvation by sufferings." This is a recurring theme in Hebrews, utterly endemic to the rhetorical argument of the sermon: Jesus' faithful endurance of sufferings has fitted him to become our merciful and empathic priest, perfecting him as our savior. Though Wesley's preaching was peppered with the designation of Jesus as the "Captain of our salvation," not once in his published sermons did he ever address the proposition that God perfected our Captain "through sufferings." The idea received no consideration. In his *Explanatory Notes* on Hebrews 2:10, Wesley's commentary was untypically belabored:

*To perfect the captain*—Prince, Leader, and Author of *their salvation*, by His atoning *sufferings* for them. To *perfect* or consummate implies the bringing Him to a full and glorious end of

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<sup>24</sup>Wesley, *Notes* 815. This brief comment alone tends strongly to provide evidence against Maddox's suggestion that Jesus' human nature was created directly by God (see note 15 above).

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 816.

all His troubles. . . . But what is here said of our Lord's being *made perfect through sufferings* has no relation to our being saved or sanctified by sufferings. Even He Himself was perfect, as God and as man, before ever He suffered. By His sufferings, in His life and death, He was made a perfect or complete sin-offering.<sup>26</sup>

There was, in other words, little (if any) pedagogical value in suffering for Jesus, and relatively little for Jesus' followers as well—which is the inverse of Hebrews' argument. Where Hebrews lifts Jesus as a model of patient and enduring suffering (Heb. 12:1-4), whose example is to inspire his disciples to like faithfulness, for Wesley the category of "suffering" was relevant only in terms of Jesus' "atoning sufferings" (narrowly conceived) for us, and the only "perfection" Jesus undergoes is "the bringing Him to a full and glorious end of all His troubles." Then, when Wesley actually did appear poised to comment on Jesus' being "made perfect through sufferings," he did so only to cut the tie that Hebrews actually makes between Jesus' faithful obedience and ours (cf. Heb. 5:8-9).

Wesley's treatment of Hebrews 4:15 was even less substantial. His translation of the phrase "in all points tempted like we are" receives no comment whatsoever in his *Notes*. In only one published sermon did Wesley ever quote the phrase "touched with the feeling of [our] infirmities"<sup>27</sup>—and, as with his *Notes*, in no sermon did he ever mention "in all points tempted as we are." The silence is deafening. Of course, none of this means that Wesley did not believe these Christological propositions of Hebrews 4:15; he undoubtedly did. It does suggest, however, that he preferred to avoid such acknowledgements of Jesus' humanity and his real struggles with temptation. Wesley seems to have had no desire to dwell on the point.

The most crucial passage in Hebrews for our purposes is Hebrew 5:1-10, with its strong language regarding Jesus' human struggles and faithful response to God. The following phrases are lifted from Wesley's own translation in his *Notes*:

5:1—"taken from among men"

5:2—"who can have compassion on the ignorant, and the wandering; seeing he himself also is compassed with infirmity"

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 315.

<sup>27</sup>John Wesley, *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, ed. Frank Baker (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984–), 1:247.

- 5:5—“Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest”  
 5:7—“who in the days of his flesh, having offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and being heard in that he feared”  
 5:8—“though he was a Son, yet he learned obedience by the things which he suffered”  
 5:9—“being perfected, became the author of eternal salvation to all that obey him”

In all of his published sermons, Wesley makes but one brief allusion to 5:1 and never cites 5:5 at all. Incredibly, he never draws homiletically upon 5:7 or 5:8. In three different sermons he cites one idea in 5:9—that Jesus is “the author of eternal salvation to all who obey him”—but in each case he sidesteps the presupposition of Hebrews that Jesus was “perfected” through his obedience to God, indeed that he “learned obedience by the things which he suffered.” Thus, while for Hebrews it is the one who learned obedience the hard way who now is able to save those who, in turn, are obedient to him, Wesley betrayed no interest in such a Christology. Hebrews’ rhetorical appeal to Jesus as the supreme model of faithfulness to God in the midst of suffering, sorrow and persecution, and so also in the face of the accompanying temptation to abandon Christian faith and discipleship, appears to have been lost on Wesley. We return to his unusually lengthy and involved *Notes* on Hebrews 2:10:

But what is here said of our Lord’s being *made perfect through sufferings* has no relation to our being saved or sanctified by sufferings. Even He Himself was perfect, as God and as man, before ever He suffered. . . . It is His atonement, and His Spirit carrying on “the work of faith with power” in our hearts, that alone can sanctify us. Various afflictions indeed may be made subservient to this; and so far as they are blessed to the weaning us from sin, and causing our affections to be set on things above, so far they do indirectly help on our sanctification.<sup>28</sup>

First, Wesley denied any analogy between the suffering and obedience of Jesus and the suffering and obedience of his disciples, despite Hebrews’ strong rhetorical appeal to that very analogy. Then he avoided Hebrews’ developmental Christology in favor of what must be understood

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<sup>28</sup> Wesley, *Notes*, 315.

as a static perfection, “as God and as man, before ever He suffered.” Finally, having effectively drained Hebrews of its rhetorical appeal to Jesus as the pioneer who has blazed a trail through this world before us and beside us, he could only appeal to the Spirit’s “carrying on ‘the work of faith with power’ in our hearts” as the means and mode of sanctification. Jesus’ perfection was internal and ahistorical—and so then must ours be.

Earlier in this essay we suggested that, if indeed Hebrews was truly “beloved” of Wesley,<sup>29</sup> then it was not beloved for its Christology. It is worth recalling, now, what it was of Hebrews that was most dearly beloved by him: it was his interpretation of Hebrews’ working definition of faith as “the evidence of things not seen” (11:1). It is not difficult to suspect Wesley of over-interpretation on this score, given that he consistently understood this text to teach that true biblical faith is in fact a kind of spiritual perception, God’s gift of spiritual senses to see and hear the invisible world of God and angels. Put simply, Wesley read the terms “evidence” and “substance” of Hebrews 11:1 through a distinctly empirical/mystical lens. Since Wesley’s Christology assumed of Jesus a perfection, “as God and as man, before ever He suffered,” then Jesus himself must have lived consistently and thoroughly with such utter clarity of spiritual vision. For Wesley, Jesus did not grow through struggle, heartache, suffering, and obedience learned through facing and resisting all manner of temptation; Jesus was, instead, simply perfect. Likewise, Wesley eschews Hebrews’ insistence upon our own struggles and suffering as God’s means of perfecting us, gravitating instead toward the sheer gift of a faith that is itself certainty—a witness of the Spirit that delivers us from doubt and fear and immediately ushers us into the clarity of entire sanctification. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that the American holiness heirs of Wesley have not developed much of a theology of suffering as a divine means of perfecting us, of making us to become “partakers of God’s holiness” (Heb. 12:10).

So, again, we return to Maddox’s insufficient defense of Wesley’s anemic Christology. While it is comprehensible that “by emphasizing Christ as the pardoning Initiative of God in salvation, Wesley has underlined the prevenience of *grace* to our *response*,”<sup>30</sup> it is not entirely credi-

<sup>29</sup>Deschner, 169.

<sup>30</sup>Maddox, 118.

ble. To be faithful to traditional Christology and coherent with his own soteriology, Wesley should have interpreted Jesus Christ not only as the embodiment of God's pardoning and empowering initiative toward us, but also as the embodiment of humanity's ideal reception of and response to that divine initiative. Thus, we find Wesley to be notably inadequate on the crucial point of Christology.

### **The Rhetoric of Persuasion and Human Agency**

Interestingly, and ironically, it is precisely the human response to divine grace in Jesus Christ, and the human responsibility to remain faithful, that emerge as the central foci of concern in Hebrews. Its rhetoric of persuasion both necessarily implies and explicitly acknowledges the vital importance of human response to God. "How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?" (Heb. 2:3). Not surprisingly, the Christology of Hebrews fits this purpose perfectly. It is unfortunate that Wesley, for all of his insistence upon human responsibility in reply to God's great grace, neglected to embrace Hebrews' portrayal of Jesus as the supreme embodiment and exemplar of this faithful response to God. An analysis of the rhetorical function of Hebrews in what follows will help to underscore the recurring implication of human responsibility *vis a vis* divine grace offered to us in Jesus Christ—who, in turn, is himself the revelation of not only of divine speech toward us (Heb. 1:2), but also of faithful human response to God (3:6; 5:7-9; 10:5-10).

Rhetorically, Hebrews functions in a space consisting of two species of rhetoric. It falls somewhere between epideictic and deliberative. For Hebrews to be an exclusively epideictic document, it would be necessary to find a couple of markers in its argument. In the positive form of epideictic, one should see "praising language," also known as encomium. In its negative form, one should see "shaming language," also known as invective. While praising language does exist in the document, it is directed toward the aforementioned examples of great faithfulness—Jesus and Israel's earlier champions of faithfulness—and not toward the addressees themselves (with the possible, relatively mild exception of 6:9-10). What does exist most prominently is exhortation and dissuasion, the positive and negative forms of deliberative rhetoric. Happily for us, Craig R. Koester writes that "neatly categorizing Hebrews is not necessary, since deliberative and epideictic elements were often interwoven in speeches"

in the ancient world.<sup>31</sup> For the purposes of our discussion, the aspects of persuasion and dissuasion, as found in the deliberative aspects of the work, are most important. Nevertheless, certain epideictic elements of the document must be discussed later as a result of their being intertwined with the persuasive elements in the text.

In our view, the main goal in Hebrews, to persuade its audience to “hold fast” (3:6, 3:14, 4:14, 10:23), is an exhortation to stick to the faith in the face of persecution and the suffering it causes. In order for the author to convince his addressees to remain in an uncomfortable situation, he must dissuade them from their pending apostasy. He utilizes Jesus Christ and his role as the example of suffering to show not only the difficulty of the path of righteousness, but the greatness of his ultimate sacrifice—a sacrifice that created a covenant, a covenant that one cannot break and still easily return.

In support of this goal to “hold fast,” the author warns of the perils of apostasy. The first instance of this occurs when the author writes, “Take care, brothers and sisters, that none of you may have an evil unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God” (3:12). He continues with an example of what unbelief can cause by reminding the audience of the story in Numbers 14 of those who, instead of finding their way into the promised land, fell dead in the wilderness. “And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, if not to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief” (3:18-19). Note the grave note of responsibility! He reminds them that God’s rest is still open to them (4:1), but they must be cautious not to fail to reach it because of becoming divided from the faith (4:2), and not to be disobedient like those in the desert (4:6). “Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one may fall through such disobedience as theirs” (4:11). It is difficult to imagine a stronger recognition of the human necessity of real response to God’s grace.

Again, in Hebrews 6, the author asks the audience to move past the ways of disobedience, past the “basic teaching about Christ” (6:1). The author once more warns of the perils of leaving the group and speaks of the futility of a second repentance: “For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, and have tasted the

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<sup>31</sup>Craig R. Koester, “Hebrews, Rhetoric, and the Future of Humanity,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 64 (2002), 104.

heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, since on their own they are crucifying again the Son of God and are holding him up to contempt” (6:4-6). The interpretation of this passage is one of the more hotly debated issues in Hebrews scholarship. More important than the interpretation of the verse, however, is its function—which clearly is to move its audience to faithful obedience to the gospel. The author warns that, if they leave and then attempt to come back, they are “crucifying again the Son of God.” This is a strong argument to keep members inside the community of faith.

This effort is continued in Hebrews 10. While the author continues to attempt to dissuade the members of the *ekklesia* from departing in favor of the faith of their ancestors, he does not wish to destroy that faith. Instead, in the spirit of Matthew 5:17, he tries to fulfill the faith of their fathers and mothers.

For if we willfully persist in sin after having received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy “on the testimony of two or three witnesses.” How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by those who have spurned the Son of God. . . ? (Heb.10:28-29).

In discussing the punishments of the law, the author brings a mental picture of a miserable death, the death of a criminal, and continues to warn that much more is the punishment of the apostate.

The negatives of leaving, while most prominent, are not necessarily most important to the author of Hebrews. The joys of faithfulness are many in Hebrews 11, but are woven into the stories of suffering that lead to honor in the sight of God and God’s faithful people. However, they are also tied to the “better” argument of Hebrews. Jesus Christ is better than all who came before.

For us, all of this persuasive rhetoric—the sometimes fiery arguments of a first-century Jewish-Christian preacher—serves to underscore the frank recognition of human agency and responsibility that underlies this document we call Hebrews. The author hopes to move his audience to faithfulness, all of which implies the human power to move and to be moved. Jesus is throughout this document upheld as the supreme revela-



tion of God and the supreme embodiment of humanity; hence, it is only to be expected that the same human power, agency, and responsibility are discernible in Hebrews' portrait of the Captain of our salvation. Nonetheless, we have demonstrated that John Wesley shied away from this very portrait—and ironically so, given his “orienting concern” for “responsible grace” (Maddox). Despite Maddox's attempt to offer an explanation for Wesley's somewhat flimsy Christology, the seemingly unavoidable fact is that, in this crucial dimension of his theology, Wesley was not terribly well guided by his orienting concern. This, in turn, has led to a reticence, historically, for Wesley's followers to reflect often or deeply on the pedagogical possibilities of suffering, especially suffering as a result of faithful obedience to God in the midst of resistance and persecution, “in order that we may share in God's holiness” (Heb. 12:10).

# SUFFERING FOR AND TO CHRIST IN WILLIAM BOOTH'S ESCHATOLOGICAL ECCLESIOLOGY

by

Andrew Miller III

On a given Sunday a visitor might walk into a Salvation Army worship service and hear the congregation confidently singing to the accompaniment of a brass band one of their battle choruses: "I'll go in the strength of the Lord / To conflicts which faith will require / His grace as my shield and reward / My courage and zeal shall inspire / Since he gives the word of command / To meet and encounter the foe / With his sword of truth in my hand / To suffer and triumph I'll go."<sup>1</sup> The content of this song reflects the ecclesiological self-understanding of Salvationists who, as members of the universal church, are actively involved in the mission of God. Proclaiming this dangerously boisterous message is the ecclesiological heritage of the Salvation Army. The early Army and its leader, William Booth, embraced an eschatologically flavored ecclesiology that specifically called its soldiers to be prepared to suffer in the dire districts of life as soldiers of the cross. William Booth explained that Jesus Christ's missional mandate to go into all the world meant suffering for and to Christ.

Though it is not likely that Salvationists around the world are explicitly concerned with ecclesiology as a study, the Salvation Army is implic-

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<sup>1</sup>Edward Turney, "I'll Go in the Strength of the Lord," *The Song Book of The Salvation Army* (London: The Salvation Army International Headquarters, 1987), 202.

itly acting on its doctrine of the church, which is rooted in mission. Consequently, ecclesiological reflection within the Salvation Army must always consider missional aspects when evaluating its ecclesiology. Systematic theologian Jürgen Moltmann suggests, “What we have to learn from them [missional movements] is not that the church ‘has’ a mission, but the very reverse: that the mission of Christ creates its own church. Mission does not come from the church; it is from mission and in the light of mission that the church has to be understood.”<sup>2</sup> It is this missional direction which unites Booth’s bold “bass drum” ecclesiology with his eschatology. “Marching to war” for the “salvation of the world” is seen in the context of the holistic and universal mission of God. The influence of eschatology on ecclesiology is pivotal for how we understand the mission of William Booth and for how that mission can be interpreted today. How one views the end dramatically informs the way one theologically understands the church and its missional relationship to that end.

### **William Booth’s Eschatological Ecclesiology**

The particular approach to ecclesiology demonstrated in William Booth’s theological praxis necessarily mingles with his personal and universal eschatology. He fervently desired the eternal salvation of souls and the world’s eternal salvation represented in his millennialism. To say that William Booth had an eschatological ecclesiology is to state that his ecclesiology is formulated on the basis of his desire to redeem individual persons and the world for eternity, whatever the cost.

Pertinent to discussion about the ecclesiology observed in William Booth’s theology is the question of whether an ecclesiology can exist implicitly. Can there be a doctrine of the church if there is no explicit and official articulation of the same? If an ecclesiology is unmistakably developed theologically, is it more faithful than an implied ecclesiology? Such systems might be so active in “being the church” that these movements do not take time to formulate an official ecclesiology. Through church history the unarticulated ecclesiological systems have often changed the direction of the church, systems like Pietism, Moravianism, early Methodism, along with Salvationism.

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<sup>2</sup>Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 10.

Every ecclesiology is at least partially prompted by its eschatology.<sup>3</sup> This statement assumes a teleological model that dictates that the church is living in response to the way it understands the end. The church is the visible sign of the present and coming kingdom of God. When eschatology is connected to ecclesiology, the church can see the future victory of God as a reality impacting the here and now.

During the formative years of the Salvation Army, its ecclesiology was (as most areas of its development) extremely practical. Salvation Army theologian R. David Rightmire explains, “Booth had a functional ecclesiology, conceiving the church as ‘act’ rather than ‘substance.’”<sup>4</sup> The importance of personal eschatology, expressed in Booth’s desire to save souls, was lodged in the concept of the Army’s universal mission to save the world. This mission was the “greatest good” of Booth’s utilitarian-like ethic.

“The good time coming”<sup>5</sup> was the way that William Booth often referred to the approaching millennial kingdom, a kingdom for which the Salvation Army was pragmatically and theologically established. William Booth was a person referred to in today’s terminology as a post-millennialist. His eschatological views of the kingdom of God were never more clearly stated than in the title of his August, 1890, article “The Millennium; or, The Ultimate Triumph of Salvation Army Principles.”<sup>6</sup> In this article Booth asserts:

A genuine Salvationist is a true reformer of men. He alone is a real socialist, because he is the advocate of the only true principles by which the reformation of society can be effected. His confidence for the future is not based alone on the theories he holds . . . but in that Millennial heaven . . . to him, the millennium is already, in a measure, an accomplished fact.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>This is a debated point. Some churches seem to be motivated by nothing but maintaining the *status quo*. A state church ecclesiology is often motivated by an eschatological system that might seek to maintain or justify the *status quo*. This might reflect a realized eschatology. A realized eschatology views the first coming of Jesus Christ as inaugurating his kingdom. This kingdom is merely a spiritual or existential reality within the hearts of the believers or the church.

<sup>4</sup>R. David Rightmire, *Sacraments and the Salvation Army: Pneumatological Foundations* (The Scarecrow Press, 1990), 79.

<sup>5</sup>William Booth, “The Millennium; or, The Ultimate Triumph of Salvation Army Principles.” *All The World* 6 (August, 1890), 337.

<sup>6</sup>William Booth, “The Millennium,” 337-343.

<sup>7</sup>William Booth, “The Millennium,” 343.

William Booth was working to realize the kingdom of God on earth. He was a man motivated by the possibility of the redemption of the world. This motivation was based in large measure on his understanding of eschatology, which to him was measured on a global scale with a global mandate.

When ontologically defining Salvationist self-understanding and its millennial task, Booth explains, “Salvationism means simply the overcoming and banishing from the earth of wickedness, inward and outward, from the heart and life of man, and the establishment of the principles of purity and goodness instead.”<sup>8</sup> He understood the millennium in terms of global harmony; the means of arriving at such a state was through the agency of soldiers in the great salvation war. Booth commanded, “Soldiers! You are to do this! [fulfill the prophecies that will bring universal peace]. . . . There is but one way to reach this millennium of peace and good will . . . there is but one way to the world’s deliverance, and that is by fighting.”<sup>9</sup> Fighting for Booth clearly meant human agents escorting the millennium into reality.

As the Salvation Army grew, so did the need for the institutionalization of its mission and practices. Hence, the Army eventually became its own ecclesial body, but the core missional direction still reigned in the Army.

### **Suffering and the Army**

The ecclesiology of the early Salvation Army is one that called its soldiers to the world and to a fight against the evil therein. “Suffering” can be defined as undergoing pain, distress, injury, or loss. Suffering is something that happens beyond the norm of human comfort. It is not a surprise then that William Booth called his Army to suffer for the expansion of Christ’s kingdom. This theme of suffering is uniquely tied to the Salvation Army’s Wesleyan understanding of holiness.

**When Metaphor Becomes Reality.** In 1865 William Booth found his destiny while preaching in London’s East End, when he formed The East London Christian Revival Society.<sup>10</sup> Later known as the Christian

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<sup>8</sup>William Booth, “Fight!”, *All The World 1* (May 1885):112-114, 111.

<sup>9</sup>William Booth, “Universal Peace. A Christmas Address.” *The War Cry 2* (December 1881), 4.

<sup>10</sup>Also referred to as The East London Christian Revival Union or East London Christian Mission. These names appeared interchangeably in the formative years of the movements. See Rightmire, 28-29n. and John R Rhemick, *A New People of God: A Study in Salvationism* (Des Plaines, ILL: The Salvation Army, 1993), 17.

Mission, this group was motivated to preach the gospel to the poor of London's East End, a segment of the population that was generally neglected by the church in the Victorian era. During these thirteen years the Christian Mission grew to include 75 preaching stations and 120 evangelists throughout Britain. The eschatological perspective that accompanied this fledgling mission was dominated by personal eschatology.

In 1878 the Christian Mission changed its name to the Salvation Army. This change of identity is the first clear indication of a personal shift in William Booth's theology, which adjusted from personal redemptive categories to institutional redemptive categories.<sup>11</sup> This new theology is made clear in a popular (and often quoted) article by William Booth entitled "Our New Name—The Salvationist" in *The Salvationist*<sup>12</sup> from January 1, 1879:

We are a salvation people—this is our specialty. . . . Our work is salvation. We believe in salvation and we have salvation. . . . We aim at salvation. We want this and nothing short of this and we want this right off. My brethren, my comrades, soul saving is our avocation, the great purpose and business of our lives. Let us seek first the Kingdom of God, let us be Salvationist indeed.<sup>13</sup>

The alteration is most obviously seen in the pragmatic shift to transform the structure of the Christian Mission to the military structure of the Salvation Army. When the military metaphor was adopted, every area of Booth's movement was affected: preaching stations became corps, evangelists became corps officers, members became soldiers, and its leader

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<sup>11</sup>That is to say that the Salvation Army was viewed by William Booth as institutionally sanctified to bring redemption to the world. Roger Green explains that these "institutional" categories were "sustained by his [Booth's] belief that The Salvation Army was divinely ordained, and that it was a renewal in the nineteenth century and twentieth century of the Church of the New Testament, the early Church, the Reformation Church, and the Wesleyan revival." *War on Two Fronts: The Redemptive Theology of William Booth* (Atlanta: The Salvation Army, 1989), 54-55.

<sup>12</sup>It should be noted that this was written in connection with the change of name of the Army's journal from *The Christian Mission Magazine* to *The Salvationist*.

<sup>13</sup>William Booth, "Our New Name—The Salvationist," found in *The Founder Speaks Again: A Selection of the Writings of William Booth* (London: The Salvation Army, 1960), 45-48.

became the General. An autocratic form of leadership emerged and, like a conquering Army, the fingers of the Salvation Army were stretched around the world. Roger J. Green explains that at this time Booth's theology began to move from individual categories to institutional categories. Indeed, William Booth saw his Salvation Army as institutionally sanctified to bring about the Kingdom of God on earth.<sup>14</sup>

It is at this juncture that the universal eschatology of William Booth sharpened into focus. His Salvation Army was, in his mind, the vehicle that would facilitate the coming millennium. Within eight years of the 1878 name change, the Salvation Army exploded to include 1,749 corps and 4,129 officers.<sup>15</sup> Indicative of this time is Booth's commissioning of a corporate eschatological task: "Go to them all. The whole fourteen hundred millions [sic]. Don't despair. *It can be done*. It SHALL BE DONE. God has sent The Salvation Army on the task. If every saint on earth would do his duty, it *could* be done effectually in the next ten years. If the Salvation Army will be true to God, it *will* be done during the next fifty" [emphasis Booth's].<sup>16</sup>

Battle images were rigorously employed as the Salvation Army sought to identify itself along the lines of an army. The Salvation Army was, as one author has said, a group of "soldiers without swords,"<sup>17</sup> whose mission had a singular focus of winning the world for Christ. Did the military metaphor create its own reality as a result of the way that its adherents adopted its mission? Booth and his Army saw themselves in a fight with a supreme purpose. Within the realm of historical theology it is easy to conclude that the Salvation Army's militarism developed an eschatological ecclesiology that rearticulated what God's people were to

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<sup>14</sup>See William Booth's article "The Millennium," 341. In this article Booth paints a picture of the coming millennial kingdom that envisions London as the New Jerusalem.

<sup>15</sup>Robert Sandal, *The History of The Salvation Army*. 7 vols. (London: The Salvation Army, 1947-1966, vols. 1-3 by Sandal, vols. 4-5 by Arch Wiggins, vol. 6 by Fredrick Coutts, vol. 7 by Henry Gariepy), 2:338.

<sup>16</sup>William Booth, "Go!" *All the World* (November, 1884) found in *The General's Letters, 1885* (London: International Headquarters, 1890), 7. This demonstrates an amazing parallel between Booth and Charles G. Finney, particularly Finney's claim in 1835 that if the church does its job the millennium could come in three years.

<sup>17</sup>Herbert Andrew Wisby, *Soldiers without Swords* (New York: Macmillan, 1955).

be about in this world. The metaphor of an army “marching through the land” created new ways to express the mission of God. William Booth could challenge his troops the same way a military general would. Concepts such as suffering could be explored within the military metaphor in a way that traditional churches could not.

Calling its members to risk their lives for the gospel of Jesus Christ could be swallowed within the metaphoric Army. For Booth joining the Army as a soldier meant a risk; it meant that in the great salvation war one might sacrifice his or her own self interest for the greatest good of winning the world for Christ. In an article titled, “The War Spirit” Booth challenged his soldiers to consider “the destiny of millions . . . [that] is hanging in the balance—depending to an awful extent on the enthusiastic, skillful, and self-sacrificing, [sic] conduct, and maintenance of this war. . . . Let us go back to the example of our Great *Commander-in-Chief* . . . and follow him. . . . Yours for the thick of the fight, William Booth.”<sup>18</sup> Around such battle cries of its General, the Army went to war. Suffering in the battle was further understood in light of eschatological rewards. Suffering is often accompanied by themes of eternal victory. An example of this is the song quoted earlier, which proclaims that the soldier is to go “to suffer *and triumph*” (emphasis mine).

***Suffering for Christ.*** William Booth often described the activity and mission of the Army, and implicitly its rich ecclesiological tradition, as “the fight.”<sup>19</sup> What did he mean by fighting? He explains that “A good soldier is always a fighting man. . . . Fighting means hardship and labour, and hunger, and wounds, and suffering, and life-sorrow and death.”<sup>20</sup> The suffering in the throws of the fight for the Salvationist is “for” Christ. The “fight” was a service for the Lord, and for early Salvationists anything done on behalf of Christ’s kingdom was worth earthly pain.

Booth was very clear about the perils involved in the salvation war. In his article “The Risks,” he challenges soldiers to “Come out and place yourselves, with every power you possess for doing or suffering at the

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<sup>18</sup>William Booth, *The General’s Letter*, 73.

<sup>19</sup>References to this claim are abounding. See his statement in the *Salvation Soldiery*, 53; The Article entitled “Fight!” *All The World 1* (May 1885): 112-114.

<sup>20</sup>Booth, *Salvation Soldiery: A Series of Addresses on the Requirements of Jesus Christ’s Service* (London: The Salvation Army, 1889), 53.



Master's feet."<sup>21</sup> This statement shows that suffering is done for Christ; suffering is something sacrificed for Jesus Christ himself. Often, Booth and early Army writers compared suffering for Christ to the sufferings of Christ on the cross. An early leader in the Salvation Army, George Scott Railton, who officially led the Army's expansion to the United States, challenged: "Let cowards seek an easier way / And win the praise of men / Cross bearing, dying day by day / Is still the Master's plan."<sup>22</sup> William Booth's son-in-law, Fredrick Booth-Tucker, wrote a hymn published in the *War Cry* on August 14, 1897, that is still sung today when new officers are commissioned: "They say the fighting is too hard / My strength of small avail / When foes beset and friends are fled / My faith must surely fail / But, O how can I quit my post / While millions sin-bound lie? / I cannot leave the dear old flag / 'Twere better far to die."<sup>23</sup>

Suffering for Christ also had an evangelistic aim. The risks of suffering in the fight can help to achieve the goal of others being drawn to the Gospel. Booth explained, "Whenever men suffer for Christ's sake, not only does God draw near to bless, but men draw near to enquire."<sup>24</sup> The eschatological focus of William Booth's theology was accompanied by his understanding that Christians should give of themselves (i.e., suffer) to bring the world to Jesus Christ. When comparing the relationship of suffering to the eschatological task, Booth explained, "Suffering and saving are terms of almost the same significance in the Christian's career. If he suffers for Christ he saves, and if he saves he suffers. These men [the apostles] suffered for Christ, and saved with a vengeance. If they had dodged the suffering they would have never saved at all."<sup>25</sup>

***Suffering to Christ.*** A theology of suffering was articulated in 1884 by William Booth in an article simply titled, "Go!" This article appeared in the Salvation Army's international periodical *All the World*. Booth explains that it is the task of all Christians, as expressed in Mark

<sup>21</sup>Booth, *The General's Letters, 1885* (London: International Headquarters, 1890), 20.

<sup>22</sup>Quoted in Allen Satterlee, *Notable Quotables: A Compendium of Gems from Salvation Army Literature* (Atlanta: The Salvation Army, 1985), 211.

<sup>23</sup>Fredrick Booth-Tucker, "They Bid Me Choose an Easier Path," *The Song Book of The Salvation Army* (London: The Salvation Army International Headquarters, 1987), 215.

<sup>24</sup>Booth, *Salvation Soldierly*, 44.

<sup>25</sup>Booth, *The General's Letters*, 5.

16:15, to “Go into all the world.” He explains that “Going meant suffering to Christ: it meant this to the Apostles. They went to the world: this meant going to scorn, poverty, stripes, imprisonment, death—cruel deaths. If you go, you will have to suffer; there is no other way of going.”<sup>26</sup> What is implied by the three words “suffering to Christ”?

In this quote William Booth explains that intrinsic to Christian life is suffering. When Christ called his followers to “go,” he expected that they would suffer because of their going. Hence, Jesus thought going into the world meant suffering for the person who answered the call. Just as going meant suffering to the disciples, going meant suffering to Jesus. Booth demonstrates how the apostles followed this call and Salvationists should expect to find the same suffering along their way. The metaphor of a Salvation Army enabled the reader to understand the seriousness of Jesus’ call.

Another way to understand William Booth’s challenge in this article is through Booth’s social theology that valued all of humanity as created in the image of God. “Going” then means serving Christ in the form of hurting individuals. If the Spirit of Christ resides in individual Salvationists, then Christ suffers with these individuals. Conversely, if the people the Army serves in the “slums” cause soldiers to suffer, then their suffering is to Christ. Booth saw his service not only *for* Christ, but *to* Christ as well. When Christian soldiers are serving their neighbors, they are serving Christ. For such a mandate consider Jesus’ words in Matthew 25:40, “just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (NRSV). Catherine Booth, who has been called the “cofounder”<sup>27</sup> of the Salvation Army, also recognized the significance of suffering with the poor: “Oh, for grace always to see Him where He is to be seen, for verily, flesh and blood doth not reveal this unto us! Well . . . I keep seeing Him risen again in the forms of drunkards and ruffians of all descriptions.”<sup>28</sup>

In the same way, Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37) redefines the way that humanity looks at “neighbors.” William Booth recognized the importance of this passage for early Salvation Army hospi-

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<sup>26</sup>William Booth, *The General’s Letters*, 5.

<sup>27</sup>See Roger J. Green, *Catherine Booth: Cofounder of the Salvation Army* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996).

<sup>28</sup>Catherine Booth, quoted in Bramwell Booth, *These Fifty Years* (London: Cassel, 1929), 45-46.

tality ministries as he framed this pericope in sacramental terms, (which is somewhat ironic for a non-practicing-sacramental denomination), by urging soldiers “to observe continually the sacrament of the Good Samaritan.”<sup>29</sup>

Such an incarnational perspective shaped a distinct missional ecclesiology. Similarly, Bramwell Booth illustrated:

When I see the poor, shivering creatures gathered in the warmth and comfort of our Shelters, and the famished ones in the Food Depots, and the workless hard at work, and the lost and lonely in the bright hopefulness of the Women’s and Children Homes, and the prisoners—set in happy families in our Harbours of Refuge, my heart sings for joy, and I say, “*Is not this the Christ come again?*” If he came now to London and Boston and New York and Melbourne and Tokio [sic], as He came to Jerusalem and Nazareth and Caesarea, would He not want to do exactly this? I believe He would!<sup>30</sup>

“Suffering to Christ” is a theme that encapsulates William Booth’s ecclesiology in a unique and powerful way. Suffering was an intrinsic aspect of the identity of Salvationists. Booth saw this as a call of Christ, and his incarnational Army saw the need of seeing Christ in those whom they served. If one was merely called to suffer “for” Christ, then obligation might overcast a call that is vital to the Salvationist’s identity. Instead, Salvationists suffered because they were Christians; they suffered because they served others as if they were Christ himself.

***Suffering Salvationists.*** The stark change that occurred in the lives of sinners who joined the ranks of the Salvation Army had an impact on social and economic factors of many given areas. The business of bars and pubs dropped drastically with the absence of their best customers who were now abstaining soldiers.<sup>31</sup> There are many incidents in the Army’s history of mobs forming to combat its open-air meetings. In the

<sup>29</sup>William Booth, quoted in Sandall, *The History of The Salvation Army*, 3:59; Fairbank, *Booth’s Boots: Social Service Beginnings in The Salvation Army* (London: The Salvation Army, 1983), 184; Philip Needham, “Towards A Re-Integration of the Salvationist Mission,” in *Creed and Deed: Toward a Christian Theology of Social Services in The Salvation Army*, ed. Waldron (Oakville, Ontario: The Salvation Army, 1986), 14.

<sup>30</sup>Bramwell Booth: *Papers on Life and Religion* (London: The Salvation Army, 1920), 125.

<sup>31</sup>See Sandall, *The History of the Salvation Army*, 2:170-198.

1880s, opposition groups were organized and often called *Skeleton Armies*.<sup>32</sup> Often the *Skeleton* constituents were the bar managers and brewers of a given town. In one case the *Skeletons* were a full fledged copy of the Salvation Army soldiers with their own uniforms, flags, and bass drums. In 1882, at the height of the Army's expansion, the Army officially noted that 669 soldiers and officers had been "knocked down, kicked, or otherwise brutally assaulted," forty percent of these people being women and children.<sup>33</sup>

The salvation war produced two persons promoted to glory, two martyrs, Captain Sarah Broadbent and Captain Susan Beaty. In 1884, while serving in Worthing, Broadbent decided to hold a prayer meeting instead of an open air meeting since the open airs had caused pandemonium in her town. That evening the mobs were surprised not to find the local corps in the streets. Sandall described tragic events that followed: "[The opposition group] marched to Showham [the location of the corps in the town], smashed all the windows of the corps hall there, and in the course of the rioting the officer in charge (Captain Sarah J. Broadbent) received her death-blow from a flying stone."<sup>34</sup> Beaty's promotion was more gradual. In the midst of a mob attack in Hastings, she was repeatedly kicked; her death in 1889 was said to have been caused by internal injuries from the incident.<sup>35</sup> Throughout the next several years Salvationists sustained multiple injuries in the heat of the battle—from Samuel Logan Brengle, who was sidelined for being hit in the head by a brick, to Major Euguen Nsingaini who in 1998, during his country's civil war, was gunned down in the Congo because of his participation in a peace initiative.<sup>36</sup>

If there is any theological way of understanding this commitment to the battle, it is through the Salvation Army's Wesleyan roots. The passion-

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<sup>32</sup>For more information on these groups, see Glen K. Horridge, *The Salvation Army Origins and Early Days: 1865-1900* (Surrey: Ammonite, 1993), 92-100. He explains that an opposition group in Whitechapel called themselves the *Unconverted Salvation Army*. Similarly in Guildford, a group called itself the "Red (-Nose) Army."

<sup>33</sup>Sandall, *The History of the Salvation Army*, 2:181. Sandall explains that these numbers are likely incomplete.

<sup>34</sup>Sandall, *The History of the Salvation Army*, 2:180-181.

<sup>35</sup>See Pamela J. Walker, *Pulling the Devil's Kingdom Down: The Salvation Army in Victorian Britain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 224-227.

<sup>36</sup>*The Officer* (December, 1998).

ate way that Salvationists lived and proclaimed the doctrine of holiness sustained them during the fight. The Army took the torch from John Wesley, who had understood that holiness was social and personal. Totally loving God and neighbor was possible only through the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. Brengle appropriately underscores a Salvationist ecclesiology of suffering when he said the Lord's "greatest servants have often been the greatest sufferers. They have gathered up in themselves and endured all the pains and woes, sorrows and agonies, fierce and cruel martyrdoms of humanity, and so have been able to minister to all its vast and pitiful needs, and comfort its voiceless sorrow."<sup>37</sup>

### **Evaluating the Army's Ecclesiology**

William Booth's ecclesiology was one that dramatically called the church to consider its call to mission and expect to suffer while going about that mission. Such an ecclesiological understanding was developed as the eschatologically focused Army understood itself to be in a battle to save the world. The kingdom of Christ and the gospel of that kingdom found a new expression in Booth's Salvation Army. When looking critically at the life of William Booth, it is easy to see that he was an imperfect man. His autocratic leadership was a weakness that expressed itself in poor relationships with three of his children who left the ministry of the Salvation Army. Another weakness is that at times his eschatology verged on viewing the Army as the sole agent for bringing in the millennium.

Theologically, there are many ways that Booth was "rough around the edges." One area, however, where he was theologically on target was his ecclesiology. His doctrine of the church incorporated the place of the church as a restoring agent in the world. This eschatologically motivated ecclesiology, which called people to suffer for Christ, is a rich theological heritage that the contemporary Army has inherited. Evaluating William Booth's ecclesiology today is a task that is of great significance for the contemporary Salvation Army as it seeks an historically informed mission. Scholars of the Salvation Army often assume that, because Booth's ecclesiology was conditioned by his eschatology, his ecclesiology was insufficient. This study is a call for a revision of the Salvation Army's historiography.

Contemporary scholars do not always view the impact of William Booth's eschatology in a positive light. Some assume that his eschatology,

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<sup>37</sup>Samuel Logan Brengle, quoted in Sally Chesham, *Peace Like a River* (Atlanta: The Salvation Army, 1981), 123.

particularly his understanding of the millennium, created a deficient ecclesiology. Such a position is taken by Salvation Army scholar Roger Green<sup>38</sup> who concludes that the contemporary Salvation Army has inherited a “weak ecclesiology.”<sup>39</sup> He asserts that Booth’s ecclesiology was weak for two reasons: his postmillennialism and the distancing of the Army from the institutional church after the failed merger with the Church of England. The latter claim is not being challenged here; rather, the question is Green’s claim that Booth’s postmillennialism contributed to a weak ecclesiology. Green states: “Postmillennial theology does not comport well with a strong ecclesiology, especially when one’s doctrine of the Church is seen primarily through Army lenses.”<sup>40</sup>

A definition is needed for the term “weak.” It appears that Green is suggesting that “weak” is a lack of strength. His argument that the contemporary Army has inherited a weak ecclesiology seems to have two points of contention. His first argument is that postmillennialism does not create a lasting ecclesiology because it supposedly did not plan for the future. His second argument is that Booth was ecclesiastically inconsistent in his definitions of the Army’s *raison d’ete*. Green’s second claim demands a distinction between ecclesiastical structures and ecclesiology. Booth was inconsistent when speaking ecclesiastically. His unpredictable ecclesiastic language refers more to the organization of the movement, whereas, suggesting that Booth possessed a “weak ecclesiology” is proposing that he had an incomplete doctrine of the church. Green’s final point of argument is that Booth’s ecclesiology is weak because it de-emphasized ecclesiastical structures. In fact, Booth was proposing an alternative structure that was far more effective than the ecclesiastical structures of his day.

The pragmatically-minded William Booth saw a great eschatological goal. That goal was saving the world. Despite Green’s claim that postmillennialism does not comport well with a sturdy ecclesiology, the opposite can be seen in the denominations that were birthed as a result of the nine-

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<sup>38</sup>The scholarship of Roger Green has been very important to me. Many Salvationists around the world are the beneficiaries of his research. The discussion that follows does not reduce my admiration for his scholarship.

<sup>39</sup>Roger J. Green, “Facing History: Our Way Ahead for a Salvationist Theology.” *Word and Deed* 1:2 (May, 1999): 23-39, 29.

<sup>40</sup>Roger Green, “Facing History: Our Way Ahead for a Salvationist Theology,” 29.

teenth-century holiness revival.<sup>41</sup> For instance, the Wesleyan and Free Methodist churches were born out of desire to see ecclesiology matched with mission in the world. These denominations are noted for their stands against slavery.

William Booth was continually defining the early Army, his letters and sermons giving regular emphasis (sometimes *overemphasis*) to what it meant to be a Salvationist. This provided an ecclesial self-understanding for the young Army. An implicit ecclesiology that lacks classical formulation does not necessarily mean a “weak” ecclesiology. Booth’s writings are saturated with ecclesiological statements concerning the mission and aims of the Army. What is implicit is direct theological definition about ecclesiology. His inconsistent ecclesiastical jargon does not negate the content and missional purpose of those statements.

Sociologically this creates difficulties in identifying the Salvation Army as a “church” or “sect” along the lines of the typology of Ernst Troeltsch and others. Sociological difficulties do not, however, necessitate theological deficiency.<sup>42</sup> At the forefront of Roger Green’s argument is his desire to see the Army move toward church-like categories. Green notes, “I have long been convinced that the only way to approach a correct historical analysis that leads to a truthful institutional self-understanding is to impose the sect/church distinctions developed in the discipline of sociology upon ourselves.”<sup>43</sup> He then encourages Salvationists to accept the “historical fact” that the Army has moved from being a sect to a church and should hence evaluate what sectarian distinctives should be maintained.<sup>44</sup>

In contrast to Green, I assert the following. Missionally-directed movements are not governed by sociology; they are motivated by God’s word, which challenges them to be an active body “preaching the Gospel

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<sup>41</sup>See Donald Dayton, *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage* (Hendrickson Publishers, 1976).

<sup>42</sup>See Roland Robertson’s helpful study of the Salvation Army using this typology in “The Salvation Army: the Persistence of Sectarianism,” in Brian R. Wilson, ed. *Patterns of Sectarianism* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1967), 49-105; Andrew Mark Eason, “The Salvation Army in Late-Victorian Britain: The Convergence of Church and Sect,” *Word and Deed* 5:2 (May 2003): 29-50.

<sup>43</sup>Green, “Facing History,” 29.

<sup>44</sup>The chief sectarian distinction Green opposes is postmillennialism. He maintains that the Army should retain wearing the uniform as a symbol of the sacramental life. See Green, “Facing History,” 30-31.

of Jesus Christ and meeting human needs in his name without discrimination.”<sup>45</sup> When mission directs the church, it forms an alternative ecclesiology that is often more in tune with Scripture than the sociologically classified “church” or “denomination.”

To criticize William Booth’s ecclesiology as “weak” is to force his missionally-directed movement into a box of intellectual abstractions. Booth’s ecclesiology was missional. He was unconcerned with theological abstractions and discussions. Philip Needham’s book *Community in Mission* rightly places a Salvationist ecclesiology in the context of mission. The ecclesiological thesis of this work is that “a Salvationist ecclesiology stands as a reminder to the Church that its mission in the world is primary and that the life of the Church ought largely to be shaped by a basic commitment to mission.”<sup>46</sup> A missional ecclesiology is exactly where the Army should be if it is to be at all true to its historical and theological heritage.

Because Green uses the term “weak,” it is difficult to distinguish what ecclesiology he is assuming to be adequate for the contemporary Salvation Army. He maintains that the Salvation Army must embrace a view of history that is different from Booth’s postmillennialism.<sup>47</sup> He proposes that the Army shed any trace of postmillennialism and suggests that Salvationists embrace the biblical language of the Kingdom of God when looking at history. This proposal is warmly welcomed, for such language is indeed something that the contemporary Army should embrace, but the spirit of William Booth’s millennialism is not to be set against this language. When moving toward the future, the Army must evaluate its her-

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<sup>45</sup>*The Salvation Army 2004 Year Book* (London: The Salvation Army International Headquarters, 2004), iii.

<sup>46</sup>Philip Needham, *Community in Mission: A Salvationist Ecclesiology* (Atlanta: The Salvation Army Supplies, 1987), 4-5. Needham’s discussion is intentionally inward focused toward the Army. This focus is the book’s strength and simultaneously its weakness. *Community in Mission* is a supplemental response to the Army’s response to the Lima Document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. His argument about the sacraments falls into the category of defense rather than explanation. The Salvation Army cannot continue to defend its sacramental position from a spiritualist hermeneutic that tends toward a type of sacramental doceticism, which overemphasizes the spiritual over the physical. See Rightmire, *Sacraments and the Salvation Army*, 242-245.

<sup>47</sup>Green illustrates, “The postmillennial theology of the Booth’s simply will not do here [when trying to posit an understanding of the future].” “Facing History,” 36.



itage in order to progress with historically directed confidence. It seems that the ecclesiological heritage that William Booth fashioned for his Army is something that should be maintained. Why? Because this ecclesiology keeps the Salvation Army focused on mission and keeps alive and inter-related the themes of suffering and holiness.

### **Conclusion**

William Booth's functional, biblically based, missional ecclesiology was formed alongside the metaphor of an Army. This metaphor created new ways for the mission of God to be expressed in the world, particularly as it related to suffering. Booth called the Salvation Army to suffer as it lived out its ecclesiology; suffering went hand in hand with being a soldier. The pulse of this ecclesiology was William Booth's eschatology. His impassioned desire to win the world for Jesus produced a missional ecclesiology. He saw the church as necessarily active, commenting: ". . . there can be no question that it is of God that those who are on the Lord's side should aim at this great and godlike purpose [defeat the devil and deliver souls from hell], and direct and devote all their energies to its accomplishment."<sup>48</sup> The question is not whether the Army has a "weak" or "strong" ecclesiology, but whether it is faithful to Jesus and the gospel of his kingdom and whether it is functional today. The contemporary Salvation Army has inherited an ecclesiology from William Booth that is faithful in these things—this legacy is worthy of the Army's time and celebration.

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<sup>48</sup>William Booth, "A Good Soldier of Jesus Christ," *The Founder Speaks Again* (London: The Salvation Army, 1960), 49.

# TOWARD A WESLEYAN THEOLOGY OF FAILURE

by

Lori Haynes Niles

In a tribute last year to John Wesley at the University Church of Saint Mary the Virgin, Oxford, the Reverend Ralph D. Waller offered this analysis of Wesley's life:

Written across great tracks of his life is the word "failure." He was a failed missionary who never converted any native Americans [sic]. He failed to revive the Church of England as the Jesuits had revived the Church of Rome. He failed to keep Methodism within the Church of England, which had always been his intention. He failed to reform the University of Oxford, which was probably harder than reviving the Church of England. He failed to keep English and American Methodism united. He failed with all his girlfriends, indeed he was so naïve that to one of them he read church history, and when she got engaged to someone else he excommunicated her. He failed in his marriage and, although there were moments of tenderness, he and his wife were condemned to 30 years of unhappiness. He failed to appoint the right members of staff when he opened his school at Kingswood. The first two school masters he engaged were both part-time highwaymen, who not only embezzled his building fund, but supplemented their teachers' salaries by riding over to the main Bristol to London Road when lessons had finished, to hold up stage coaches.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ralph Weller. *John Wesley*. Sermon delivered at The University Church of Saint Mary the Virgin, Oxford, 5 February 2006. Available from [http://www.university-church.ox.ac.uk/sermons/documents/Waller\\_HT06.doc](http://www.university-church.ox.ac.uk/sermons/documents/Waller_HT06.doc) viewed 12 January, 2007.

Indeed, John Wesley was, in his own right, a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief and its associated suffering. Yet, in the midst of seasons of great failure, Wesley was formed into a man of God known for his optimism about “the transforming potential of God’s grace for our lives and our world.”<sup>2</sup> This Wesleyan optimism was and continues to be an alternative to perpetual suffering as the result of our own failures, a way of recasting failure into the fodder of spiritual formation, as it was in Wesley’s personal life.

Wesley was passionately, if not morbidly, self-reflective and he desired no less for those who would call themselves followers after his tradition. In fact, the method of Methodism itself, both by its design and in the pastoral care mediated through the structures of the class meeting and witnessed by Wesley’s own pastoral writings, can be interpreted as more than a strategic plan for entering into Christian perfection. It also was a strategy for dealing with human imperfection along a continuum of behavior from “sin rightfully called so (voluntary transgression of the known law)” through “involuntary transgression of a Divine law, known or unknown,” all of which are in need of atoning blood in the Christ-like life.<sup>3</sup>

### Types of Failure

In articulating those actions which give offense to God, Wesley’s teaching and preaching deals extensively with what might be called moral failures—gross sins that break the known will of God. However, he also documents sin that results from the failure to properly execute the known will of God,<sup>4</sup> which might be called “executorial failure.” In his own life,

<sup>2</sup>Randy Maddox. “Wesley’s Prescription for Making Disciples of Jesus Christ: Insights for the 21st Century Church,” Available from [http://www.pulpitandpew.duke.edu/maddox%20paper\\_9-23-02.pdf](http://www.pulpitandpew.duke.edu/maddox%20paper_9-23-02.pdf), viewed 12 January, 2007.

<sup>3</sup>Wesley’s “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection,” carefully laid out the differences between “sin” and “not sin” for the purposes of discussion of the doctrine of Christian perfection. A doctrine of “Christian imperfection,” rather than being contrary to Christian perfection, may indeed be complimentary and necessary to the practical mechanisms involved in the development of Christ-likeness. For a discussion of this complementarity principle based on the work of Alfred North Whitehead, see Kenton Stiles, “Disfiguring Harmony: Reconciliation, Mark C. Taylor, and Postmodern Theological Aesthetics,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 2002 (134-136).

<sup>4</sup>See “*Letter to Richard Morgan*,” March 15, 1734; “*Letter to Vincent Pironet*,” December 1748; “*Letter to Miss March*,” May 13, 1762, as well as “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection.”

Wesley seems to have suffered from what James Fowler identifies as a highly dominant superego.<sup>5</sup> This psychodynamic observation may have led to the question posed by Martin Schmidt: Was Wesley able to look at himself dispassionately enough to acknowledge moral failures except in times of crisis? The rest of the time, Wesley seems to have acknowledged only executorial failures in his own life: not pursuing goals to their end point, not correcting others more passionately, not being firm enough in his pastoral admonitions.<sup>6</sup> Yet, the times of crisis, though perhaps few, were significant in Wesley’s personal development through the life cycle.

To better understand the types of failure illustrated by Wesley’s life, documented in his pastoral care and addressed in the formulation of his methods, it may be helpful to construct a diagram which places both moral failure and executorial failure in a spatial representation. These failures of action or behavior may be seen represented on the Y axis of Figure 1. Wesley also acknowledged another kind of failure, not properly called sin. These are involuntary transgressions and are the result of ignorance and the human condition.<sup>7</sup> The X axis therefore represents not types of failure, but the nature of the knowledge behind the failure and/or the level of willfulness behind the failure.

**FIGURE 1**

Executorial Failure	Sins of Omission	Ignorance
Moral Failure	Sins of Commission	Human Error (no moral culpability)
	Known (Volitional)	Unknown

(Non-volitional)

<sup>5</sup>James Fowler, “John Wesley’s Development in Faith,” in *The Future of the Methodist Theological Traditions*, edited by M. Douglas Meeks (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 172-192.

<sup>6</sup>Martin Schmidt, *John Wesley: A Theological Biography*, Vol. II, Part II, Translated by Denis Inman (Nashville, Abingdon, 1973), 171.

<sup>7</sup>Wesley, (54).

Thus, using the mechanism of the diagram for reference, we postulate that those actions or events in our lives that can be characterized as failure (or Christian Imperfection) can be subsumed under four categories: Sins of Commission, Sins of Omission, Human Error, and Ignorance. These distinctions are important, not because they allow us to play mental management games to soothe our consciences and mitigate our suffering through distribution of guilty feelings into the arenas we feel most adept at negotiating, but because both the appropriate community response and the spiritually formative outcomes of each category have unique import in our development as the Body of Christ, corporately and individually. Practical we must be if we are to justly deal with a topic that includes such emotionally volatile and potentially transformative material as our own failure to live out that to which we are called in the holiness lifestyle.

**Sins of Commission.** To briefly analyze the kind of failures that might fall into each category, we begin in the lower left hand quadrant with Sins of Commission. These are properly called sins because they involve the knowing and volitional violation of God’s will. We know sin when we see it. It is in direct violation of God’s word or our covenant with God. An act that fits into this quadrant involves moral culpability, often premeditation, and violates the spirit as well as the letter of the law. One can “fall into” failure in this category through a lapse in judgment, not being diligent in resisting temptation, or not attending to underlying psychological, spiritual, and/or physical needs that then drive behavior beyond the limits of self-control. One can also consciously choose to rebel for a variety of reasons, including self-centeredness, motivations for revenge, anger at God, or grasping at a reward for good behavior. The consequences of this type of failure, particularly for Christian leaders, are often devastating to both the self and the community.

While it doesn’t take much imagination to reach into our own life histories and identify examples of such moral failure, an example from the Oscar-nominated film *Notes on a Scandal*<sup>8</sup> provides a vivid and sympathetic portrait of moral failure in our day, and illustrates the psychological facileness the human mind is blessed with. Having recently returned to the work world after dutifully parenting her Down’s Syndrome son and rebellious daughter in a marriage that is portrayed as stable, but less than

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<sup>8</sup>*Notes on a Scandal*. Dir. Richard Eyre, Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2006.

fulfilling, Sheba Hart is romantically pursued by her talented 16-year-old art student. Despite her moral hesitation, she eventually agrees to and then becomes obsessed with the relationship. When caught by a colleague, Sheba agrees that, of course, she should take responsibility for violating the law and her commitments, but reveals the tangled path that led to her “indiscretion,” culminating in her insight that she had been so good for so long that she felt somehow entitled to break the rules. In the world portrayed in the film, where God plays only a background role, if that, the focus becomes the psychological drama of cover-up. Yet, notably, it is only when her moral failure comes fully into the open that she is able to engage in the restoration of her shattered life. This portrayal of the human means of dealing with moral failure reveals underlying psychodynamic principles which must be addressed in the context of Christian community if we are to be people who can overcome moral failure, or “sin, properly called so.”

The role of the community in the face of such acts, according to Galatians 6, is to (1) confront the sin, (2) identify with the condition of the sinner, (3) support in repentance (implied), (4) bear witness to forgiveness of the sin (implied), (5) offer restoration to the community, and (6) journey together through the consequences. The personal formational outcomes of journeying through this quadrant of failure may be the most transformational of all. It requires the acceptance of grace as evidenced and mediated through the community as the only means to healing. The individual must put aside pride and self-reliance and in the process becomes not only bonded but dependent on the community as a means of grace.

**Human Error.** Human error is characterized by an act that is morally significant, but not knowingly or intentionally wrong. A concrete example of Human Error might be the best tool for understanding its defining qualities.

For several years, physicians administered a class of drugs intended to provide pain relief for patients experiencing joint pain. Acting with good intent, many doctors unwittingly contributed to side effects that resulted in patient deaths. The drug companies were not aware of the severity of the consequences, neither were the physicians. The results were morally significant (death), but there was no intent or culpability *until* results of studies demonstrated the negative outcomes. The act

(helping a patient) was a failure (the patient was not helped, but harmed). The research became the tool of accountability that revealed the error of the act. Once the results were clear, any further act of prescribing would have been rightly placed in the quadrant of a sin of commission.

The natural result of human error is pain and suffering, but an act of human error cannot rightly be considered sin. We can be in human error as a result of a lack of knowledge (either objective or subjective). However, once the error is revealed, the individual must move any continuation of the action into the quadrant of either a sin of commission or a sin of omission. Once there is knowledge (either objective, subjective, or both) the actor becomes morally responsible for the act, despite energies directed toward self-justification.

We are living in an age where our consciences could be said to be limited by our culture. While conscience bears subjective witness to right and wrong, it may not be dependable given the media backdrop, family histories, and other factors that are common in our population. For example, divorce no longer seems to be a moral issue in light of the number of families in which divorce has become normative practice. Similarly, sexual behaviors that once would have been considered blatantly wrong in a different cultural milieu are dwarfed by “worse sins.” At the recent M7 conference of the Church of the Nazarene, *Brio Magazine* editor Susie Shellenberger recounted a letter she had received from a teen girl telling about taking showers with her boyfriend, while clearly stating her commitment to the principle of sexual purity. The girl wondered if she was *objectively* wrong because she didn’t subjectively *feel* wrong about the behavior since she was violating no particular biblical law or command.

When making moral judgments, a feeling of conviction might be one indicator of moral failure, but the lack of feeling conviction about a moral behavior is not reliable given our nominally-theistic cultural context. If feelings are the criteria for our moral judgments, we may be sacrificing some other important ways of knowing, which is why community discernment is as relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as it was in the 18<sup>th</sup>. Shellenberger was being asked to “weigh in” as a trusted representative of the girl’s Christian community. Her experience gives witness to the significance of the need for this type of community in the local context.

The responsibility of the community is to use Scripture, reason, and experience to reveal truth and to teach each other (Is. 1:17-19; Titus 2; Rom 15:14-16), but the individual must then take in the correction and

own the consequences of the act. The personal formational outcomes of successfully negotiating this quadrant include taking personal responsibility for restitution, and the discipline of submission to the wisdom of the community.

**Ignorance.** The third quadrant is that of Ignorance in which there is a failure both to will and to do. This ignorance can rightly be seen as immaturity. It cannot be seen as a sin because there is no intent to avoid action; there is simply no mechanism of knowledge to motivate action. Likewise, there is no intentional act of rebellion or disobedience; there is only the expression of natural inclination. The responsibility of the community is to introduce knowledge of righteousness, to model, to offer shared practice, and to provide developmentally appropriate nourishment for righteousness (Matt. 28:19-20; 1 Cor. 3; 1 Tim. 4). As the individual receives the ministry of the community through teaching, modeling, and shared practice, the individual comes to value the role of community. This is true whether the individual is a child of the faith community or a new convert to Christianity. The community may appropriately assume some responsibility for the consequences of the acts of the immature believer without undermining that individual's personal responsibility. Intervention is simply shared responsibility for those "weaker in the faith" that will eventually be replaced by the mature believer's personal accountability. The spiritual formation outcome for the individual is bonding to the community that nourishes him or her, and trust that the community is fair and dependable. From a faith development perspective, these are foundational to further growth and identification with the body of believers.<sup>9</sup>

**Sins of Omission.** The final quadrant of failure is Sins of Omission. This quadrant is characterized by the concept of knowing to do good, but not doing it (Jas. 4:17). Wesley seems to have perceived this area of particular import to those striving to live the holy life:

Beware of sins of omission; lose no opportunity of doing good in any kind. Be zealous of good works; willingly omit no work, either of piety or mercy. Do all the good you possibly can to the bodies and souls of men. Particularly, "thou shalt in anywise reprove thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him."

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<sup>9</sup>John Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* Revised and expanded (Toronto: Anglican Book Center, 1976). Both James Fowler and Robert Keegan also address trust as foundational for affiliation with the faith community.



Be active. Give no place to indolence or sloth; give no occasion to say, "Ye are idle, ye are idle." Many will say so still; but let your whole spirit and behaviour refute the slander. Be always employed; lose no shred of time; gather up the fragments, that nothing be lost. And whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might. Be "slow to speak," and wary in speaking. "In a multitude of words there wanteth not sin." Do not talk much; neither long at a time. Few can converse profitably above an hour. Keep at the utmost distance from pious chit-chat, from religious gossiping.<sup>10</sup>

It is important to recognize that this exhortation is not an invitation to works as a means of salvation, but as evidence of perfect love flowing from faith.<sup>11</sup>

This is the quadrant of procrastination, comfort keeping, and observational rather than participatory life in the Spirit. These things, from a Wesleyan perspective, are sin. The role of the community in such cases is encouragement and motivation that comes through the sharing of life and witness (Gal. 6: 9; 1 Thess. 5; Heb. 3). Yet it is the individual who must choose to respond with action, even if that action be in community context. No one can force an individual out of the "failure grid." That takes an act of personal volition. The formational outcomes of successful negotiation of failure in this quadrant are increasing self-discipline and works of well-doing.

It is important to note that the above quadrants of failure are intended to be seen against the ground of the justified life and includes the necessity of a Mediator in the person of Christ.<sup>12</sup> This "picture" does not address initial sanctification in the context of the unbeliever, but ongoing sanctification in the context of the growing Christian life. This conceptualization is not intended to imply that all Christians are perpetually abiding in one of the four quadrants, nor that one cannot backslide or turn away and give in to a lifestyle of Christian failure or sin. It does imply that this framework is useful for understanding and acting within the Christian community under the salvific lordship and power of Jesus Christ, so that we might continue to grow in his likeness, even in the midst of significant failure to meet the goal.

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<sup>10</sup>Wesley, (101).

<sup>11</sup>John Wesley. Edited by Thomas Jackson. *Sermon 5 Justification by Faith* (1872 edition).

<sup>12</sup>Wesley (53).

It may be evident in this journey through the quadrants of failure, the associated community obligations, and the personal formational opportunities, that two of the quadrants provide special opportunities for dependence on community, while two provide special opportunities for taking personal responsibility, both of which are markers of maturity in the spiritual life. A balanced view of spiritual formation requires responses that are rooted both in independence and interdependence and opportunities for journeying on both apophatic (*Via Negativa*) and kataphatic (*Via Positiva*) ways of knowing. Both concepts map effectively to the experiences encountered in the process of negotiating failure in order to live a resilient and holy Christian life.

### **Dealing with Failure in Classes and Bands: Specifics of the Wesleyan Way**

If we operate from the premise that failure or sin is the thing that interferes with the holy life, then this Christian imperfection must be either conquered or harnessed. When examining the methods employed to help 18<sup>th</sup>-century Christians in their walk toward Christian perfection, one cannot help but notice that John Wesley didn't ask the classes to come together to pat one another on the back, talk about the weather, compare notes on witnessing, share a favorite Bible verse, and depart in peace to love and serve the Lord. Not that any of those things are bad or worthless; but none of them confront the growing Christian with what seems as though, to Wesley (judging by the questions and criteria set forth for the bands), was the *inevitability* of experiencing one of the four categories of failure in the Christian life *on a regular basis*.

It appears Wesley assumed that, asked the proper stimulating question, Christians could readily account for failures in their lives each and every week, and that by so doing they would effectively undermine the power of those things which hindered their progress toward Christian perfection. If individuals could not come up with concrete examples of failure in their own lives, they were invited to open their spiritual judgment for group discussion with what Keith Drury refers to only as “the fourth question”: What have you thought, said or done of which you doubt whether it be sin or not?<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Keith Drury, “Who Says What the Bible Says: The keys to the kingdom, binding, and loosing,” *The Voice: CRI Institute*. Viewed online at <http://www.crivoice.org/bindloose.html>, 13 February, 2007.

Wesley's class method forever bound the experience of the individual Methodist to the Methodist community. Perhaps the reason was purely pragmatic: it worked to help keep people growing in grace. Perhaps the reason, as Drury proposes, was the intentional affirmation of the community of the saints as the heir to the biblical role of binding and loosing. Perhaps it was because Wesley intuited what Harvard Professor of Psychology, Daniel Gilbert, purports that modern neuroscience has discovered: "the human mind tends to exploit ambiguity. . . ."<sup>14</sup>

Our minds are infinitely inventive when it comes to interpreting our experiences on our own. If our basic mindset is to be self-critical and defeatist, we will exploit ambiguity to make our experience fit with our perception of the world. We will perceive our failures as insurmountable barriers to spiritual maturity. We will see our actions in the worst light and become self-punitive, guilt-ridden, and defeated. If, on the other hand, our basic orientation to ourselves requires us to see ourselves as either essentially good or qualitatively made perfect through God's grace, we will exploit ambiguity to help us maintain our self-image and to build a sense of blamelessness, sufficiency, and pride which prevents us from seeing our need for the atoning blood. Thus, we tend toward either wallowing in the pain of our imperfection or denial of our imperfection's existence. Both put the psychic energy available for spiritual growth on the symptom rather than on the cure, or on the self rather than on the Spirit.

The acts of self-disclosing the areas of our lives that are ambiguous (or that we would choose to consider as potentially ambiguous), and submitting our experience to the interpretive framework of community, means that we are no longer free to exploit ambiguity toward our own end. This is a radically transformative methodology for dealing with failure, particularly failure that could be considered to be located in the quadrant of human error, in which we commit an act that we don't know is wrong at the outset. By allowing the community to speak judgment (for that is what it is) and submitting ourselves to it, we are moving our experience from ambiguity to a state of distinctness and clarity in which we are required to consciously respond. We can still choose to "cook our books" (denial and cover up that leads to estrangement from ourselves and others); we can move the experience to the quadrant of a Sin of Com-

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<sup>14</sup>Daniel Gilbert. *Stumbling on Happiness* (New York: Knopf, 2006), 154.

mission (disobedience that will eventually lead to a rift in our relationship with God); or we can choose to submit the error to the atoning blood and grow from it as we seek to make amends for the consequences of our erroneous actions. We cannot, however, remain the same. We are transformed through the disempowerment of ambiguity, our “worst best friend” in the battle for our souls, and we must make conscious decisions about how we will respond to the transformative knowledge.

But what about those failures that fall into other quadrants? Wesley seemed to have those covered, as well. Into the quadrant of Ignorance, Wesley spoke education, but not education of the mind alone. The Christian life is grounded in, but not based solely upon, knowledge of facts and propositions. This seems to be the truth that the Enlightenment-era Wesley learned as a result of his failure in America. To the knowledge he had acquired as a boy and the practices he was compelled to engage in during his early life, he learned from his Moravian friends that he must add the element of heart experience.

The Aldersgate experience was the culmination, not of acquiring more propositional knowledge, but of practicing the self-reflective spirituality of the Moravians. Thus, teaching in the Wesleyan tradition had multiple focal points: the sermons of the monthly circuits, quarterly districts, and annual conferences all served to provide content knowledge. But it was the practice and coaching, features of the bands, that provided direct experience in living the Christian life and knowing the Spirit by heart, experientially and subjectively. These multiple entry points for knowledge served to nurture those who were spiritually ignorant and helped them to latch on to a place where they could engage effectively in the Christian life as they acted on their learning.

Into the quadrant of Sins of Omission, the bands spoke encouragement and provided a place where participants could learn from the experiences of those who had first-hand knowledge of the benefits of persisting in good works. This was practiced through the discipline of testimony and also through prayer, calling on the Spirit for the appropriate motivation for godly action in the life of the faltering believer.

Finally, into the quadrant of Sins of Commission, the classes and bands spoke in some unique ways that we are only now discovering the psychological soundness of. Confessing sin publicly is an intensely painful experience, which at first brush we are inclined to want to spare our brothers and sisters from under the blanket of love. However, new

research indicates that “intense suffering triggers the very processes that eradicate it.”<sup>15</sup> That is why individuals who face intense losses, such as loss of physical capabilities or of family members to tragic and untimely death, so often cope better than we would expect ourselves to, and often become our examples of moral fiber. When we are forced to face something with no way out, to articulate it, explain it, and make meaning of it, we invest our energy in moving on rather than in justifying or denying it. Spiritually, as long as we are engaged in self-justification, we are trapped by the power of the sin. Thus, the best offense for a life dominated by the forces of sin, from a psychological perspective, is the offense that fails to trigger a defensive response, and instead creates a climate for meaning-making.

If we have a place to go where we know that we are able to, and are committed to, facing our suffering through confession, we are less likely to be inclined toward cover-ups and self-defense. Sins of Commission may, in fact, be the easiest sins to avoid, because their intensity generates a kind of psychological immune response based on past experience. We fight back against sin because we know it is bad and threatens our spiritual experience. When the natural immune response to sin is triggered through personal testimony (telling our sin-conquering stories) and prayers of thanksgiving for the mercy of God, and is further reinforced through social networking, as in the case of regular class and band meetings, it becomes increasingly reasonable that we develop the capacity (or character) to strike these sins from our practice. Conversely, if we have no environment for facing the failures, if our social network encourages us (even ever-subtly) in our cover-ups, we become victims of our own psychological devices and are crippled in our spiritual growth.

Wesley must have somehow intuited this now-documented perception of human response to crisis—in this case the crisis of failure. By planning into the routine practice of Christian community the likelihood of Christian imperfection and a pattern of confession and accountability for dealing with it, he created an environment in which the development of Christian perfection was and is possible. It has been said that Methodism cannot work separated from the method. Our feeble attempts at living a holy lifestyle are forever being crushed down by our psychological survival skills. Wesley addresses this tendency through a strategy of mutual

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<sup>15</sup>*Ibid*, 181.

accountability and pastoral care that, at its best, provides a context for turning failure into a means of grace.

### **In Summary**

To summarize, I am suggesting that there exists in John Wesley's practical theology a framework of failure within the Christian life that includes elements of moral and executional failure, and that these are engaged either with willfulness or without willfulness. These could be called, cumulatively, Christian imperfection. Wesley, however, leveraged the power of these imperfections in the service of Christian perfection through the mechanisms put in place in the class and band systems.

There are scripturally appropriate community responses to each of the four categories of imperfection that facilitate an individual's spiritual formation, building both attitudes and practices that contribute to the formation of Christ-like character. These classic Wesleyan strategies are triangulated with current psychological research and personal experiences of Christians throughout the centuries, as well as with theories of spiritual formation. Growth is indisputably generated by the Spirit at work through individual experience in the context of a social network (Christian community) that either embraces or seeks to ignore the formative power of failure. When the individual is provided with a context in which mediated failure is normative experience, the chances of being derailed on the journey to Christ-likeness are greatly reduced, and the chances of optimistic transformation of failure experiences into markers along the faith journey are greatly enhanced.

We need not be victims of our failure experiences (or our attempts to deal with our failure experiences). We need not be condemned to suffering endless cycles of repetition and hopelessness in the Christian life. We are more than conquerors through him who loved us (Romans 8:37) as we receive community mediation of our failure as a means of grace in our spiritual lives.

# LISTENING, NARRATIVE, AND ATONEMENT

by

**Aaron Perry**

Recent techniques and studies in counseling reveal that individual narratives can be reworked and reconsidered in the presence of a listener. The act of listening creates the setting in which the speakers may come to reexamine and reorient the stories of their lives. As people work out their identities with and for each other in this communicating act, a relationship is birthed. This has implications for considering the act of listening as an atoning act. Listening, or “conversation” in the Wesleyan tradition, is an act of communal self-denial and mutual aid on the way to holiness.

I will consider listening as a practice that can achieve at-one-ment, which means that listening can merge stories. To consider this, first, I will briefly present at-one-ment with God as a narrative shared with God that forms a new community. Second, God’s method of achieving this shared narrative will be considered, metaphorically, as interpersonal communication. Part of God’s communication is listening to humanity. This act of God enables at-one-ment by making possible the merger of other narratives with God’s narrative in Jesus. Third, I will present listening as a defining role and transformative act of the church, the community founded by the narrative shared with God in Jesus, in which the church enables others to join her narrative. In keeping with the theme of suffering, I will give specific attention to how listening may be an act of suffering.

## **At-one-ment as Shared Narrative**

A community is formed by sharing. This is part of the insight of St. Augustine, who wrote, “A people . . . is a gathered multitude of rational

beings united by agreeing to share the things they love.”<sup>1</sup> What I suggest as shared by the community of God is the story of Jesus Christ: begun by God, worked out with humanity, continued in the church. This sharing of a narrative is possible because of the phenomenon of representation. For Irenaeus, Jesus represents Adam because of the Incarnation. Having been made flesh, he enters into communion with humanity.<sup>2</sup> This also means that Jesus lives through different moments of the human life such as birth, childhood, youth, even old age.<sup>3</sup> In the Incarnation, God and humanity begin sharing a story.<sup>4</sup>

Oliver O’Donovan gives two aspects of representation. First, considering representation of a community, he says that the “representative *alone* constitutes the presence of the represented.”<sup>5</sup> So, Jesus is the “representative individual, who in lonely faithfulness carries the tradition of the people [of Israel], its fate and its promises, in his own destiny.”<sup>6</sup> Second, “the represented are really present in what the representative does and experiences on their behalf.”<sup>7</sup> The relationship between the representative and the represented could be parallel to the relation between a peo-

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<sup>1</sup>*City of God*, book XIX, article 24, from *From Irenaeus to Grotius* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), Oliver O’Donovan & Joan Lockwood O’Donovan (eds.), 162. For a contemporary consideration of Augustine’s thought, see Oliver O’Donovan, *Common Objects of Love* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002).

<sup>2</sup>Irenaeus, *Irenaeus Against Heresies* (hereafter *AH*), in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (1885; repr., Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994), 1:527 (V.1.1).

<sup>3</sup>Irenaeus, *AH*, 1:391 (II.22.4).

<sup>4</sup>This sharing of narrative could also be fleshed out as *participation*. Philip Quinn (“Aquinas on Atonement,” from *Trinity, Incarnation, Atonement* [Notre Dame, IN: UND Press, 1989], [eds.] Ronald J. Feenstra & Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.) mentions this participation as one of Aquinas’ benefits to the Incarnation: “[W]e are brought to fuller participation in the divine life because God has participated in human life” (155).

<sup>5</sup>Oliver O’Donovan, *Desire of the Nations* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), 125. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 125. Emphasis in the original. O’Donovan’s work is sensitive to the political aspect of representation. For a Wesleyan consideration of representation, see H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith, and Holiness* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1988), 373-376. Dunning also believes that Irenaeus’ work is an antecedent to the Wesleyan affirmations of reconciliation and sanctification in the atonement (380-381).



ple and its government, when the people can truly say, “That is *my* government.”<sup>8</sup>

“Narrative” better captures the theological phenomenon of representation. Consider how outsiders can claim the story of Abraham as their own in word and deed (cf. Deut. 26:5-11). Only insofar as Abraham’s election and subsequent story represents and thereby becomes the outsiders’ own are they in relationship with God.<sup>9</sup> The *story* of Abraham’s life becomes the factor between the alien and God that achieves at-onement. Acceptance into Israel meant acceptance of Israel’s narrative and inherent practices. Representation, as a category in a narrative context, means that persons can embody stories (as Jesus does), and that persons can enter stories (as non-Jews did with Abraham’s story).

Representation means the presence of something (a story, a person, etc.) in that which belongs to another (a life, a story, etc.), and thereby becomes part of something to which it did not originally belong. As Jesus enters the narrative of Israel, God is brought into a human story. As the fullness of God’s narrative is in Jesus, humanity is brought into God’s story. There is mutual participation. In Jesus’ story, God presents humanity with a story they may share, and in this sharing arises a new community.

How could God determine the appropriateness of a narrative? Could God, in Jesus, have lived a life of luxury, ease, and total peace without suffering violence, and achieved a meaningful narrative to share? The answer seems to be no. Such would capture neither the stories of so many humans nor the narrative of Israel. To be shared meaningfully, a narrative must be existentially, or symbolically, valuable. Symbolic value is that aspect of a theory of atonement that connects something about Jesus, whether a metaphor, phrase, title, or noun, with a human need.<sup>10</sup> For a narrative to be meaningfully shared with humanity, then, it must touch a human need. But how did God determine what type of story would be appropriate, or what human need(s) to address? How did God determine

<sup>8</sup>See also Oliver O’Donovan, *The Ways of Judgment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), chapter 9.

<sup>9</sup>See Joel B. Green, “Narrative Theology,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), Kevin J. Vanhoozer (ed.), 532.

<sup>10</sup>Peter Schmiechen, *Saving Power: Theories of Atonement and Forms of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 5-7.

what story would itself be a meaningful merger of the divine story and humanity's story?

### **Interpersonal Communication: God as Listener**

Seeing God's work with humanity as an act of interpersonal communication illuminates God's method of achieving symbolic value in the Jesus narrative. Interpersonal communication differs from other forms of communication in that it "emphasizes the presence of the personal."<sup>11</sup> This emphasis has five elements. First, personal communication emphasizes the uniqueness of the other person in conversation. Second, personal communication recognizes an un-measurable aspect to the other person (considered variously as spirit, soul, emotion, etc.). Third, effective personal communication takes seriously the responsive nature of humans, which, fourth, considers what others will think or how they will consider any comment, question, etc. Finally, personal communication considers issues of addressability, by which one considers how communication must be aimed to target a specific other.<sup>12</sup> Because of this emphasis of the other, identities are in play in interpersonal communication, as the communication act works out who we are for the other and who they are for us.<sup>13</sup>

If we consider the work of God with humanity as interpersonal communication, then the identity of humanity is open to reconstruction by the presence of another communicator, a story communicator. In communication, adding another character creates a new context in which stories are open to co-construction with the speaker and the listener. I propose that God reopens the narrative of humanity, and our personal narratives, by being this present listener, and thereby forms an existentially meaningful narrative that we can share.

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<sup>11</sup>John Stewart (ed.), *Bridges not Walls: A Book About Interpersonal Communication*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed., (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006), 16.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 34-38.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 63. Identities are negotiated in communication exchanges of all sorts, no matter their size or length. The negotiation, of course, does not always end in *interpersonal communication*. Ordering a pizza, saying "No" to a telemarketer, depositing money with a real-life bank teller involves the negotiation of identities. Negotiations do not need to lead to interpersonal communication, as God's communication has done and how our more meaningful and important relationships operate. Some negotiations, like the ones listed above, can end in impersonal relationships. See John Stewart, K. E. Zediker, & S. Wittborn, *Communicating Interpersonally, a Social Construction Approach*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (Los Angeles: Roxbury, 2005).

But why should we consider interpersonal communication an appropriate metaphor? As humans engage in communication, the relationship between the communicators is worked out. In order to share a narrative, the narrative itself must be communicated in some fashion. Because humans are dialogical beings,<sup>14</sup> part of a story's sharing, its being held in common, is the process of dialogue. As humans engage in sharing a story by communication, they are establishing a relationship. For this reason, God's work in developing a story with humanity can be considered in a similar fashion.

Why does listening make the merger of narratives, or mutual participation, possible? Autobiographical memories are malleable and get worked out in different contexts.<sup>15</sup> One such context, the presence of a listener, opens the story of an individual to the constructive abilities of both speaker and listener.<sup>16</sup> In a parallel fashion, God's listening to humanity makes the story of humanity open to co-construction. With God listening, no event is beyond his willingness to hear, and therefore beyond his ability to engage in its reconstruction.<sup>17</sup>

If interpersonal communication is a suitable metaphor for God's interaction with humanity, and it involves listening to the other, how does God listen? First, let us consider listening itself. Carl Rogers defined

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<sup>14</sup>See Warren S. Brown, "Cognitive Contributions to Soul," in *Whatever Happened to the Soul* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998), Warren S. Brown, Nancey Murphy, H. Newton Maloney (eds.), 99-125. Brown writes, "Perhaps the greatest chasm between the mental life of the most intelligent non-human primates and that of human beings lies in the use of language in communication and mental representation" (104).

<sup>15</sup>Monisha Pasupathi, "The Social Construction of the Personal Past and its Implications for Adult Development," *Psychological Bulletin* 127:5 (2001): 651-672. The participants in the social construction of the personal past include the speaker, the listener, and the combination of both, which is not simply formed by the sum of memories between the two (656). As autobiographical memories are malleable, so is their meaning static. Peggy Penn ("Chronic Illness: Trauma, Language, and Writing: *Breaking the Silence*," *Family Process* 40:1 [2001]), when considering the impact of metaphor on interpretation, captures this well. She writes, "Meaning is not a stable entity, but an outcome of relational negotiations in a particular context. When those negotiations change, meanings change as well" (44).

<sup>16</sup>Pasupathi, "Social Construction of the Personal Past and its Implications for Adult Development," 654.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 654: "Whether an event is evoked by a conversation at all can be viewed as one aspect of co-construction."

empathic listening as entering the private perceptual world of the other and becoming thoroughly at home in it. Being willing to enter the world of another through listening conveys the deep value of the other and, as such, “can transform all of our relationships.”<sup>18</sup> With this in mind, listening with total attention is “one of the greatest gifts we can give another.”<sup>19</sup> It deepens and broadens community because it “is the first step in making people feel valued.”<sup>20</sup> Deep and reflective listening conveys the importance of the other in the story he or she has lived until this point. This value is conveyed because the listener has entered the story of the speaker on the speaker’s own terms.

God listens by entering into unique settings, private perceptual worlds, that give him ability to hear predicaments of those who wish to talk with him. One such perceptual world is the outcast, which is one way to consider the life of Jesus. Frank Lake writes that Christ must be a “listener to every item of painful shame that is recounted, so that its power to bind the soul in the iron chains of condemnation and alienation is manifestly overcome.”<sup>21</sup> In the context of shame, “only insofar as [Christ] was identified fully with those suffering the debilitating stigma of shame could his own ‘despising the shame’ enable them to live above the existential circumstances in which they were trapped.”<sup>22</sup>

That God enters these unique settings of suffering enables the one in these situations to pray. Just as Christ was physically present in these situations, so the Spirit now presents the living Christ to the ones suffering in these hard places. The one who prays must be able to bring “complaints, objections, demands, accusations, resentments, doubts, and disbeliefs out

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<sup>18</sup>Kay Lindahl, *Practicing the Sacred Art of Listening: A Guide to Enrich Your Relationships and Kindle Your Spiritual Life* (Woodstock, VT: SkyLights Paths Publishing), as quoted in John Stewart (ed.), *Bridges not Walls: A Book About Interpersonal Communication*, 199.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 199. See E. Riikonen & G. M. Smith, *Reimagining Therapy: Inquiries in Social Construction* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 109: “Being understood is another way of feeling morally worthwhile,” as quoted by Penn, “Chronic Illness: Trauma, Language, and Writing,” 44.

<sup>21</sup>Frank Lake, *Clinical Theology* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press [unabridged edition], 2005), 1:52.

<sup>22</sup>C. Norman Kraus, *Jesus Christ Our Lord: Christology from a Disciples’ Perspective* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1990), 218, as quoted by Joel B. Green & Mark D. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP, 2000), 164.

of hiding, and into conversation with God.”<sup>23</sup> What encourages this prayer, this *talking* to God, is the death of Christ. We learn from Christ’s passion that “it is part of God’s understanding of our situation to encourage us to bring our indignant protests about life’s distress to Him.”<sup>24</sup> God understands our situation by entering into our unique settings, our private perceptual worlds. God listens.

God’s listening can be considered redemptive and healing because it can transform the narratives or the private worlds in which he listens. Listening, initially, provides a healing work because it reflects the work of God in Christ. It provides theological insight. Note:

The very process of reflective listening, through its powerful unspoken assumptions, creates in both listener and speaker a sense of deep acceptance. . . . It is a very short step to the kind of love that is attributed to God. . . . Is it too bold to say that reflective listening, with its underlying attitude of acceptance, gives the person an echo of God’s love?<sup>25</sup>

As communication continues, listening provides:

- (1) the speaker space for interpretation of his or her narrative;
- (2) re-narration of the speaker’s life; and
- (3) empowerment of the speaker.<sup>26</sup>

We will consider these in order.

First, speaking removes one’s story from complete subjectivity and allows one a more existentially objective consideration. Communication of one’s story, sharing one’s interpretation of it with the listener, gives it

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<sup>23</sup>Lake, *Clinical Theology*, 1:40.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 1:41.

<sup>25</sup>See William R. Miller and Kathleen A. Jackson, *Practical Psychology for Pastors* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1995 [2<sup>nd</sup> ed.]), 56.

<sup>26</sup>Pasupathi (“The Social Construction of the Personal Past and its Implications for Adult Development”) writes that “people may recall the past in the service of solving a problem” (656). Each of these problems—the need for reinterpretation and re-narration, and powerlessness, is a problem that can be solved in cooperation with the listener. Pasupathi points out that, when faced with a “listener who does not display appropriate emotional responses at key points in [the speaker’s] story. . . [that] speaker finds it difficult to end the tale coherently” (655). The result is a “shorter, less detailed, and less coherent” story (655).

the space for meaning.<sup>27</sup> Certain events need to be reexamined and reinterpreted, and some must be condemned as unjust, evil, abusive, etc. This judgment, perhaps facilitated by the listener as the story becomes more existentially objective, can communicate alternative interpretations of such events to the listener. Such speaking, however, automatically removes the story from being merely internalized so that alternative meanings of the speaker's story and its events can be considered. The role of the therapeutic listener is to alter how "sufferers are engaged in stories of suffering sustained in their ways of conversing."<sup>28</sup> The new voice, encouraged by the listener, achieves a new rubric of interpretation for the speaker in their suffering and changes the way the speaker can address the memory.

Second, speaking also provides space for memories to be considered narratively. The development of the life story schema happens as a residue of speaking, thinking, and reasoning about events in one's past. So, we can say that speaking enables one to narrate the events of life and work out the narrative template which they use to consider these events and new ones.<sup>29</sup>

One can easily imagine, however, how a speaker may share a story with a listener that is not really the story she believes about her own life. Consider this in the context of shame. In the face of such false sharing, or false cover stories,<sup>30</sup> "the chronically shamed person is in reality a 'silent' being. . . . Though the real self exists, it lives the life of a mute, never daring to speak its name, barred from doing so by the crippling power of shame."<sup>31</sup> This real self, the real story, is covered by shame. In the face of

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<sup>27</sup>O'Donovan, *The Ways of Judgment*, 250: "To communicate anything, material or spiritual, is to give it a meaning." Sharing one's story, in verbal or written form, is still to give it meaning.

<sup>28</sup>Tom Strong, "Poetic Possibilities in Conversations about Suffering," *Contemporary Family Therapy* 24:3 (September 2002), 460.

<sup>29</sup>This sharing also impacts the memory. Pasupathi ("The Social Construction of the Personal Past and its Implications for Adult Development") writes, "Socially shared memories are held with greater confidence and certainty than those not shared" (655). It should be noted, however, that not all memories are narratives.

<sup>30</sup>Alan Mann, *Atonement for a Sinless Society* (UK: Paternoster, 2006), 43. Cover stories are those a shamed person may present to a listener that are not actually the ones that reflect his or her own considerations of him- or herself.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

such false sharing, is the listener bound? Partially. The story narrated, however, even if a cover story, can still be listened to with new narratives slowly offered and practiced for the speaker.<sup>32</sup> Listening may embolden the speaker to share more of the real story. Since each communicator is unique, the cover story offered bears insight into the speaker. Why have they shared *this* story in *this* way? Is there a kernel of truth to this narrative that is inherent to the real narrative?<sup>33</sup> As the listener presents a new narrative, it can be adopted and applied by the speaker. “Even without a ‘real’ self being present [as the cover story hides the real self], there can be healing and transformation.”<sup>34</sup> This transformation of the speaker is by the re-narration of their own story, which can be started even if they only present cover stories initially.

Another element to listening to stories is hearing silent stories. Parin Dossa writes that subordinate groups wait for the “appropriate time and context before speaking; otherwise they risk the possibility of not being heard.”<sup>35</sup> Dossa cites studies concerning bombed Japanese women (from Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945) and how they remained silent about their suffering until they could express themselves through an accepted status, which became that of motherhood. They were then able to describe their sufferings in the context of “tainted bodies.”<sup>36</sup> But even in the silence, the group was sharing. Dossa’s point is that, though lacking the ability to communicate verbally, the body will communicate in other ways. “Once we acknowledge that . . . silence can be recognized as language, we can learn to read ‘the cadences of silences, the gaps between fragile words, in order to hear’ what is being said.”<sup>37</sup>

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 85. This presentation of a new narrative may be irritable for the one hearing it. This is because, against the narrative of Jesus, their own narratives will be seen as inconsistent and incoherent. The question for presenters of the gospel becomes whether they are “willing to endure, even augment, this tension until the Gestalt of conversion occurs.” Brad Kallenberg, *Live to Tell* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos), 61-62.

<sup>33</sup>Bluck & Habermas, “The Life Story Schema,” 139. Stories told multiple times often have a “kernel story,” and parts of the story may remain stable while new information is added.

<sup>34</sup>Mann, *Atonement for a Sinless Society*, 86.

<sup>35</sup>Parin Dossa, “The Body Remembers: A Migratory Tale of Social Suffering,” *International Journal of Mental Health* 32:3 (Fall 2003), 53.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 54.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 54.

Finally, listening can empower the speaker. Telling one's story provides the speaker a "way out of inherited authoritarianisms. . . ." <sup>38</sup> Gabriel Fackre captures this benefit well by saying, "The right to tell one's own tale is a weapon of the marginalized in the struggle against their cultural captors or a preserve of identity in a world of uniformity. Narrative in this mode is a way of giving voice to the voiceless. . . ." <sup>39</sup> Christians ought to take it on themselves to listen if telling stories gives voice to those Christ most identifies with in their unique settings. This power is socially available. Arthur Frank writes, "In stories, the teller not only recovers her voice; she becomes a witness to the conditions that rob others of their voices." <sup>40</sup> In one person telling, many gain a voice. Perhaps listening to the least is listening to Jesus.

### **The Church as Listener**

Let me flesh out this communication as the church, the community formed by sharing the story of Jesus, part of which is shaped by God's listening and at-one with God. The benefits of sharing that we have just noted in the practices of interpersonal communication are best obtained in a communal and social setting. E. E. Sampson writes that "the social process—namely, dialogue and conversation—precedes and is the foundation for any subsequent psychological processes that emerge." <sup>41</sup> It is the potential of the church to be this social process of story-communication. The community established by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the church, can become a community of story-communication in which individuals are able to negotiate new identities and new selves. <sup>42</sup> This negotiation of the self in communication can be considered as sanctifying. As the church lives out its calling to be a new culture, it is a community that is affected by communication and affects the communication

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<sup>38</sup>Gabriel Fackre, "Narrative Theology: An Overview," *Interpretation* 37:4 (October 1983), 347.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 347.

<sup>40</sup>Arthur Frank, *The Wounded Story Teller* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), xii, as quoted by Dossa, "The Body Remembers," 56.

<sup>41</sup>E. E. Sampson, *Celebrating the Other: A Dialogic Account of Human Nature* (Boulder, CO: Westview), 103, as found in John Stewart (ed.), *Bridges Not Walls*, 69.

<sup>42</sup>See Stewart, *Bridges Not Walls*, 27-28, although Stewart is not working in a church context.



practices of its members. The communication practices of the church will both impact and describe who she is as a culture. By having similar ways of speaking and listening, individuals show that they belong to the same culture.<sup>43</sup> Christians can become known as being a community marked by their practices of conversation, faithfully embodying the work of God on the cross in their practice of listening and entering into private perceptual worlds. In so doing, the private perceptual world is no longer private and may be reformed, in part, by the practices of the one now listening.

Consider this in the context of friendship. Friendship can be thought of as “the embodiment of conversation: the character and durability of a conversation *is* the character and durability of the friendship.”<sup>44</sup> Here we see the combination of the form and content of communication. Speaking and listening knit lives together as the *form* of communication begins to impact its *content*. Speakers and listeners can embrace one another and their narratives in these very acts.<sup>45</sup> Joining the church, the community established by the listening and speaking of God in Jesus, is initiated by the listening community.<sup>46</sup> As the speaker is listened to, her narrative is presented with a new narrative, a new culture, that practices listening to other narratives. The speaker’s own narrative can be judged, considered, and re-appropriated by this new community, the church. The church finds not only her story (the content of her speech) changed, but the manner of her communication as well—she can now become a listener.<sup>47</sup> The

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<sup>43</sup>Kallenberg (*Live to Tell*) writes that “. . . religious conversion necessarily includes the acquisition of the appropriate conceptual language” (41) and that “becoming fluent in a language involves participation in the grammar of the language, that is, participation in the form of life of the language’s speakers” (57).

<sup>44</sup>Kallenberg, *Live to Tell*, 61. Emphasis his.

<sup>45</sup>Kallenberg (*Live to Tell*) writes that “a friendship formed with an insider of a rival community may be the handrail that assists one’s ascent into the new community” (61).

<sup>46</sup>Consider the simple phrase, “Tell me a little about yourself.” The self is relayed in short episodic stories. As such, a schema of the life story “serves in the development and maintenance of social relationships” (Bluck & Habermas, “The Life Story Schema,” 137). Of course, the church does not *have* to be the one to initiate this conversation, but by practicing such initiations, she better lives God’s first steps toward sinners.

<sup>47</sup>Inasmuch as listening is part of the “language” of the church, Kallenberg’s (*Live to Tell*) words are most appropriate: “Language can only be learned by participation” (87). One learns to listen, first, by being listened to. Hence, the cross of Christ begins the whole process of listening. We, as the church, listen because God first listened to us.

process of change for the speaker now becomes, in part, the responsibility of the church, as the speaker is engaging in deeper and more frequent conversations.<sup>48</sup> The church begins to bear burdens because they are “social spaces where we engage in atoning practice ‘in that we acknowledge that an individual’s sin is never his alone, that its endurance harms us all, and therefore its cancellation is also the responsibility of all.’”<sup>49</sup> This empathic suffering shows the ecclesial relationship now properly established.

This process of sanctification is also present for the listener who may suffer in listening. In seeing Christ as one who listens, our own eyes are first opened to learning that there are people needing a listening character in their private perceptual worlds. As the listener carries presumptions to the act of listening, they may be “intimidated” by the speaker’s content.<sup>50</sup> This shortcoming can be transformed in the presence of Christ who listens first and along with us. The news of the speaker does not hold eternal consequences if the listening of Jesus ends in resurrection. Even the listener is sanctified by seeing themselves more clearly. It is for this reason that many in the church, and in ministry, refuse to be active and available listeners: they fear who they themselves might be.

Why would Christians, especially mature ones, shrink from listening? Here the potential suffering of listening becomes clear. Peggy Penn writes that in listening to the one who is chronically ill, the well person often acts in self-protection and so “avoids or downplays the true content of the story. The listener feels they must intuitively protect his or her own immune system against the personal impact such a story could have.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>To enter into conversations, the entrant must gain in language and topics of conversation. Kallenberg (*Live to Tell*) addresses the language aspect of this by saying that “becoming fluent in a language involves participation in the grammar of the language, that is, participation in the form of life of the language’s speakers” (57). Schulster (“Things we Talk About”) remarks about the need to develop common ground in order to converse: “The suggestion is that people whose favorite topics are clustered in the same factors will find communication easier. Conversely, those whose favorite topics are clustered in different factors may find little in common to chat about except experiences of the present moment” (430). One must acquire a new language and a new set of topics in order to properly converse with the new community.

<sup>49</sup>William C. Placher, “Christ Takes our Place,” *Interpretation* 53:1 (January 1999), 17.

<sup>50</sup>Penn, “Chronic Illness: Trauma, Language, and Writing,” 43.

<sup>51</sup>Penn, “Chronic Illness: Trauma, Language, and Writing,” 42.

True listening opens the self to be affected by the story presented, which, when it is a tale of suffering, may be one that some listeners wish to reject. This defensive posture, whether by rejecting the story's content, or by refusing to listen altogether, safeguards the listeners and keeps them from empathically listening, which, in turn, keeps them from pain.<sup>52</sup> By offering oneself to the speaker in listening, however, and thereby subjecting oneself to pain, the listener experiences the same suffering as the listening Christ, and also shares in the glory of Christ (Rom. 8:17). By listening, the church may reflect the work of God that re-opens humanity's narrative to be shared with God and thereby invite an outsider to participate in this narrative. May we practice the gospel of a listening God with ears to hear.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>The San Francisco Chronicle reports that fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging) scans revealed that the same part of the brain that is active during pain is activated when witnessing or anticipating the pain of a loved one. The implication is that empathy, feeling another's pain, is very closely related to feeling one's own pain. Keay Davidson, "Scientists Discover How the Brain Feels Others' Pain," *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 20, 2004, online at <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/c/a/2004/02/20/MNGC654O7H1.DTL> (accessed February 26, 2007). Empathizing with another's story opens the listener to pain.

<sup>53</sup> Thanks to Frances Young for helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper presented at the Wesleyan Theological Society's annual meeting at Olivet Nazarene University, March 2, 2007.

# **EUCHARIST: THE CHURCH'S POLITICAL RESPONSE TO SUFFERING AND VOCATIONAL EMPOWERMENT TO SUFFERING LOVE**

by

**Brent Peterson**

What is the role and vocation of the church in response to the suffering of the world? I will address two related avenues through the lens of the Eucharist, the service of word and table.<sup>1</sup> First, the Spirit through communal worship continually forms, constitutes, and empowers the church as the eschatological *polis*; hence, the communal gathering of the church is political worship. Second, political worship is the dynamic encounter from which ethics spring and is first embodied as the identity/vocation of the church to suffer in love, caring and serving people, especially the marginalized and oppressed. I will consider the works of Bernd Wannewetsch, in his book *Political Worship*, and William Cavanaugh, in his book *Torture and Eucharist*. Further, I will take a glimpse at John Wesley's sacramental theology, highlighting places of harmony with the work of Wannewetsch and Cavanaugh.

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<sup>1</sup>Historically, the term Eucharist has been understood as the entire communal worship of the service of word and table. The idea of political worship that will be espoused recognizes that the entire communal gathering has political implications, not just the celebration at the table. For the sake of clarity, when speaking specifically about the celebration at the table, I will refer to this either as "the table" or "the Lord's Supper." The term "Eucharist" will refer to the service of word and table.

### Assumptions: A Call to Suffering

It is important to consider how I understand and will use suffering. Suffer comes from the Latin *suffere*, which offers a passive and active meaning. Intransitively or passively, suffer means “to sustain loss, hardship, or damage.” Transitively or actively, suffer means “to bear under” or “carry.”<sup>2</sup> Semantically, I will argue that the church is called to suffer actively, to *carry* and *bear* the burdens of those who are intransitively or passively suffering under oppression or hardship. Further, it is precisely in the celebration of the Eucharist where the church receives its identity and vocation to become the broken and poured out body of Jesus *into* and *for* the world, inviting those who suffer and are oppressed to the table, a place of new life and personhood in the eternal body politic of the kingdom.<sup>3</sup>

While the compassionate ministry of the church should be an obvious given, a recent century of neglect, at least by many American Evangelicals, necessitates an explicit declaration. The church is the body of Christ continuing Christ's pneumatic-empowered ministry.<sup>4</sup> Hence, the Bible calls for the church to show mercy and compassion in love to one another and especially to those who are oppressed and suffering. Currently, in many Evangelical and mainline Protestant denominations, there has been a partial recovery of the church's role in caring for the marginalized and oppressed of the world as the ecclesial working out of its soteriology. However, there is also a current danger lurking which makes social justice the total end of the church at the exclusion or neglect of the communal worship gathering. If social justice becomes the *telos* of the church, therein lies the implicit danger that communal worship, and thus the sacraments, will be seen either as instrumental, as a means to something greater, or unnecessary, a “royal waste of time”<sup>5</sup> and resources.

The primary thesis for this paper asserts: The compassionate ministry of the church is an ethic of suffering (actively) love, specifically to

<sup>2</sup>Both the transitive and intransitive definitions were reached in consultation with John F. Collins, *A Primer of Ecclesiastical Latin* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1985) and Leo F. Stelten, *Dictionary of Ecclesiastical Latin* (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1995), under the entry *suffere*.

<sup>3</sup>By body politic here I mean a group of persons organized under a single governmental authority, the church under and in God.

<sup>4</sup>1 John 3:16-17; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21.

<sup>5</sup>See Marva Dawn, *A Royal Waste of Time: The Splendour of Worshipping God and Being Church for the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000).

those who are suffering (passively), and must not become a program but the vocational identity of the church grounded in its political worship. The church's vocation for the world can only be fully realized as those empowered by the Spirit are sent from the table. From the table the church goes out to invite the world to the table as the church awaits the consummation of the kingdom of God at the heavenly feast. However, what is explicitly meant by political worship and what is its relationship to the ethic of suffering love?

### **Political Worship: Ethics Springing from Worship**

The Eucharist is the most political act of the church. On the surface, such a claim might be accused of ignoring the desperate plight of the oppressed and marginalized, furthering the tragic sundering of piety and ethics. However, this would be precisely what I am working against. Communal worship is the continual constitution of the church by the Spirit. God continually fashions the church, universal and local, as the body of Christ, citizens of the kingdom of God. Communal worship proclaims and weekly constitutes and invites persons to place their allegiance and citizenship in God as sons and daughters in the kingdom of God.<sup>6</sup>

Bernd Wannewetsch asserts in his book *Political Worship* a dynamic and generative relationship between worship and ethics. Often ethics, and specifically the church's activity in social justice and compassionate ministry, have been severed from its worship at the table. There exists a temptation, specifically in the North American Evangelical churches, to separate piety from ethics.<sup>7</sup> This is fundamentally dangerous. Warns Wannewetsch, "If we fail to understand the assembly of believers politically, 'church service' and 'moral service' necessarily fall apart."<sup>8</sup> Wannewetsch describes how political worship is a union between piety

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<sup>6</sup>Wannewetsch ultimately argues that the church is the merger of the *oikos*-home and *polis* city as the primary communion of public and private religion. Hence, both familial terms (sons and daughters) and political terms (citizen) are used and in need of uniting.

<sup>7</sup>This separation has been evidenced in Wesleyan denominations that have emphasized personal piety as the *telos* of their Christian faith, while currently many Protestant mainline denominations seem to gravitate toward social justice as the ends of all the church is to be about. It seems that the Roman Catholic Church has offered a better practice of the unification of piety and ethics.

<sup>8</sup>Bernd Wannewetsch, *Political Worship: Ethics for Christian Citizens*. Trans. by Margaret Kohl (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 31.

and ethics. As we are fashioned in a community that worships God, that identity as a citizen of the *polis* yields practices of allegiance for how one is to act, first in communal worship and then in the overflow in the world. What is called for is neither a collapse of piety into ethics nor a stark separation.

Louis Marie Chauvet describes this as the temptation to absorb liturgy into ethics or vice versa. Either case would separate the sacraments from the lived experience. The grace received in the sacraments is given a task to accomplish, namely, to make us become what we have celebrated and received. Liturgy without ethics can lose its connection to God, while without ethics, sacramental practice can be ossified and verge on magic. In fact, “it is the *sacrament* that gives *ethics* the power to become a ‘spiritual sacrifice:’ it is *ethics* that gives the *sacrament* the means of verifying its fruitfulness.”<sup>9</sup> Ethics is the living out in thankful response the gift of God’s presence encountered and received in the sacraments. Sacraments provide ethics their power and impetus, which are always a response to the love of God

Before arriving at the ethic that springs from worship, Wannewetsch explores the political dimensions of worship. What is happening in communal worship?

### **Worship: Divine Encounter and Political Activity**

Worship is the place of the Divine encounter, the field where the liturgy occurs. *Leitourgia* is classically understood with two related ideas, both from the realm of imperial politics. First, liturgy is a means by which a gathering of people are united and made a *polis*. Alexander Schmemmann writes that “the original sense of *leitourgia* was an action by which a group of people become something corporately which they had not been as a collection of individuals.”<sup>10</sup> Christian worship is where individuals are made a communion of persons in the church—the eschatological *polis*.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*. Trans. by Patrick Madigan, S. J., and Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 65. Italics are mine.

<sup>10</sup>Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the Word* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1988), 25.

<sup>11</sup>See John D. Zizioulas, *Being in Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary, 1985).

Second, liturgy was originally a Greek composite word that described the public duty of a citizen to the state. This service was often very costly in both time and money. This act or “work” was not only for the benefit of the state but helped to confirm and further establish one’s allegiance to the state as a compatriot.

Many Christians in the free-church tradition think liturgy is often understood as fixed texts or rites of a communal service, or even the level of “formality” of a service. But more accurately, liturgy is the work of the people, whereby the church is gathered to the proclamation of the Word and invited to “work” by making themselves present before God who gathered them, by placing themselves upon the altar with songs of praise, tithes, and offerings. Despite the temptation to turn worship into a marketing technology or passive entertainment, God gathers the church to be transformed in the Divine encounter. These two aspects together mark liturgy as political activity, whereby individuals are united into one body, which then constitutes and births their ethic as their political allegiance. With an understanding of worship, how does Wannewetsch understand this grouping of a people as political?

### **Politics Defined: Form of Life**

Politics can be defined as “whatever touches the affairs of the citizens. Politics is civil life in the *polis*.”<sup>12</sup> One is always living into a *polis*. Further, it is the church’s shared life both on Sunday and in the rest of the week that marks a political life and identity. Ethics springing from worship is not an illusory escape from everyday life. Rather, Wannewetsch’s project rests on the premise that the Divine encounter and experience in worship pertains specifically to the realities and questions of one’s existence in the world.<sup>13</sup>

Ethics that spring from worship is embodied in the political *form of life*, a law of love. There appears solid continuity with John Wesley’s understanding of sanctification, and its scope in the life of the believer with how Wannewetsch understands political worship. Political worship “embraces the life of believers as a whole, not just certain parts of it, be it the political sphere.”<sup>14</sup> However, it does move beyond the individual

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<sup>12</sup>Wannewetsch, 9.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 6

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 32.



which has often been a struggle in the practical application of Wesleyan soteriology. Wannenwetsch claims, "A *form of life* is more than a lifestyle adopted by individual men and women. It represents the *ethos* of a community, and critical participation in it."<sup>15</sup> The center of this *form of life* is worship—the Divine transforming encounter of love.

In this day of declining church attendance in Europe and North America and the birth of online churches, is being gathered to communal worship important? Or more directly, is communal worship really necessary to being a Christian? In thinking about whether a Christian has to go to church, Wannenwetsch replies, "It is the Christian *form of life*. Worship as a *form of life* sees worship itself as the regulative factor wherein we recognize the discipline which proves a life to be Christian."<sup>16</sup> By definition, the essential practice of a Christian is participation in communal worship. However, it is always God who *comes before* seeking and wooing, empowering that response.

As God gathers and is graciously present, in agreement with Wesley, there is a response required to the gift of God's transforming presence. The response in worship and in the world comes in thanksgiving. Ethics that spring from worship offers inward agreement with the content of faith. Such an "ethic would seem to have no better form than that of gratitude."<sup>17</sup> Thus, as the gathered receive their identity in worship in response to the gracious encounter of life, they respond to God's presence by living and loving in thankfulness. This response begins in worship, most principally in the Lord's Supper—Eucharist (thanksgiving). " 'Eucharist' remains directly active thanksgiving and cannot be turned into a disposition of thankfulness."<sup>18</sup> This will be more fully elaborated later, but Wannenwetsch asserts that our ethics is embodied in political thankfulness *first* in worship.

Even as the response in thanksgiving implies an ethic of love in the world, it does not become the real *telos* of worship. "It is just because Christian worship is not a means to an end that it is political."<sup>19</sup> Ethics is living out the reality of the liberation and identity offered in worship. Worship is not a means to a moral end. Where worship is a means to

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 34.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 47.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 49.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 25.

something else, it “cannot and may not be a ‘means of grace.’”<sup>20</sup> Let us look specifically at the dynamic encounter and the political aspects of communal worship.

### **Ethical Worship**

Wannenwetsch contends that the first place of ethical practice occurs in worship. This not only pertains to the priestly role of the congregation in regard to intercessions, but how well the church’s *polis* reflects the love of God. “Unless the Church in its own internal public character develops the political form of life which it calls for in society as a whole, its claim will be felt to be a heteronymous imposition.”<sup>21</sup> One could look to the passing of the peace, not simply as cordial greeting among church attendees, but the gracious empowerment of reconciliation among brothers and sisters of the kingdom of God. “Worship is political when the ‘peace’ before communion is not merely practiced as a non-committal sign of general solidarity, but is also taken seriously as an act of reconciliation between people ‘who have something against each other.’”<sup>22</sup> This is central to the continual formation of the church’s *polis*.

Wannenwetsch draws on Martin Luther to consider political formation in the Lord’s Supper. Luther, in his sermon “On the Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ concerning the Brotherhoods,” describes how at the Lord’s Supper there is an exchange of property or community of goods in freedom which fashions the communion of saints. “The meaning or work of this sacrament is the communion of saints. . . that Christ with all saints is one spiritual body, just as the people of a city are one community and one body, each citizen a member of the other and of the whole city. Thus all saints are members of Christ and the church, which is the one spiritual, eternal city of God.”<sup>23</sup>

Further, Luther notes that fellowship includes the spiritual benefits of Christ and his saints as those who receive of each other in Christ. But this sharing is not only in the benefits; this indwelling also leads to a community of suffering:

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 46.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 57. Cf. John Wesley’s Sermon 63, “The General Spread of the Gospel,” where he argues a very similar point.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 76.

<sup>23</sup>Wannenwetsch, 182, quoting Martin Luther’s sermon “On the Blessed Sacrament.”

Conversely, all sufferings and sins are also common to all, and this love is kindled for love. . . . As a city's name is common to all its citizens, with its honour, liberty, commerce, usages, customs, aid, support, protection and the like so also, conversely, are all dangers, fire, flood, enemies, death, injuries, tribute and the like.<sup>24</sup>

One wonders if Luther had in mind Paul's text in Romans 12.15, "Rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn." Clearly, at the table the community is fashioned both in the sharing of love and also in the suffering of life's hardships and burdens.

It is this gift of love from God for the other where freedom is grounded. Real freedom is not personal choice, but suffering (actively) in love. Recalling Luther, Wannewetsch notes that freedom cannot be acquired, but comes to us as freedom from outside ourselves. It comes to us "in the word of divine promise which frees us from the mistaken view that she has to create freedom for herself."<sup>25</sup> It is the freedom that empowers us to love Christ and neighbor. In this way we bear up in love and suffer with our brothers and sisters. This invitation of freedom to love offers an ethical necessity which comes from faith's overflow of love. Luther writes, "We conclude, therefore, that a Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor. . . . He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love."<sup>26</sup>

This is how one in freedom suffers in love with the neighbor. The freed woman dwells in her neighbor, making the neighbor not an object for which a good deed can be performed. For Luther, our freedom not only makes us compatible with our neighbor, but invites us to suffer—bear with our neighbor in their distress. Our freedom calls us to be compatible with our neighbor's "unfreedom, his actually infringed freedom, his practical distress and necessity."<sup>27</sup> As our neighbor is in need and lacks what we have, sharing becomes our expression of a freedom to suffer with our neighbor in love. This is only possible because an individ-

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., quoting M. Luther, "Sermon on the Blessed Sacrament."

<sup>25</sup>Wannewetsch, 178, with a reference to Luther's *The Freedom of a Christian* (*Works*, iii, 1520), 343ff. Translated directly from Latin by Bernd Wannewetsch.

<sup>26</sup>Wannewetsch, 180, with reference to M. Luther, *Freedom of a Christian*, 371.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

ual's freedom is not a possession, but always a gift. This gift is repeatedly offered in the eucharistic service of word and table.

This invitation to suffer the needs of the local church and the world begins and is most fully embodied in worship. In response to the Word, a reconciled people acts politically to suffer the needs and requests of others, many of whom are without name or voice. Wannenwetsch describes the *leitourgia*—"The priestly ministry remains one of the essential marks of the church. In this way the church lends its voice to those who are voiceless, whether voluntarily or involuntarily. It intercedes before God for those whose voices are missing in worship, and it raises its own voice for those who still have no say in the world."<sup>28</sup> The church's intercessions include those in its midst whose faces and voices we do know and to whom we are being reconciled and united. "Worship is political when the intercessions bring before God the needs of this particular congregation, its individual members, and the congregation as a whole, and learn from this immediacy to pray in equally specific terms for village, town, country, and the world."<sup>29</sup>

Intercession is first and foremost what defines political advocacy. Advocacy for the other begins in worship. Advocacy is not primarily about big activity that often dies down like wind after a storm. Moreover, this is not "work" at the whim of the congregation; it is the Spirit who leads the church into intercession. The Spirit is still the *parakletos* who speaks on others' behalf and intercedes for them. It is the Spirit who teaches us what and how to pray for ourselves and others. This advocacy for the other is something that must be taught and empowered by the Spirit. One's advocacy before God must lead one to continue the advocacy out in the world. "Anyone who before God opens his mouth for the dumb can also raise his voice before the world and the powerful on behalf of the people who have no voice of their own, or whose voices are not listened to."<sup>30</sup> It is striking how often we have neglected the congregational ministry of intercession in worship.

Intercessory prayer is not an instrumental means to "real work" in the world. Prayerful intercession for others is "both an admission of the limitations of action, and an acknowledgment of the limitlessness of

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<sup>28</sup>Wannenwetsch, 325.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 341.

[God's] compassion."<sup>31</sup> It is precisely a prayer that recognizes how little we can really do. Our level of suffering for the other is often so limited that we can become anesthetized in the face of such insurmountable suffering. Intercessory prayer, recognizing the limits of what we can do, keeps alive the awareness that God wants all human beings to be helped (1 Tim. 2:4). The church in its priestly role intercedes for all because of its eschatological vision that God's compassion is limitless. Nevertheless, we are called to action, living out our identity of suffering love. In so doing, we must recognize that the process of naturalization into and the living out new political convictions is messy.

### **Messy Birthing of Ethics**

The birth of ethics as the doing/being of the church is messy. Worship is not "a linear, harmonious socialization process, in which the ethical shaping of believers follow like words written one after another on a blank page. Ethical learning always proceeds in the form of a struggle between the 'old' and the 'new' man."<sup>32</sup> In this struggle the church must continually allow God to transform her mind as Paul notes in Romans 12.1. There is a persistent struggle with old thought patterns and competing allegiances to the earthly city. Worship as a form of life makes the Christian life more like learning a foreign language than understanding one's own. A foreign language "can only be properly learned in its own country, where terms and phrases are understood in the context of a form of life which sustains them."<sup>33</sup> This serves as another way for Wannewetsch to emphasize that ethics cannot be abstracted from worship and applied as a type of theory for any context in the earthly city. Without a foundation in worship, it would simply be unintelligible.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, the church in the process of transformation is never to be at home in the earthly city.

**Conflict as Foreigner.** Wannewetsch reminds us that living out one's kingdom citizenship in the world leads to suffering (passively) which has yielded lethal consequences. Living as a stranger in the earthly community leads to suffering at the hands of the worldly powers. Any rit-

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 342.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 39.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>This may be what Paul is referring to in 1 Corinthians 1:20-31.

ual theorist can attest that foreigners and strangers to a community are always at odds and a threat to the internal cohesion of that community.<sup>35</sup> This tension is exacerbated because one's citizenship in the heavenly *polis* is not a privatized cult religion. If Christians would have practiced their worship as a private domestic cult, they could have enjoyed the religious tolerance bestowed by the Roman authorities in this respect, and would have been spared the experience of martyrdom. As it was, martyrdom was inevitable since the *ecclesia* was bound from the beginning to celebrate political worship.

Wannenwetsch helpfully notes that, with allegiance to God's *polis*, Christians have not been afraid of terms used to describe their worldly political status as *paroikoi* (strangers), *parepidenoi* (sojourners), and *xenoi* (foreigners). These terms are used to describe people who are aliens in the earthly *polis*. These individuals are not full citizens but native inhabitants, foreigners, not nationals.<sup>36</sup> Dual citizenship is not permitted by the church or the state. For the early church, no matter what political status was given the believer by the state, "as a full citizen of the Church's *polis*, he can be no more than a *paraoikos* in the secular community."<sup>37</sup>

As strangers and foreigners to the earthly city, the church, as the body of Christ, is called to suffer in love with and for the world. What is the political motivation? It is here that the eschatological vision informs the vocation of the church in the world. Observes Wannenwetsch:

The fundamentally missionary attitude meant that this "inside" was destined to dissolve, for as wandering people of God the congregation was on its way to acquiring an eschatological form, where there can no longer be any "outside"—that is to

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<sup>35</sup>Refer to the works of Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), Tom Driver, *Liberating Rites* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1998), Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1995), and Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2002.)

<sup>36</sup>Wannenwetsch, 141. See 1 Pet 1:1; 2:11; Heb.11:13. Wannenwetsch notes how early Christians saw themselves as a separate civil community within the local life in the civil polity of the empire, even if they were not recognized by the state. A second-century document, the Epistle of Diognetus, notes this self-understanding.

<sup>37</sup>Wannenwetsch, 142.

say, once the polis "from all nations," whose walls are always open (Rev. 21:25), has been finally reached.<sup>38</sup>

It is in this sense that the vision is ultimately political. In Jesus' *political* prayer we are invited to pray, "May your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven." The *telos* of the church's suffering love in the world not only offers food, shelter, and clothing, but primarily it is offering an invitation to the table whereby the foreigner becomes a political sister and brother.<sup>39</sup>

In light of the claims made for political worship by Wannewetsch, I will briefly consider the work of William Cavanaugh in his book *Torture and Eucharist*, while noting places of agreement with Wannewetsch.

**Torture and Eucharist.** Through a fascinating narrative depicting the crimes against the Chilean people under the Pinochet regime, William Cavanaugh talks about the relationship between the church and the government and how a renewal in eucharistic ecclesiology brought names and faces to the violence of torture. Cavanaugh's major premise is that the Eucharist is the church's primary political response to torture.

Cavanaugh claims that the rise of the modern state is predicated on the transfer of authority from particular associations to the state, enabling a direct relationship between the state and the individual.<sup>40</sup> In the Chilean instance, torture became a primary tool of the state to accomplish this direct relation. The state's political torture atomized individuals, who were fearful and alone, resulting in the breakdown of social bodies that could threaten the state's claims of totality. Cavanaugh is convinced that "torture is a kind of perverted liturgy, a ritual act which organizes bodies in the society into a collective performance, not of community, but of an atomized aggregate of mutually suspicious individuals. . . . Torture is not merely physical assault on bodies, but a formation of social imagination."<sup>41</sup> Violence was used by the state not as a response to threats, but

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 164.

<sup>39</sup>The eschatological dimensions of political worship are an essential corollary to political worship. It perhaps is obvious, but the *polis* of the kingdom of God, while present and "already," is always pointing to its complete consummation. Conversely, the earthly *polis* seems exhausted in the already and is always leaning toward claims of totalization.

<sup>40</sup>William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist* (UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 9.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 12.

rather to create threats of which it was the only protection from itself. Through the use of pain, this social imagination eliminated both the past and future. “With no *eschaton*, time runs in circles, always dumping the prisoner back in the anguish of the present.”<sup>42</sup> Conversely, a past would remind them of how egregious that state’s tactics were, while a future would give them hope that the present hardship would eventually pass, and so too the violent state.

While Cavanaugh had in mind the Chilean people under Pinochet, torture as self-imagination is certainly present in affluent and democratic nation-states built on gluttonous consumption as the means to one’s identity at the expense and oppression of many other nameless and faceless victims. Torture may be even more coercive when the starving are never seen or the impoverished are simply viewed as objects of government assistance. In affluent cultures, this atomization results in the distrust of all others who threaten “my” life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. If my imagination is only for me, it will lead to the continual objectification of all persons, with no room for community.

With fear and violence as its liturgy, peace in the civil state comes through the conquest of enemies. Cavanaugh argues that a true social order, a church politic, is based, not on the defeat of one’s enemies, but on identification with the “victims through participation in Christ’s reconciling sacrifice.”<sup>43</sup> It is here where political worship leads the church to suffering love in the world. The church is a social body that is defined not by defeating enemies but by self-giving, serving, and loving the other.

**The Church’s Challenge to the State’s Ultimacy.** Political worship is the public declaration that the nation state does not have ultimacy. However, challenging the state’s claim to totality does not ignore the evil practices of violence. Reflecting on the messiness of ethics that springs from political worship that Wannewetsch described, the Chilean church’s response to violence was messy. Cavanaugh argues that the removal of the church as a coercive power was positive, but when the church became a silent voice for the sake of “peace,” it failed to do and be what it was created for. Both Cavanaugh and Wannewetsch claim that the most political act of the church that undermines society’s claim to totality is communal worship. This does not mean that the church retreats

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 37.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 11.



into a private enclave, ignoring the harsh brutalities. Cavanaugh places a hard critique on the initial reactions of the church in Chile. The church was treated well by the state as a private cult, having removed itself from the games of coercion, and in so doing the church acquiesced to the drama which corroded the church's ability to resist when and where the state became violent.

Archbishop Oscar Romero in El Salvador is a principle figure of one who, in the face of the state's violent abuses, did not succumb to violence as the church's means of political action.<sup>44</sup> The church politic calls for suffering love, not coercive violence. A eucharistic counter-politics cannot help but be deeply involved with the sufferings of this world, while it is opposed to the politics of the world which celebrates violence and injustice as a means to self-preservation. The point is "not to politicize the Eucharist, but to 'Eucharistize' the world."<sup>45</sup> It is principally in the eucharistic liturgy that the church encounters and is constituted to be the eschatological *polis*. "Where torture is an anti-liturgy for the realization of the state's power on the bodies of others, the Eucharist is the liturgical realization of Christ's suffering and redemptive body in the bodies of His followers."<sup>46</sup> Christians are to be formed not by the culture but by a "eucharistic imagination." This imagination is not fanciful unreality. The "eucharistic imagination is a vision of what is really real, the kingdom of God, as it disrupts the imagination of violence."<sup>47</sup> Hence, as the church is gathered at the table, it receives and offers to others a vision for the future which gives hope and life in the present.

### The Sacramental Theology of John Wesley

Within this political discussion of sacraments and worship, how does John Wesley understand the sacraments as a means of grace—and what did this grace offer? I will highlight four specific claims made by Wannewetsch and compare them with Wesley. First, do the sacraments

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<sup>44</sup>The 1989 movie *Romero* (Dir. John Duigan, Prod. by Lawrence Mortoff, John Sacret Young (II) and Ellwood Kieser, Paulist Pictures), offers several spell-binding scenes of the church's move to worship in the direct face of state violence, including Romero's death while lifting up the chalice, where the blood of Christ was spilt.

<sup>45</sup>Cavanaugh, 14.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 204.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 206.

demand a response in thankfulness? Second, does this encounter with God in the sacraments as political worship call the church to an ethic of suffering love? Third, is the sacramental encounter of God instrumental to an ethic in the world or an end in itself? Fourth, is communal worship central or necessary for Wesley as it is for Wannenwetsch?

Wesley often quoted the Augustinian maxim that a sacrament is “an outward sign of an inward grace.”<sup>48</sup> Further, Randy Maddox claims that Wesley appeared to be at home with the Anglican *via media* emphasizing both the Spirit’s role of giving and the responsiveness of the receiver. This alternative Maddox labels *responsible grace*.<sup>49</sup> However, in regard to both the Eucharist and Baptism, Maddox implies that the Anglican Church downplayed the responsiveness of the receiver which was emphasized in Wesley. The Western church’s fixation with the atonement often reduced the sacraments to moments of certification or juridical pardon.

So where did this emphasis on responsibility come from? Maddox suggests that Wesley’s sacramental understanding was not only formed by the Church of England, but by the Eastern Church. The Eastern Church’s emphasis on the presence and offering of the Spirit not only recalled with joy God’s work in Christ, but partaking of the sacraments fostered and empowered our recovery of the holiness of God. Likewise, Wesley understood the sacraments, empowered by the Holy Spirit, as offering a therapeutic recovery of the holiness of God. While affirming the dynamic gift of the Spirit through the sacraments, the question ceases to be “whether we are ‘worthy’ to receive this gracious empowerment,” and instead centers on whether “we co-operantly receive—or squander—its healing potential.”<sup>50</sup>

While Maddox and others have documented the shift in Wesley’s thought concerning the Eucharist, Wesley affirmed that the central reason for partaking in the means of grace was not obedience to God’s command, but that we encounter God’s presence.<sup>51</sup> Meanwhile, the mature Wesley also affirmed the means of grace as “exercises that nourish the

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<sup>48</sup>John Wesley, Sermon 101, “The Duty of Constant Communion,” *The Works of John Wesley*, 7:503, in 14 vols., 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Ed. Thomas Jackson. London: Wesleyan, Methodist Book Room, 1872; reprint ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979). There are actually many references to this definition.

<sup>49</sup>Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1994), 196.

<sup>50</sup>Maddox, 198.

<sup>51</sup>See Wesley Sermon 16, “Means of Grace,” *Works* 5:188.

grace given to us.”<sup>52</sup> The sacraments not only offer grace that must be responded to, but the grace received empowers that response. Wesley here seems to agree that piety and ethics must never be separated and that one's ethic in love is empowered by the means of grace. In practice and in preaching, John Wesley advocated the centrality of regular communion. This is most explicitly observed in his sermon “The Duty of Constant Communion.” There he writes, “I must show that it is the duty of every Christian to receive the Lord's Supper as often as he can.”<sup>53</sup>

While frequency is advocated, does the therapeutic recovery of holiness that is made possible in the sacraments call for the church to suffering love in the world? Later, in the sermon “The Duty of Constant Communion,” Wesley describes the content of this therapeutic recovery of holy tempers.

The grace of God given herein confirms to us the pardon of our sins, and enables us to leave them. As our bodies are strengthened by bread and wine, so are our souls by these tokens of the body and the blood of Christ. This is the food of our souls: This gives strength to perform our duty, and leads us on to perfection. If, therefore, we have any regard for the plain command of Christ, if we desire the pardon of our sins, if we wish for strength to believe, to love and obey God, then we should neglect no opportunity of receiving the Lord's Supper; then we must never turn our backs on the feast which our Lord has prepared for us.<sup>54</sup>

Wesley asserts that communion is not only an embodied testimony of our forgiveness from sin, but a means of grace to grow away from sin into love. Drawing from the larger Wesleyan corpus, I argue that our perfection is growth in God's love which implies our duty to love others.<sup>55</sup> While the language is not explicitly communal, there is a sense in which the Eucharist continually enables and re-constitutes our growth in love, which then birth's our ethical duty to love others.

How does Wesley understand the relationship between ethics and communal worship? In the sermon “Means of Grace,” Wesley is clear that

<sup>52</sup>Maddox, 201.

<sup>53</sup>John Wesley, “The Duty of Constant Communion,” 147.

<sup>54</sup>“Duty of Constant Communion,” 148.

<sup>55</sup>See Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1972).

religion and outward acts of love are always by-products and never “ends.”

But in process of time, when “the love of many waxed cold,” some began to mistake the means for the end, and to place emphasis on religion rather in doing those outward works, [rather] than in a heart renewed after the image of God. They forgot that “the end of” every commandment is “love, out of a pure heart,” with “faith unfeigned;” the loving the Lord their God with all their heart, and their neighbour as themselves; and the being purified from pride, anger, and evil desire, by a “faith of the operation of God.”<sup>56</sup>

Wannenwetsch emphasized that worship is not an instrument or means to political action in the world. Similarly, Wesley affirms that, at the heart of all faith, theology, and sacraments, is the love of God, which also implies a love for neighbor. The good works are simply the result of God’s love that is flourishing in the individual. Speaking explicitly about the means of grace, Wesley seems clear that all grace leads one into an encounter with the loving God.

What are the boundaries and guidelines to adjudicate the consummation of worship’s intention? In a letter “*A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion—Part 1*,” Wesley responds to the question as to both the importance of worship, and the necessity of individual response to it.

**Query 1.** Whether a due and regular attendance on the public offices of religion, paid in a serious and composed way, by good (that is, well-meaning) men, does not answer the true ends of devotion.

**Answer.** I suppose, by devotion, you mean public worship; by the true ends of it, the love of God and man; and by a due and regular attendance on the public offices of religion, paid in a serious and composed way, the going as often as we have opportunity to our parish church, and to the sacrament there administered. If so, the question is, whether this attendance on those offices does not produce the love of God and man. I answer, sometimes it does; and sometimes it does not. I myself thus attended them for many years; and yet am con-

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<sup>56</sup>“Means of Grace,” 185-186.

scious to myself that during that whole time I had no more of the love of God than a stone. And I know many hundreds, perhaps thousands, of serious persons, who are ready to testify the same thing."<sup>57</sup>

Wesley notes that worship can foster the love of God and man, but not necessarily so. The distinguishing factor is the spiritual responsibility and receptivity of the Spirit. God, in political worship, does not manipulate, coerce, or overpower, but offers transforming life for those ready to be encountered in political worship.

### Conclusion

I am not trying to advocate that a Wesleyan sacramental theology agrees fully with what either Wannewetsch or Cavanaugh offer. There is little (hopefully) argument that Wesleyans recognize that their identity as Christians is to embody suffering love in the world as their ethic. What perhaps is up for discussion is whether worship and the sacraments are central, not just as the birth of this ethic of suffering love and empowerment to fulfill this task, but as central to the process of sanctification. I do think there is room within Wesleyan theology to affirm the conviction that political worship is central, both as the birth of ethics and as the primary embodiment of it. Further, political worship must never be a means or instrument to any activity of suffering love in the world. However, as the continual consummation of our political identity, responding to the abundance of God's love, the church is called into the world to offer real compassionate ministry, not just handing out food and clothes at a shelter, but inviting the needy to our home (or *polis*) to become a member (or citizen) of the body of Christ (kingdom of God).

It is in worship, and specifically at the table, where God encounters the church in suffering love and then constitutes the church to go out and be the poured out body and spilt blood of Christ as an act of suffering love. I close with a Wesleyan eucharistic prayer. In a spirit of sacramental thankfulness, Wesley prays that we would be captured into and by the love of God.

I magnify thee for granting me to be born in thy Church, and of religious parents; for washing me in thy baptism, and

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<sup>57</sup>John Wesley, "A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion—Part 1," *Works*, 8:61.

instructing me in thy doctrine of truth and holiness; for sustaining me by thy gracious providence, and guiding me by thy blessed Spirit; for admitting me, with the rest of my Christian brethren, to wait on thee at thy public worship; and for so often feeding my soul with thy most precious body and blood, those pledges of love, and sure conveyances of strength and comfort. O be gracious unto all of us, whom thou hast this day (or at any time) admitted to thy holy table. Strengthen our hearts in thy ways against all our temptations, and make us “more than conquerors” in thy love.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>J. Wesley, “Forms of Prayer for Every Day in the Week,” *Works*, 11:207.

# THE FORM AND POWER OF GODLINESS: WESLEYAN COMMUNAL DISCIPLINE AS VOLUNTARY SUFFERING

by

Kevin M. Watson

Methodists are, according to John Wesley's *Advice to the People Called Methodists*, people who "unite together to encourage and help each other in . . . working out [their] salvation, and for that end watch over one another in love."<sup>1</sup> The Wesleyan revival, from the beginning, was tied to small-group accountability, as John Wesley instituted a discipline that enabled Methodists to "watch over one another in love" so that they grew in their love of God and neighbor. A key part of this discipline was the structure of societies, classes, and bands that helped guide converts from a profession of faith in Christ into a life of committed discipleship. Yet, over time, the Methodist heritage has distanced itself from Wesley's structure. Today, contemporary Methodism has almost entirely abandoned the original Methodist structure for making disciples of Jesus Christ. As a result, while in Methodism a doctrine has been preserved that is recognizably Wesleyan, the structure Wesley intended to make this doctrine come to life in individual souls has been neglected.

Therefore, I will argue that the contemporary abandonment of Wesleyan discipline undermines the vitality of Methodism, because being truly Methodist means being Wesleyan. The argument will further be made that an authentic Wesleyan identity includes both the doctrines and

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<sup>1</sup>Rupert E. Davies, *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 9. *The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 125.

discipline that John Wesley bequeathed to his followers. It will also be argued that Wesley never intended for the doctrine of the movement to be separated from the structure that he designed to make the doctrine come to life in individual souls. For Wesley, beliefs were always connected to actions.

If contemporary Methodism is to reclaim its Wesleyan heritage, it will need to recommit itself to a discipline that involves small group accountability as a primary means of making disciples of Jesus Christ. In our increasingly consumer-driven culture, where people often value comfort above all else and struggle with even the simplest form of discipline, Wesleyan pastors, theologians, and teachers must be able to make a compelling case for the role of self-denial and voluntary suffering in the Christian life if the practice of accountability is to be resurrected in Methodism today.

### **Wesleyan Discipline: The Importance of Accountability for Growth in Holiness**

The basic structure that John Wesley organized consisted of societies, classes, and bands. One of his major contributions to Methodism was the discipline that this structure provided, which he argued was “entirely founded on common sense, particularly applying to the general rules of Scripture.”<sup>2</sup> Wesley instituted this structure because experience taught him that growth in grace was most likely to occur when Christians were held accountable for their discipleship. Wesley recorded in his journal one particular occasion where he “found the people in general to be in a cold, dead, languid state. And no wonder since there had been for several months a total neglect of *discipline*.”<sup>3</sup> He strongly believed that the discipline that this structure provided was essential to Methodists’ spiritual vitality, and that, with respect to their discipline, “Methodists are a highly favoured people.”<sup>4</sup>

Wesley’s description of the different parts of the Methodist structure consistently focused on the importance of communal support in the Chris-

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<sup>2</sup>Albert C. Outler, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, Vols. 1-4. *The Sermons* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 3:511.

<sup>3</sup>W. Reginald Ward, and Richard P. Heitzenrater, eds., *The Works of John Wesley*, Vols. 18-24. *Journals and Diaries* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 22:426.

<sup>4</sup>Outler, *Sermons*, 3:511.



tian life in order to “work out your salvation.”<sup>5</sup> In *The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies*, Wesley discussed the origin of the United Society, which was “a company of men ‘having the form, and seeking the power of godliness’, united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation.”<sup>6</sup> The only condition for admission into a society was “a desire to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins.”<sup>7</sup> While it was initially very easy to be admitted into a society, it was more difficult to remain in one. Those who “continue to evidence their desire of salvation” were expected to follow the general rules of “doing no harm,” “doing good,” and “attending upon all the ordinances of God.”<sup>8</sup>

The class meeting originally came into existence as a means of paying off debts related to building the first New Room in Bristol in 1739. Wesley wrote, “‘This is the thing, the very thing we have wanted so long.’ I called together all the *Leaders* of the *Classes* . . . and desired that each would make a particular inquiry into the behaviour of those whom he saw weekly.”<sup>9</sup> Wesley saw that one of the important results of these class meetings was that Christians “began to ‘bear one another’s burdens,’ and ‘naturally’ to ‘care for each other.’”<sup>10</sup> Wesley’s enthusiasm for these new classes was due to his observation that when Christians united together, they also tended to grow in their faith.

The final piece of the Methodist structure was the band meeting. According to the “Rules of the Band Societies,” “The design of our meeting is to obey that command of God, ‘Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another that ye may be healed.’”<sup>11</sup> The Wesleyan band meeting involved the deepest level of commitment to Christian faith and to growing in that faith. For instance, before someone was even admitted into a band group, they were required to testify to a sense of forgiveness and peace with Jesus Christ and to express a willingness to be completely open and truthful with the other band members.

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<sup>5</sup>Phil. 2:12.

<sup>6</sup>Davies, *Methodist Societies*, 9:69.

<sup>7</sup>Davies, *Methodist Societies*, 9:70.

<sup>8</sup>Davies, *Methodist Societies*, 9:70-73.

<sup>9</sup>Davies, *Methodist Societies*, 9:261.

<sup>10</sup>Davies, *Methodist Societies*, 9:262.

<sup>11</sup>Davies, *Methodist Societies*, 9:77.

The society, class, and band structure was valued by Wesley because it encouraged growth in the Christian life and enabled Christians to participate in their own salvation. Wesley's belief in small group accountability was strong enough that in 1763, 25 years into the revival, he wrote in his journal on August 25<sup>th</sup>:

I was more convinced than ever that the preaching like an apostle, without joining together those that are awakened and training them up in the ways of God, is only begetting children for the murderer. How much preaching has there been for these twenty years all over Pembrokeshire! But no *regular societies*, no discipline, no order or connection. And the consequence is that nine in ten of the once awakened are now faster asleep than ever.<sup>12</sup>

The society, class, and band structure was one of the major ways that the Methodist movement was distinct from similar revivals of the time. For example, one of Wesley's chief rivals and friends, George Whitefield, famously lamented that he had ignored the need for a structure to undergird the movement he led: "My Brother Wesley acted wisely—the souls that were awakened under his ministry he joined in class, and thus preserved the fruits of his labor. This I neglected, and my people are a rope of sand."<sup>13</sup> In other words, the uncommon results that Wesley found in Pembrokeshire were the results that Whitefield found more typically wherever he had preached.

In 1763, Wesley apparently considered the connection to be the glue that held both the revival and individual souls together as the Methodists sought to "spread scriptural holiness over the land."<sup>14</sup> Wesley's experience further taught him that Christians most effectively participate in their own salvation when they are united together "watching over one another

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<sup>12</sup>Ward, *Journals and Diaries*, 21:424.

<sup>13</sup>Holland N. McTyeire, *A History of Methodism: Comprising a View of the Rise of this Revival of Spiritual Religion in the First Half of the Eighteenth Century, and of the Principal Agents by Whom it Was Promoted in Europe and America; with Some Account of The Doctrine and Polity of Episcopal Methodism in the United States, and the Means and Manner of its Extension Down to A.D. 1884* (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1904), 204 (citing Adam Clarke).

<sup>14</sup>Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Works of John Wesley* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002, reprint edition), 8:299.

in love.” Therefore, a key insight of the revival was that Methodist doctrine would not come to life in individual souls without the structure that enabled Methodists to hold each other accountable for growing in grace.

One of the main purposes of the society, class, and band structure was to enable Methodists to grow in grace. Through the early Methodist movement, the aim of Methodism was constant: “holiness was their point.”<sup>15</sup> And the Methodists believed that it was God who “thrust them out, utterly against their will, to raise a holy people.”<sup>16</sup> As Wesley wrote in *Thoughts Upon Methodism*, “From this short sketch of Methodism (so called) any man of understanding may easily discern that it is only plain scriptural religion, guarded by a few prudential regulations. The essence of it is holiness of heart and life; the circumstantial all point to this.”<sup>17</sup> For Wesley and the early Methodists, then, each part of the society, class, band structure was aimed at promoting “holiness of heart and life.” Moreover, the central Methodist belief in “holiness of heart and life” was intimately connected with the actions of Methodists.

During his lifetime, Wesley constantly sought to keep the doctrine and discipline of the movement focused on enabling this growth in holiness. This concern is seen in the Minutes from June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1744, where the key leaders of Methodism met to consider, among other things, “What to do; that is, how to regulate our doctrine, discipline, and practice.”<sup>18</sup> In one of Wesley’s many summaries of the history of Methodism, he recalled that after preaching in the fields, people began “to inquire what they must do to be saved. He [Wesley] desired them to meet him all together, which they did, and increased continually in number.”<sup>19</sup> As the revival increased so that there were more Methodists than Wesley could realistically meet with, the class Leader came to serve a crucial role in inquiring “how every soul in his class prospers . . . [and] how he grows in the knowledge and love of God.”<sup>20</sup> The Methodist discipline, then, served as the primary method of ensuring that the basic goal of “holiness of heart and life” was achieved.

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<sup>15</sup>Jackson, 8:300.

<sup>16</sup>Jackson, 8:300.

<sup>17</sup>Davies, *Methodist Societies*, 9:529.

<sup>18</sup>Jackson, 8:275.

<sup>19</sup>Davies, *Methodist Societies*, 9:528.

<sup>20</sup>Jackson, 8:301.

Wesley's discipline sought to ensure that Methodists did not elevate either faith or works to the exclusion of the other. He realized that beliefs impact what people are likely to do, and actions reveal much about what people actually believe. In other words, for Wesley, "theology and practice *really were* one."<sup>21</sup> The Methodist discipline, then, was the surest method through which Wesley could ensure that Methodist beliefs would come to life in individual souls.

### **Wesleyan Doctrine: The Importance of Entire Sanctification for Growth in Holiness**

Wesley's understanding of sanctification was the primary doctrine which connected beliefs to actions. He felt that entire sanctification, or Christian perfection, was a particular doctrinal distinctive of Methodism. Towards the end of his life, he described the doctrine of entire sanctification as "the grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodists; and for the sake of propagating this chiefly he appeared to have raised us up."<sup>22</sup> Entire sanctification, for Wesley, meant obeying Christ's commandment to love God and neighbor.<sup>23</sup> The belief that Christians, empowered by God's grace, could actually love God and neighbor fully was an "essential" belief of early Methodism. This doctrinal emphasis, some scholars have argued, is the key to Wesley's spirituality.<sup>24</sup>

For Wesley, to deny Christ's power to make his people perfect in love, in this life, was ultimately to undercut the "power of godliness." Wesley was insistent that Christians did not have to sin:

God forbid we should thus speak. No necessity of sin was laid upon *them* [St. Peter and St. Paul]. The grace of God was surely sufficient for them. And it *is* sufficient for *us* at this day. With the temptation which fell on *them* that *was* a way to escape, as there *is* to every soul of man in every temptation; so that whosoever is tempted to any sin *need* not yield; for no man is tempted above that he is able to bear.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Howard A. Snyder, *The Radical Wesley and Patterns for Church Renewal* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1996), 5.

<sup>22</sup>Jackson, 13:9.

<sup>23</sup>See Matt. 22:37-40.

<sup>24</sup>Frank Whaling, *John and Charles Wesley: Selected Writing and Hymns* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1981), 47.

<sup>25</sup>Outler, *Sermons*, 2:112.

Ultimately, to make sin a necessity would be “to make the power of sin greater than that of grace.”<sup>26</sup> In “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” Wesley reminds his followers that Christ’s grace is sufficient for them. In fact, they should expect to be made perfect in love in this life. Wesley writes, “expect it *by faith*, expect it *as you are*, and expect it *now!*”<sup>27</sup>

Wesley’s doctrine of entire sanctification illustrates how intimately connected theology and praxis are in his theology and method. Wesley’s definition of Christian perfection in *Brief Thoughts on Christian Perfection* illustrates this connection: “By perfection I mean the humble, gentle, patient love of God, and our neighbour, ruling our tempers, words, and actions.”<sup>28</sup> Christians who “watched over one another in love” were more likely to participate in God’s gracious work of perfecting them in love. Wesley’s goal was to convince his audience to believe in Jesus Christ and to participate in Christ’s gracious transformation of their lives. As he wrote in “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” “‘Ye *are* saved.’ It is not something at a distance: it is a present thing, a blessing which, through the free mercy of God, ye are now in possession of.”<sup>29</sup>

Salvation is not given by God simply in order that Christians will go to heaven when they die. Rather, salvation is something that, when it is experienced, changes the way life is viewed and lived. Wesley, as a result, felt that doctrine without discipline was largely ineffective because it neglected to provide a method for living out professed beliefs.<sup>30</sup> So, while Christian faith has eternal consequences, it also has immediate implications for the present. Thus, a major concern of both Methodist doctrine and discipline was enabling Methodists to grow in holiness.

Wesley’s commitment to Christian perfection illustrates why the Methodist structure was crucial to the movement’s success. The goal of “holiness of heart and life” brought the expectation that disciples would completely surrender their lives to the lordship of Jesus Christ. For Methodists, then, the gospel was relevant to every part of life. Yet, Wesley discovered in his ministry that those who responded to the gospel but

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<sup>26</sup>Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 188.

<sup>27</sup>Outler, *Sermons*, 2:169.

<sup>28</sup>Jackson, 11:446.

<sup>29</sup>Outler, *Sermons*, 2:156.

<sup>30</sup>See Ward, *Journals and Diaries*, 21:424, and Ward, *Journals and Diaries*, 22:426.

were left on their own to live out the Way of Salvation often fell away from the grace given to them. The best way to ensure that those who had experienced the new birth would continue to grow in their faith was to plug them into the Methodist structure.

This structure, as a result, was designed to help Christians make progress in moving towards the goal or *telos* of being made perfect in love. If the doctrine of the movement was “salvation by faith, preceded by repentance, and followed by holiness,”<sup>31</sup> the method of enabling Christians to grow in holiness was small group accountability. The Methodist structure, then, deliberately complements Wesley’s understanding of the Way of Salvation. The society meeting provided an experience of awakening where sinners became aware of God’s prevenient grace working in their lives, the class meeting helped people come to faith in Jesus Christ and receive the forgiveness of their sins, and the band meeting was intended to help those who had already experienced the new birth to grow in holiness through God’s sanctifying grace.<sup>32</sup> Wesleyan doctrine and discipline were designed to work together to enable Methodists to continue moving forward in their faith.

### **The Danger of Comfortable Living: A Lesson from the Revival**

John Wesley believed that it was crucial to maintain both the basic doctrine and discipline of Methodism in order to ensure that Methodists grew in holiness. In *Thoughts upon Methodism*, he summarized the basic doctrine and discipline of Methodism and predicted that, as long as they were maintained, the movement would continue to thrive. However, Wesley warned: “if even the circumstantial parts are despised, the essential will soon be lost. And if ever the essential parts should evaporate, what remains will be dung and dross.”<sup>33</sup> In 1786, as Wesley took inventory of the state of Methodism, he observed that “wherever riches have increased . . . the essence of religion, the mind that was in Christ, has decreased in the same proportion.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Davies, *Methodist Societies*, 9:528.

<sup>32</sup>Steve Harper outlines the relationship between the Methodist structure and prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace in *Devotional Life in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1995), 131.

<sup>33</sup>Davies, *Methodist Societies*, 9:529.

<sup>34</sup>Davies, *Methodist Societies*, 9:529.

The danger of wealth and affluence caused Wesley to worry that the revival would not last. He wrote: I do “not see how it is possible . . . for any revival of true religion to continue long.”<sup>35</sup> Similarly, in his sermon, “Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity,” Wesley asked, “Does it not seem (and yet this cannot be!) that Christianity, true scriptural Christianity, has a tendency in process of time to undermine and destroy itself?”<sup>36</sup> Wesley feared that “wherever true Christianity spreads it must cause diligence and frugality, which . . . must beget riches. And riches naturally beget pride, love of the world, and every temper that is destructive of Christianity.”<sup>37</sup>

As a result, it is not surprising that near the end of his life, as Wesley wondered what the future would hold for the Methodist movement, one of his biggest fears was that Methodists would become “rich.” He feared that riches would divide Methodist loyalties so that those who became rich and had been entirely dedicated to the pursuit of “holiness of heart and life” would pursue riches more actively than holiness. He feared that riches would be the yeast that would spread throughout the revival, causing it to unravel.

The cure for the temptation of riches was self-denial. Wesley asked, “why is self-denial in general so little practised at present among the Methodists?”<sup>38</sup> Even from the perspective of 1790, Wesley feared that self-denial was falling out of favor and was undermining his best efforts to “spread scriptural holiness.” He found that “Methodists grow more and more self-indulgent, because they *grow rich*.”<sup>39</sup> Wesley wanted his followers to “gain all that they can and save all that they can,” but he did not want them to become rich. According to Wesley, if you gain and save all you can, “you must in the nature of things grow rich. Then if you have any desire to escape the damnation of hell, *give* all you can.”<sup>40</sup>

Clearly, for Wesley, this was not a trivial issue. The issue of riches has eternal consequences. If Methodists gained all that they could and saved all that they could but refused to give all that they could, Wesley

<sup>35</sup>Davies, *Methodist Societies*, 9:529.

<sup>36</sup>Outler, *Sermons*, 4:95.

<sup>37</sup>Outler, *Sermons*, 4:95-96.

<sup>38</sup>Outler, *Sermons*, 4:95.

<sup>39</sup>Outler, *Sermons*, 4:95.

<sup>40</sup>Outler, *Sermons*, 4:96.

warned them, “I can have no more hope of your salvation than for that of Judas Iscariot.”<sup>41</sup>

Late in his ministry, as Wesley looked at Methodism, he feared that the system he had created was somehow failing. Methodists were not holding one another accountable for growing in their faith. But by Wesley’s own definition, Methodists were people “‘seeking the power of godliness,’ united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation.”<sup>42</sup> The structure, by definition, was failing if people were coming together and not holding each other accountable. They could not claim to be watching over one another in love if they allowed each other to become comfortable with their riches, instead of encouraging each other to grow in holiness.

Wesley’s fear of Methodists growing rich provides a powerful example of why small group accountability is necessary for “holiness of heart and life.” Without being held accountable, Methodists seemed to be pulled back into the world and its desires. Wesley designed the system of accountability because he was aware of the distractions that Christians would face as they sought to grow in holiness. Thus, the entire structure had the goal of holiness as its constant goal.<sup>43</sup> Every week Methodists were required to give an account of where their loyalties had been the last week. Had they denied themselves, following the Way of Salvation, or had they chosen to be comfortable, following the way of the world? The Methodist structure provided a constant reminder that Jesus calls his disciples to carry their crosses, that discipleship requires a willingness to deny oneself. It reminded Methodists that Christian faith was about growing in holiness, not about becoming comfortable in this world.

The culture in which Methodists found themselves in Wesley’s day constantly enticed Methodists to divide their loyalties and to compromise. Accountability was the antidote to this powerful influence, as it reminded

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<sup>41</sup>Outler, *Sermons*, 4:96.

<sup>42</sup>Davies, *Methodist Societies*, 9:69.

<sup>43</sup>Henderson further develops the role each part of the Methodist structure played in encouraging growth in holiness: “The societies proclaimed and explained the doctrine, the class meeting was designed to implement the behavioral quest for holy lifestyle, and the bands facilitated the cultivation of inner purity and the purging of the attitudes. It was an interlocking system, woven around a common theme.” D. Michael Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples: John Wesley’s Class Meeting* (Nappanee: Francis Asbury Press, 1997), 115.



Methodists that their ultimate allegiance was to Jesus Christ. As such, the society, class, and band structure was the bulwark against the main threat to scriptural holiness, comfortable living. If Methodists refused to deny themselves in favor of riches, they were moving farther and farther away from the image of God, and from the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.<sup>44</sup>

### **The Contemporary Context of the United Methodist Church**

As John Wesley considered his legacy, it is interesting to notice his confidence that Methodism was well enough established that it would continue into the foreseeable future. What did concern him, however, was whether Methodism would continue as a Spirit-filled movement, or only as a “dead sect.” Towards the end of his life, he wrote:

I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case unless they hold fast both the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out.<sup>45</sup>

Ultimately, for Wesley, it is clear that to be Methodist means to “hold fast” to the doctrine *and discipline* that he articulated. This naturally raises the question: Has contemporary Methodism maintained a recognizably Wesleyan doctrine and discipline?

Doctrinally, the United Methodist Church can be considered to be Wesleyan because the *Book of Discipline* includes Wesley’s *Standard Sermons* and *Explanatory Notes* as part of the doctrinal standards.<sup>46</sup> One could argue, however, that the emphasis on growing in holiness is not as strong as it could be. It is very unclear whether the UMC has preserved a Wesleyan discipline. It could be argued that the connection has been preserved because of the continuing practice of conferencing at Annual Conferences and General Conference. On the other hand, most of the conferencing that happens today in the UMC is institutional in nature; little if

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<sup>44</sup>See Heb. 12:14.

<sup>45</sup>Davies, *Methodist Societies*, 9:527.

<sup>46</sup>United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 2004), ¶103, 71.

any of it is focused on “watching over one another in love.” One also wonders whether the average Methodist is even aware that they are members of a church that has a heritage known for being incredibly disciplined and methodical. A survey of the practice of United Methodist churches would likely reveal that small-group accountability in contemporary Methodism is the exception rather than the norm.

Ironically, though the *Book of Discipline* continues to mention the *Standard Sermons* and *Explanatory Notes* as part of the doctrinal standards of the UMC, it barely mentions the Wesleyan disciplinary structure. Aside from using conferencing as a bureaucratic structure, the original structure of societies, classes, and bands has essentially disappeared. The closest the *Book of Discipline* comes to preserving the Wesleyan structure is by reprinting the *The Nature, Design, and General Rules of Our United Societies* in ¶103 and in talking about “Small Group Ministries” and “Accountable Discipleship” in ¶1118. Yet, even this discussion of small group accountability has been relegated to a small section under the discussion of the role of the General Board of Discipleship. Here, the demise of the Wesleyan structure is acknowledged, because one of the foci is “revitalizing the role of the class leaders.”<sup>47</sup>

Henry Knight III has argued that “In Wesley’s day, a Methodist was someone who was committed to the discipline—the Rules of the United Societies—and to attend the weekly class meeting.”<sup>48</sup> But today, the *Discipline* gives the impression that someone committed to the discipline is not a typical member of a UM congregation, but is a member of the General Board of Discipleship! Surely, Wesley would insist that revitalizing small-group accountability is the responsibility of every local church, not just the responsibility of a board or agency. He would also insist that growing in holiness is the responsibility of every Christian; it is not just the responsibility of an elite few.

Unfortunately, Wesleyan classes and bands currently appear more likely to disappear entirely from the consciousness of the United Methodist Church than to be revived within mainstream Methodism. Robin Maas laments that “neither bands nor classes survived into the

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<sup>47</sup>United Methodist Church, ¶ 1118.2c, 533.

<sup>48</sup>Henry H. Knight III, “The Means of Grace and the Promise of New Life in the Evangelism of John Wesley,” *Considering the Great Commission: Evangelism and Mission in the Wesleyan Spirit*, eds., W. Stephen Gunter and Elaine Robinson (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 141.

twentieth century . . . efforts to revive the forms have met with little or no success.”<sup>49</sup> D. Michael Henderson further notes the loss of the method behind Methodism: “By the time the requirement of participation had been dropped as a condition for membership, the entire group system had crumbled and Methodism became just another religious denomination with no particular methodological distinction.”<sup>50</sup>

Today, many United Methodists resist being held accountable. Most members of the UMC would be uncomfortable or confused by Wesley’s insistence that holiness is linked with communal practice. Yet, Wesley was adamant that “‘Holy solitaries’ is a phrase no more consistent with the gospel than holy adulterers. The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness.”<sup>51</sup> Over the last several decades, the deepest form of communal practice that most Methodists have experienced is Sunday School, and even Sunday School attendance is not a requirement of membership. As Wesley predicted, the Methodist movement continues to exist. But does the UMC still have the power that Methodism had in John Wesley’s day?

### **Small-Group Accountability Is Necessary for the Revival of the United Methodist Church**

If the UMC is in danger of losing its spiritual vitality, it could be argued that this decline is due to ignoring the discipline that was always intended to be the primary vehicle that brought the “form” of Methodist religion to life. As Randy Maddox has written: “if contemporary Wesleyans have lost the *power*, it is not because we need to seek more ‘experiences,’ but because we have discarded Wesley’s spiritual guidelines and disciplines.”<sup>52</sup> It was these very guidelines and disciplines that brought the movement to life. The class meeting was especially crucial to the Methodist movement during Wesley’s lifetime. The church’s history witnesses to the necessity of reclaiming a similar structure and discipline if United Methodism is to succeed in finding spiritual renewal.

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<sup>49</sup>Robin Maas, and Gabriel O’Donnell O.P., eds., *Spiritual Traditions for the Contemporary Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 316. It should be acknowledged that much of David Lowes Watson and Steven Manskar’s work to promote Covenant Discipleship groups has occurred subsequent to Maas’ comments.

<sup>50</sup>Henderson, 142-143.

<sup>51</sup>Jackson, 14:321.

<sup>52</sup>Randy Maddox, ed., *Aldersgate Reconsidered* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1990) 15.

In *The Radical Wesley and Patterns for Church Renewal*, Howard Snyder chronicles elements typically found in renewal movements, noting that they always use “some form of small group structure.”<sup>53</sup> This structure is a crucial component of the spiritual vitality of any renewal movement. Recent advocates of Wesleyan theology have occasionally “forgotten this practical small group structure and thus have tended to overindividualize Wesley’s concept of sanctification and to lose the secret of much of the spiritual power of early Methodism.”<sup>54</sup> Ultimately, for Snyder, “the demise of the class meeting in large measure explains the decline of Methodism.”<sup>55</sup> It could further be argued that the contemporary abandonment of a Wesleyan discipline actually calls into question United Methodism’s commitment to growing in holiness. The obvious implication for Methodism today is that recovering “some functional equivalent of the class meeting with its intimacy, mutual care and support, and discipline is essential.”<sup>56</sup>

In looking at the UMC’s Wesleyan heritage, the crucial role that small-group accountability played in the Methodist revival is evident. This heritage provides a strong foundation in making the case for a return to a Wesleyan method. A crucial key to the UMC’s ability to revive the practice of small-group accountability will be reclaiming Wesley’s connection between beliefs and actions. Leaders in the United Methodist Church seem to be increasingly comfortable talking about John Wesley and his theology, but are they willing to live into the implications of Wesley’s thought, even when it is difficult?

Accountability is crucial because it maintains the connection between beliefs and actions: “Accountability is how we make sure our discipleship happens.”<sup>57</sup> Small-group accountability also “helps disciples stand against the trap of believing and living as though they were self-sufficient . . . [which] prevents us from believing there is no need to ‘work out [our] own salvation.’”<sup>58</sup> Accountability helps Christians avoid the temptation of confessing Christ with their mouths, while denying their

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<sup>53</sup>Snyder, 138.

<sup>54</sup>Snyder, 149.

<sup>55</sup>Snyder, 149.

<sup>56</sup>Snyder, 149.

<sup>57</sup>Steven W. Manskar, *Accountable Discipleship: Living in God’s Household* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2006), 23.

<sup>58</sup>Manskar, 23-24 (Phil. 2:12 is cited within the quotation).

confession in the way they live their lives. Methodists who avoid being held accountable may become cultural Christians who are practical atheists.

Elizabeth O'Connor further illustrates the need for balance between believing and doing in her book *Journey Inward, Journey Outward*. O'Connor discusses the "narrow gate" Jesus speaks of in Matthew 7:14, equating it with "the inward journey."<sup>59</sup> Her concern is "with the renewal of the church."<sup>60</sup> She believes that the church will not be renewed unless its people are on an inward and an outward journey, which is "what the Christian life is all about."<sup>61</sup> Ultimately, O'Connor's experience, as well as Wesley's, supports the argument that Christians more effectively practice what they say they believe when they come together in community. A key aspect, then, of making disciples of Jesus Christ involves engagement with and accountability to other disciples.

### **Reclaiming the Importance and Value of Self-Denial**

In John Wesley's day, all Methodists were required to attend a weekly class meeting and twenty percent were members of a band meeting.<sup>62</sup> Today, on the other hand, many Methodist churches barely have more than twenty percent of their "members" in worship on any given Sunday! In this situation, if the church hopes to reclaim an authentically Wesleyan discipline, the case will have to be made to the laity of why accountability and self-denial are necessary for spiritual growth and development. Wesleyan pastors will need to be able to explain why discipline is important not just to the church but to individuals who often resist restraints on their perceived freedom.

One of the most important ways to reclaim a Wesleyan discipline in the contemporary context of the UMC, especially in America, is through a renewed understanding of the importance and value of self-denial. Just as Methodists in Wesley's day began to pursue comfortable living through riches, American Methodists today are similarly tempted to value comfort above anything else. Wesley might wonder today, as he did at the end of his life, "why is self-denial in general so little practised at present among

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<sup>59</sup>Elizabeth O'Connor, *Journey Inward, Journey Outward* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1975), 9.

<sup>60</sup>O'Connor, 9.

<sup>61</sup>O'Connor, 9-10.

<sup>62</sup>Harper, 131.

the Methodists?” As membership in the UMC has declined over the past forty years, the UMC has increasingly accommodated to the dominant culture. As a result, self-denial is a virtue which has too often been ignored or forgotten in contemporary Methodism.

The Methodist heritage reminds the contemporary UMC that it was the goal of “holiness of heart and life” that provided the momentum for the revival. For Wesley’s contemporaries, this goal has not changed. God is still seeking to renew people into the image in which they were created, and Jesus is still seeking to save the lost. The UMC’s mission of “making disciples of Jesus Christ” reminds Methodists that Wesley’s goal was not just to tell people about the content of Christian faith. Rather, his ultimate concern was to help people discover how they could experience the power of God’s transforming grace in their own lives, to discover how they could become disciples. For Wesley, disciples are people who live out their confession of faith in Christ in the way in which they live their lives. Discipleship was not just an option for a religious elite; it was every Christian’s privilege and responsibility.

While reclaiming the importance of small-group accountability is crucial to the renewal of the United Methodist Church, moving the church back to the discipline of a small-group structure will not be easy. Elizabeth O’Connor frankly acknowledges that living out one’s faith commitment with others is difficult: “Engagement with others in depth is always difficult within the church, which is probably why so few try it and why there is so little genuine Christian community in the world.”<sup>63</sup> O’Connor argues, “Whereas Christian community is the most difficult to be involved in, it is the most rewarding and the most essential to those on an inward journey.”<sup>64</sup> Suffering and self-denial seem to be to some extent an unavoidable part of life together in community. Even though small-group accountability comes at a cost, it is a small price to pay for achieving the goal of growth in holiness.

Therefore, while some sort of small group accountability is essential to the renewal of the church,<sup>65</sup> it will require that United Methodists will-

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<sup>63</sup>O’Connor, 24.

<sup>64</sup>O’Connor, 25.

<sup>65</sup>Snyder’s argument for the need for small-group accountability permeates *The Radical Wesley* as he writes: “The whole tenor of this book suggests the need for some sort of committed small group structures for the vitality and renewal of the larger church.” Snyder, 162.

ingly embrace self-denial. This is because “a rigorous structure naturally goes against the grain in our lax, individualistic, live-and-let-live society.”<sup>66</sup> Yet, the very reasons why implementing a small group structure are difficult are the same reasons why it is desperately needed. As Snyder argues:

Talk of discipline, discipleship and responsible Christian lifestyle seldom gets beyond mere talk until folks make the kind of serious commitment to each other which provides the structure for space-time follow-through on professed beliefs and shows that believers are willing to ratify their commitment to Christ by commitment to his body. Only thus do we begin to understand *in practice* the truth that “we are members of each other.”<sup>67</sup>

There was resistance to the society, class, band structure in Wesley’s day as well.<sup>68</sup> Yet, Wesley understood what was at stake, and he held firm to the need for mutual accountability. Snyder connects this to the contemporary situation, arguing: “In any time when Christian values are in near-total eclipse, only a countercultural expression of the church will have the spiritual and social power to speak a gospel word to the dominant spirit of the age.”<sup>69</sup> It is telling that the church even needs to be reminded that it is to be countercultural. Snyder’s argument suggests that relevance and faithfulness are directly tied to being countercultural.

Wesleyan values do seem to be in danger of being overwhelmed by the dominant culture. One of the most painful parts of reclaiming a Wesleyan discipline may be realizing that the United Methodist Church has often made good citizens of the United States more effectively than it has made disciples of Jesus Christ. The fruit of these labors is that many United Methodists may not appreciate the need to be countercultural. This is a challenge that will require pastoral sensitivity and thoughtful articulation of what the mission of the church really is and how it calls us and sets us apart from the broader secular culture.

<sup>66</sup>Snyder, 149.

<sup>67</sup>Snyder, 149-150.

<sup>68</sup>In “A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists,” after describing the benefits that came as a result of the class meeting, Wesley writes: “But notwithstanding all these advantages, many were at first extremely adverse to meeting thus.” He then chronicles the objections and defends the class meeting. Davies, *Methodist Societies*, 9:262ff.

<sup>69</sup>Snyder, 150.

## Conclusion

I have argued that the keys to the renewal of the United Methodist Church are found in its Wesleyan heritage, which primarily consists of a doctrinal emphasis on scriptural holiness *and* a disciplinary insistence on the need for Methodists to “watch over one another in love.” This heritage bears witness to the role that small-group accountability plays as a prudential means of grace that God has used to renew hearts and lives in the image that they were created in. For many different reasons, the contemporary UMC has wandered away from its Wesleyan heritage, especially as it relates to Methodist discipline. Nevertheless, this paper has sought to demonstrate that to be truly Methodist means being Wesleyan, and a Wesleyan identity includes a distinct doctrine *and discipline*.

Contemporary Wesleyans who seek to revitalize accountability will face some serious difficulties. Robin Maas provides a sobering reminder:

The recovery of a genuine Wesleyan spirituality, though highly desirable, will not be an easy task. Many cultural factors weigh heavily against it. But the same could be said of Wesley’s own time, and he was not one to be daunted by unfavorable conditions! It is *never* easy to be faithful to the demands of discipleship, and that is why Wesley emphasized so heavily the importance of regular, mutual, structured support for individuals struggling to be faithful to Christ in a culturally hostile environment.<sup>70</sup>

Gradually, Methodism has moved away from holding its members accountable to practicing their faith. In moving away from this communal practice, Methodists have also, perhaps unintentionally, severed Wesley’s deliberate connection of beliefs and actions. A result of the dissolution of Wesleyan discipline is that the church has lost what made it distinct from the surrounding culture.

Methodism has come to increasingly resemble American culture, instead of being “gospel leaven in society.” Members of the Methodist Church have also been tempted to see faithfulness to the commands of Christ as optional, or only required for an elite few. The contemporary church, as a result, faces the challenge of convincing nominal Christians that they are missing out on the essence of Christian faith, that “without

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<sup>70</sup>Maas, 320.



holiness no one will see the Lord.”<sup>71</sup> The UMC must remind its members that God’s will for every Christian is that they grow in love of God and neighbor.

The UMC must avoid the temptation to accommodate to the dominant culture. Instead, it must insist that genuine expressions of Christian faith require obedience to the commands of Christ and a commitment to growing in holiness. A major conviction of mine is that Methodists today are most likely to be obedient to Christ and to grow in their faith if they “watch over one another in love,” just as the early Methodists did. As such, small group accountability is the most promising pathway to accomplishing the UMC’s mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ.

Methodists who, in faith, risk letting others into their lives, or who risk investing themselves in the lives of others who are trying to live as faithful followers of Christ in this world, will find both joy and suffering. Being held accountable can be a humiliating and embarrassing experience. Entering into a deeper level of fellowship with those whom we have previously known on only a superficial level will not be easy. But faith has always involved risk. And faith in Christ has always come with Jesus’ command to “deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow.”<sup>72</sup>

The UMC, as it seeks to be faithful to its mission, faces the challenge of helping its members value self-denial and suffering in the Christian life as they seek to enter through the “narrow door” of Christian discipleship.<sup>73</sup> The vulnerability and accountability of a Wesleyan discipline will involve suffering. John Wesley continues to remind United Methodists that the only way that one can hope to be “purified as his Lord is pure” is by walking in the way of Christ, “tak[ing] up his cross daily,” and submitting to “a constant and continued course of general self-denial!”<sup>74</sup> This is the “Way” that leads to salvation, and it is where the UMC can hope to rediscover both the form and power of godliness.

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<sup>71</sup>Heb. 12:14.

<sup>72</sup>Matt. 16:24.

<sup>73</sup>See Luke 13:24.

<sup>74</sup>Outler, *Sermons*, 1:412.

**SUFFERING WITH THE CRUCIFIED CHRIST:  
THE FUNCTION OF THE CROSS IN  
THE WORKS OF JOHN WESLEY  
AND DOROTHEE SOELLE**

by

**Darren Cushman Wood**

As I sat surrounded by ceramic ducks and cows dressed in crotched bonnets, Ruby described the abuse her daughter had recently come through. Ruby, a former factory worker who wore her hair in a truncated beehive and spoke in a thick Eastern Kentucky accent, was a member of one of the churches in my first appointment. Her son-in-law had fled the state after several years of dealing drugs and abusing her daughter. Now, several weeks later, he had turned up in a drug rehab center in North Carolina. His case worker had become triangled in the whole ordeal and had been calling Ruby's daughter trying to convince her to take him back.

"Pastor, I have been praying about all this," Ruby explained, "and the other day I got down on my knees in my prayer closet." She had converted the closet in her sewing room into an alcove of religious kitsch featuring a large bulletin board on the door where she pinned various prayer requests. "I prayed that the precious blood of Jesus would be shed upon my daughter and that his holy blood would protect her," she said, "and that the Lord's blood would be shed upon him to forgive him and change his heart." It was an atonement that was as bloody as you can get, and I, recently graduated from Union Seminary in New York and still saturated with feminist theories, was deeply troubled by what I was hearing.

Ruby's prayer illustrates the contemporary dilemma over the atonement. In recent years, critiques of the atonement have been raised by feminist theologians and others which center on two fundamental problems: violence and passivity.<sup>1</sup> Theologians have asked, Does the cross sanction abuse and perpetuate violence? And, Do certain atonement theories promote human passivity in the face of oppression? This paper will focus on how the cross functions in the works of John Wesley and Dorothee Soelle to activate the believer to overcome sin and evil. By addressing the problem of passivity, we will be better able to form solutions to the problem of violence in the atonement.

While Wesley was an eighteenth-century Anglican, Dorothee Soelle was a twentieth-century German Protestant theologian, poet, and mystic who was known for her political activism on a variety of progressive causes. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, she led the *Politisches Nachgebet*, a vesper service that combined spirituality and political activism in Cologne. For many years she was a visiting professor at Union Theological Seminary (New York). Looking at the ways Wesley and Soelle use the cross can help us address the problem of passivity because both of them recast Reformation theology they inherited in order to support Christian activism. For Wesley, it is in support of the comprehensive goal of holiness, and for Soelle it is in support of a mystical political activism. At times, they complement each other giving us a fuller understanding of the cross. And where their views of the cross diverge, they have the potential to correct each other.

### Wesley's Use of the Cross

John Wesley stands in the tradition of substitutionary atonement. While there are references to *Christus Victor*, they do not play a central role in his understanding. There are few military or ransom images in his references to the atonement, which is surprising given their prevalence in the Book of Common Prayer from which Wesley often quotes.<sup>2</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup>For a feminist perspective see Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001). For a pacifist perspective see J. Denny Weaver, *the Nonviolent Atonement* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2001). For an overview of the debate see *Atonement and Violence*, John Sanders, ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006).

<sup>2</sup>Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994) pp. 97-98.

theme of the atonement as an act of deliverance is “implicit rather than explicit and found chiefly in the earlier sermons.”<sup>3</sup> Wesley posits victory over sin in the themes of regeneration and sanctification. In “The End of Christ’s Coming” he explains how Christ destroys the works of the devil not with cosmic warfare but with an illumination of the heart. “It is by thus manifesting himself in our hearts that he effectually ‘destroys the works of the devil’.”<sup>4</sup> This is victor imagery, but the action occurs in a different place—the human heart rather than in the cosmos—from the traditional models of *Christus Victor*. Wesley “personalizes” *Christus Victor* while making this imagery one part of the framework of substitutionary atonement.

In even fewer places there are allusions to the moral influence model of atonement. It is heard in hymns in which the believer sees in the cross the supreme example of God’s love. But for Wesley, this example of love was expressed as the pardon that penal substitution secures.<sup>5</sup>

Penal substitution works within a framework of representation. In “Justification by Faith,” and in his notes on Romans, Wesley sees Christ as a “second general parent and representative of the whole human race.” As such, Christ is the Second Adam who has “tasted death for every man” (Hebrews 2:9). As our representative, Christ satisfied the just requirement that we be punished for sin. The “propitiation made by the blood of his Son” is the supreme expression of the righteous mercy of God. Maddox summarizes it best, “One is tempted to describe this as a Penalty Satisfaction *explanation* of the Atonement which has a moral Influence *purpose*, and a Ransom *effect!*”

His statements on penal substitution, however, stand in contrast to other theories of the atonement in Wesley’s day. There are no references or allusions to Anselm’s divine satisfaction. For Wesley, the restoration of God’s honor is not at stake. Even though Wesley vigorously defended

<sup>3</sup>p.71.

<sup>4</sup>Sermon 62, II.7, *Works* (Outler), vol. 2, p. 480.

<sup>5</sup>For example, see hymn 145.6-7 and hymn 160. 7 in “A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists,” *Works*, Franz Hildebrandt, Oliver A. Beckerlegge, with James Dale, editors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983) vol. 7, 251, 282. Maddox claims there is more affinity between Abelard and Wesley than is usually acknowledged, even though Wesley would reject the basic premises of Abelard’s argument. Like the *Christus Victor* themes, elements of moral influence are taken up in the personal application of substitutionary atonement. *Responsible Grace*, 106.

Arminianism, he never articulated the Governmental Theory of Grotius. He certainly did not embrace the Commercialist Theory of the hyper-Calvinism of John Owen because of its implications favoring limited atonement. According to Alan Clifford, "Wesley's theology owes more to Reformation Anglicanism than to any other source."<sup>6</sup>

Within this tradition, Wesley tends to place more emphasis on the imagery of sacrifice than on the forensic dimensions. As Colin Gunton has demonstrated, even though they overlap, the metaphors of justice and sacrifice are distinct.<sup>7</sup> For example, in "Justification by Faith," Wesley relies heavily on Isaiah fifty-three, but does very little with the metaphors of indebtedness or indictment. The sacrificial imagery may be more useful in his desire to create a "practical divinity," whereas the forensic metaphor may tend to divert attention toward metaphysical speculations that reinforce a passive trust in an acquittal that took place beyond time and space. It is the remembrance and present experience of the atonement which is the dynamic engine of Wesley's *ordo salutis*. Sacrificial imagery lends itself to this kind of active faith better than juridical metaphors.

The driving force behind Wesley's embrace of penal substitution is the centrality of the doctrine of justification. Substitutionary atonement makes justification possible because we are pardoned by virtue of "the merits of Christ's death and Passion."<sup>8</sup> Without the atonement as the objective foundation, our justification is either an illusion or relies upon our own merits. For Wesley, substitutionary atonement reveals that there is nothing we can do to earn our salvation. His embrace of penal substitution, therefore, reflects the primacy of grace in his theology.

All of this sprang from a deep personal crisis of faith. As a young man, Wesley had made an ardent attempt to practice the asceticism of William Law and others. Yet, the more he tried the more he failed, which created a frustrating paralysis in his faith. It was the doctrine of justification, as first interpreted by the Moravians and later confirmed by the homilies, that saved him from this crisis. Even though he maintained human agency in his *via salutis*, he realized that it can only be initiated by God. The cross is the supreme expression of God taking the first step to reanimate human beings so that we can progress toward holiness.

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<sup>6</sup>*Atonement and Justification, English Evangelical Theology 1640-1790: An Evaluation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 134.

<sup>7</sup>*The Actuality of Atonement* (London: T & T Clark, 1988) pp. 83-86, 105.

<sup>8</sup>Sermon 5, "Justification by Faith," IV.3 and IV.4, *Works* (Outler), vol. 1, p.195.

By contrast, William Law sees the crucifixion not as vicarious suffering for our sins but as a representational act of sacrifice to make our acts of mortification acceptable to God. Thus, salvation is dependent upon both Christ's suffering and our mortification; we must practice self-denial (i.e., "the way of the cross") in order to benefit from Christ's atonement. According to Law's fundamentally mystical position, "Christ's death did not constitute any satisfaction to God, but was only a means to the transformation of man and a demonstration of Christ's superiority to the world, death, Hell, and the Devil."<sup>9</sup> The death of Christ was substitutionary in the sense that it was the only way for God to overcome evil.

In the days leading up to his Aldersgate experience, there was an exchange of letters between Wesley and Law in which Wesley criticized his mentor for not sharing with him the true meaning of the atonement. Wesley criticized Law's asceticism as "too high for man" and "bringing us into deeper captivity to the law of sin," and he observed that Law never grounded his advice "upon faith in his blood."<sup>10</sup> Law replied, "If you are for separating the doctrine of the cross from following Christ, or faith in him, you have number and names enough on your side, but not me."<sup>11</sup> In the final letter, Wesley remarked on Law's two maxims of the Lord (1. "Without me ye can do nothing" and 2. "If any man will come after me, or be my disciple, let him take up his cross and follow me") saying that they "may imply but do not express that . . . 'He is our propitiation, through faith in his blood' "<sup>12</sup>

Underneath their falling out over the atonement were two different understandings of the relationship between justification and sanctification. Because Wesley insists that we cannot achieve our justification through our works, the atonement must be the prior event that secures our salvation. Because Law implies that sanctification is a precursor to justification, the cross plays a role other than propitiation.

The letters must be read in context. Wesley may not be a reliable interpreter of Law for us, but he does express his desperate desire to find a sufficient foundation for his quest for holiness. For Wesley, we do not

<sup>9</sup>Harald Lindstrom, *Wesley and Sanctification* (London: Epworth Press, 1946), p. 68.

<sup>10</sup>*Works* (Baker), vol. 25, "Letter from Wesley to Law, May 14, 1738," p. 540-541.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, "Letter reply from Law to Wesley, May 19, 1738," p. 544.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, "Letter from Wesley to Law, May 20, 1738," p. 547.

and cannot initiate the process of holy living. “It is through his merits alone,” Wesley writes near the end of his life, “that all believers are saved, this is, justified, saved from guilt, sanctified, saved from the nature of sin, and glorified, taken into heaven.”<sup>13</sup> Holiness can only begin with and be sustained by our pardon from sin through faith in God’s initiative on the cross. Anything less leads to utter futility.

Yet, Wesley also sees the limits of substitutionary atonement. It is essential but, if taken too far, it has dire consequences for the pursuit of holiness. He criticizes Calvinists for interpreting the righteousness of Christ in a way that leads to antinomianism. In turn, Calvinists such as James Hervey criticize Wesley for putting too much emphasis on human works and diminishing the grace of God.<sup>14</sup>

For Wesley, the problem with the Calvinists’ “substitutionary justification” is that they extend the righteousness of Christ as a substitute for the believer’s active growth in holiness. In order to avoid the implication that we are saved by our works, this view posits a distinction between Christ’s passive and active obedience. His passive obedience (“righteousness”) was his suffering the punishment for our sins; his active obedience (“righteousness”) was his fulfillment of the law. Christ is our substitute for the punishment we deserve, which is accomplished by his passive righteousness, *and* for the fulfillment of the law, which is accomplished by his active righteousness.<sup>15</sup>

Echoing the Anglican tradition, Wesley rejects the false distinction between the passive and active righteousness of Christ.<sup>16</sup> He affirms that it is the righteousness of Christ imputed to us that pardons us, but limits the effects of the atonement to mean “neither more nor less than justification.”<sup>17</sup> His substitutionary atonement did not fulfill the law, it was only a substitute for punishment.<sup>18</sup> The righteousness of Christ (be it “active” or “passive”) does not fulfill (“satisfy”) the requirements of the law for us, which would make us exempt from having to obey the law. Instead, the

<sup>13</sup>Sermon 127, “On the Wedding Garment” §6, *Works* (Outler), vol. 4, p. 143.

<sup>14</sup>*Works* (Outler) vol. 1, pp. 444-446; Maddox, p. 104.

<sup>15</sup>Maddox, p. 103.

<sup>16</sup>*Works* (Outler), vol. 1, II.9, p. 457.

<sup>17</sup>“Thoughts on the Imputed Righteousness of God,” §10, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 10 (Schmul Publishers: Salem, Ohio, 1872), p. 314.

<sup>18</sup>Lindstrom, p. 73.

righteousness of Christ must also be implanted in us after the pardon has been given (“imputed”) to us.

Regarding this implanted righteousness of Christ, Wesley believes in it but “in its proper place; not as the *ground* of our acceptance with God, but as the *fruit* of it; not in the place of *imputed* righteousness, but as the consequent upon it. That is, I believe God *implants* righteousness in every one to whom he has imputed it.”<sup>19</sup> He rejects the imputation of Christ’s *active* righteousness to believers because it removes the motivation to seek Christian perfection and with it the moral activism in the *ordo salutis*. It was “undercutting the place for *responsible* Christian growth in response to God’s *grace*.”<sup>20</sup>

Wesley has a paradox. On the one hand, he maintains the exclusive primacy of God’s grace to save us, as expressed in penal substitution. On the other hand, he contends that human agency is an essential element in the pursuit of holiness. How does he avoid both the futility of Law’s mysticism and the passivity of Hervey’s Calvinism? He must go beyond despair and self-righteousness. The answer lies in the “participatory” dimensions of atonement.

By “participatory” I am borrowing from the work of Morna Hooker who demonstrates that Paul’s understanding of the cross was an act of solidarity with humanity that creates the way for human beings to enter into solidarity with Christ’s death and resurrection, which creates new life.<sup>21</sup> We see this in key passages, such as Romans six and Galatians 2:19-20. Instead of Christ being a substitute that replaces human responsibility, the cross is literally our way to die with Christ and to be reborn in Christ.

As Paul Chilcoate describes Wesley’s thoughts as “conjunctive theology” and this synthesizing process is seen in how the atonement functions for him.<sup>22</sup> Wesley combines participatory and substitutionary dimen-

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<sup>19</sup>Sermon 20, “The Lord Our Righteousness,” II.12, *Works* (Outler), vol. 1, 458.

<sup>20</sup>Maddox, p. 104.

<sup>21</sup>*Not Ashamed of the Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), p. 36.

<sup>22</sup>Paul Chilcoate, *Recapturing the Wesleys’ Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004) p. 18.



sions of the atonement in order to hold together this paradox of God's grace and human agency. The substitutionary aspects are more apparent, but the participatory elements are saturated throughout his works. It is the synthesis of these two functions of the atonement that enable Wesley to avoid the problems of Law and Hervey, of despair and passivity.

We hear participatory themes throughout the hymns John selected for the Methodist movement. There are a number of Charles' hymns that urge the believer to participate in the atonement in order to personally appropriate the salvific benefits of substitutionary atonement. For example, hymn 24 typifies the participatory nature of the atonement. Verse one calls our attention to "the Man of griefs condemned for you" and then verses two through seven recreate the Passion story and end with the question, "Where is the King of glory now? . . . Th'Almighty faints beneath his load." Then, verses eight through fifteen bring the atonement into the heart of the believer. The believer longs to experience the crucifixion as the way into the new birth. Verse nine says, "Help me to catch thy precious blood/Help me to taste thy dying love," and it climaxes in verses ten and eleven:

Give me to feel thy agonies,  
One drop of thy sad cup afford!  
I fain with thee would sympathize,  
And share the sufferings of my Lord.  
The earth could to her centre quake,  
Convulsed, while her Creator died;  
O let my inmost nature shake,  
And die with Jesus crucified!<sup>23</sup>

Hymn 352 is even more direct:

Now, Jesus, let thy powerful death  
Into my being come,  
Slay the old Adam with thy breath,  
The man of sin consume. . . .  
My old affections mortify,  
Nail to the cross my will,  
Daily and hourly bid me die,  
. . . .

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<sup>23</sup>*Works* (Hildebrandt, Beckerlegge, Dale), vol. 7, p. 110.

So shall I live; and yet not I,  
But Christ in me shall live.<sup>24</sup>

The interplay between substitutionary and participatory themes is also seen in Wesley's *Notes* on chapters five and six of Romans. In his note on Romans 5:6, he declares that the cross is more than an example to inspire love and devotion. Christ's death is "not only to set them a pattern, or to procure them power to follow it" but first and foremost it is "to atone for" our sins.

When discussing the baptismal imagery of chapter six, Wesley introduces the Holy Spirit to make the Atonement a reality in the life of the believer. "In baptism we, through faith, are ingrafted into Christ; and we draw new spiritual life from this new root, through his Spirit, who fashions us like unto him, and particularly with regard to his death and resurrection." The sinful self is "crucified with Christ, mortified, gradually killed, by virtue of our union with him." Here we see the asceticism of Wesley's early days, which he had learned from Law and others. The end result is "complete victory over [sin] to every one who is under the powerful influences of the Spirit of Christ."<sup>25</sup> He describes our experience of the Holy Spirit as melted metal being cast in a mould. The mould is the cross, and the agent using the mould is the Spirit.

In his sermons, participatory atonement functions as the map to theosis. One enters the territory of the new birth through the cross. The new birth is marked by an activation of our "spiritual senses," which have atrophied because of sin. In order to activate the senses, the sin in one's heart must be crucified. Wesley uses participatory language to describe the effect of the new birth in new believers:

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<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 519-520. Other examples include hymn 505 that describes the role of participatory atonement in the creation of Christian fellowship. "Witnesses that Christ hath died," Charles writes, "we with him are crucified." One can see the connection between spiritual illumination and participatory atonement in hymn 118. The theme of participatory atonement is also reflected in the widespread use of Galatians 2:20 in the hymns. The theme of participation also appears in the hymns that John translated, as in this line: "No more, but Christ in me may live! My vile affections crucify" (in *John And Charles Wesley*, John Wahling, ed. (NY: Paulist Press, 1981) p. 91). Among the hymns that John might have written himself the imagery of participatory atonement appears. He associates it with the conversion experience. Under the heading, "Groaning for Full Redemption," John begins hymn 341 with references to substitutionary atonement and then moves to a participatory emphasis.

<sup>25</sup>Romans 6:3, 6, 14.

“Now the Word of God plainly declares that even those who are justified, who are born again in the lowest sense, do not ‘continue in sin’; that they cannot ‘live any longer therein’; that they are ‘planted together in the likeness of the death of Christ’; that their ‘old man is crucified with him, the body of sin being destroyed, so that thenceforth they do not serve sin.’”<sup>26</sup>

Substitutionary atonement is the initiator and basis for justification, while participatory atonement makes it a reality in the life of the believer. Participation is the way in which justifying and sanctifying grace are held together.

Participation also helps Wesley describe the on-going process of sanctification. In “The Law Established Through Faith, II” he describes how the law is established in our hearts by faith. “While we steadily look, not at the things which are seen, but at those which are not seen, we are more and more crucified to the world and the world crucified to us.”<sup>27</sup>

The participatory function of the atonement plays a key role in Wesley’s description of Christian perfection. In “Christian Perfection” he quotes Romans 6 extensively to describe the character of a “real Christian”<sup>28</sup> and utilizes Galatians 2:20 to explain how “evil tempers” are removed from the believer.<sup>29</sup> In “An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion” Wesley states that Christian perfection “does imply the being so crucified with Christ as to be able to testify, ‘I live not, but Christ liveth in me.’”<sup>30</sup> And again, in “Thoughts on Christian Perfection” he describes “a gradual mortification” that produces perfect love through “a total death to sin and an entire renewal in the love and image of God.”<sup>31</sup>

Given his abiding interest in holiness and good works, it seems ironic that Wesley does not follow Abelard or make much use of a moral influence perspective. Yet, Wesley’s view of sin demands that the believer become activated (reactivation of the *imago dei*) for good works by some-

<sup>26</sup>“Christian Perfection,” Sermon 40, II.3, *Works* (Outler), vol. 2, p. 106.

<sup>27</sup>Sermon 36, II.2, *Works* (Outler) vol. 2, p. 39.

<sup>28</sup>Sermon 40, II.4. *Works* (Outler), vol. 2, p. 106.

<sup>29</sup>*ibid.*, II.25, p. 118.

<sup>30</sup>§55, in *John Wesley*, edited by Albert C. Outler (Oxford: Oxford U Press, 1964), p. 404.

<sup>31</sup>Q.26, *ibid.*, p. 293.

thing other than ourselves, and that the effects of the atonement can operate in the human heart. Experiencing the atonement in one's heart frees human agency from the power of sin and perpetually empowers us for the pursuit of holiness. For Wesley, Christ is an ineffective role model unless the Spirit of Christ can first crucify sin in us so that we can quite literally allow that role model to be embodied in us.<sup>32</sup>

The participatory dimension of the atonement functions in several ways in his theology. It enables him to retain some ideas from the mystics that influenced him as a young man while avoiding their shortcomings. It reflects his view of "inward holiness" as theosis. It explains the effectiveness of mortification. It enables him to demonstrate how substitutionary atonement is personal and not merely theoretical. It helps to bring the gap between the juridical and therapeutic perspectives on the atonement. And at key places in his *via salutis* the theme of participatory atonement is the inner logic that combines elements of *Christus Victor* and moral influence into his substitutionary framework.

### **Dorothee Soelle's Use of the Cross**

Like Wesley, Dorothee Soelle's writings center on the relationship between human responsibility and divine grace. On the one hand, she rejects any view of the cross that reproduces the dynamics of oppression. On the other hand, she is acutely aware of the anemia of liberal theology's reliance on human initiative to address the social dynamics of sin. She affirms the universality of sin, but rejects all attempts to reduce sin to metaphysical categories. Sin must be understood in concrete, historical terms in order to prevent theology from being irrelevant or complicit with social injustice. Specifically, capitalism creates "objective cynicism" in which we involuntarily participate in the exploitation of workers and the environment. The subjective side of sin manifests itself as apathy and "neutrality," which is a middle-class tactic for avoiding responsibility for our complicity with objective cynicism.<sup>33</sup> A vicious cycle develops in which the objective and subjective sides of sin reinforce each other.

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<sup>32</sup>For other examples of participatory atonement see also Sermon 40, II.3.4. 25 *Works* (Outler), vol. 2, pp. 106, 118; "An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion," §55, in *John Wesley*, edited by Albert C. Outler (Oxford: Oxford U Press, 1964), p. 404.

<sup>33</sup>*Choosing Life*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), p. 52.

Soelle begins with a critique of substitutionary atonement because it reinforces this sinful cycle. The traditional view of Jesus as a divine hero reinforces the passivity. His suffering is so unique and complete that all we can do is admire his stamina. If his suffering is all-sufficient, then all human suffering is insignificant.<sup>34</sup> Also, this either makes God remote, or worse, it projects a “sado-masochistic theo-ideology of God as a hang-man.”<sup>35</sup>

Because substitutionary atonement places Christ on a pedestal, the cross distracts our attention from seeing God in the poor and from experiencing Christ in our solidarity with the oppressed. When Christ is a substitute we cannot see how to follow him, how to be “in Christ.” Instead, we avoid the voluntary suffering of solidarity because he “paid it all.”

These problems, in Soelle’s view, stem from the lack of importance given to the historical and political realities of sin and crucifixion (in effect, denying that Jesus Christ “suffered under Pontius Pilate”). Thus, substitutionary atonement is incapable of revealing real suffering in the world today to first-world Christians, for whom objective cynicism insulates them from seeing these problems. “In the apartheid of the middle class,” she writes, “we can easily avoid the cross.”<sup>36</sup> Instead, salvation is limited to an amorphous human experience and Christianity is reduced to a cult of personality that is little more than a reflection of the individualism and consumerism of capitalism. The net result is what she calls “Christolatry.”<sup>37</sup>

When the cross is turned into a “magical symbol of what he has done for us” and it loses its ability to reveal social injustice, then the cross can actually be misused to actively support policies that oppress people. When this happens, “Christofascism” develops.<sup>38</sup> She saw the Religious Right’s support of Ronald Reagan’s policies in Central America as an example of this perversion of the Gospel.

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<sup>34</sup>*Suffering*, trans. Everett Kalin (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 130.

<sup>35</sup>*Theology for Skeptics*, trans. Joyce Irwin (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), p. 100.

<sup>36</sup>*Thinking About God*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), pp. 131, 134.

<sup>37</sup>*Suffering*, p. 130; *Theology for Skeptics*, p. 92.

<sup>38</sup>*The Window of Vulnerability: A Political Spirituality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), p. 140.

In her early writings Soelle solves these problems by describing Christ as our “representative.” The concept of a substitute mirrors our contemporary experience of being replaceable in a capitalist society. Instead, she argues that Christ should be seen as a representative of God to us, and of us to God, because the concept of a representative is temporary until the one being represented can stand for him or herself, which points to an eschatological element in her understanding of representation. The concept of Christ the Representative never annihilates human agency.<sup>39</sup>

The only adequate representative is one who identifies with us. Christ is a “new profane and worldly representation of God” in the “helplessness and suffering” of the world today.<sup>40</sup> His suffering was more than a one-time event in the distant past, but keeps open God’s place in the world. However, God’s identity is not completely emptied into the world; otherwise, the status quo would be justified. Instead, “representation permits a form of suffering which does not make us blind, impotent and sterile.”<sup>41</sup> Christ the Representative identifies with us even in our punishment and thus sensitizes us to those whom we have harmed. “Christ makes the prison warders aware of the prison in which they themselves live, and he does so by showing that he himself is its prisoner. . . . In this identification the relation of agent and acted upon is abolished. Christ belongs to both parties at the same time; he punishes and is punished.”<sup>42</sup>

Identification implied dependency for Soelle. We are dependent on Christ to represent God to us in a post-theistic age, but God is also dependent on us, insofar as our sins must be put on Jesus in order to make his suffering real in this world. For her, Philippians two reveals that dependency that is intrinsic to suffering. The very nature of suffering implies dependency, which she sees in Philippians two. Without the dynamic of dependency, Christ’s suffering is lost in metaphysical meaninglessness. We are dependent upon Christ to represent us to God, but God is dependent upon us to represent God’s Kingdom in the world.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup>See *Christ the Representative: An Essay in Theology after the ‘Death of God’*, trans. David Lewis (London:SCM, 1967) pp. 91, 104.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 141,144.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 121-122.

<sup>43</sup>She criticizes Barth for conceiving of representation as pure dependence at the expense of responsibility (and with it reproducing the dynamic of replaceability of society) and Bonhoeffer for thinking of responsibility without dependency. *Ibid.*, p. 92.

How exactly does Christ as the representative of God to us and us to God enact our salvation? Soelle falls back into a moral exemplar framework. "Christ, the man of God, reveals in his life what liberation from the powers . . . would be like. He demythologizes them."<sup>44</sup> In *Christ the Representative*, she uses the metaphor of a teacher who secures time and space for the pupil to mature in his or her education.<sup>45</sup>

In her later works, Soelle lifts up the idea of Christ as an attracting image or icon to which we are drawn and transformed by our participation-imitation in the image. In *Thinking About God* she uses an analogy of Christ as an icon or image to which we conform (which is similar to the Teacher in *Christ the Representative*). In one sense, it is an example of the moral exemplar paradigm, but for Soelle the Christ image is so powerful that it acts on us. It is an image that disturbs us and draws us into the love and mystery of God.<sup>46</sup> In *Theology for Sceptics*, she states that we see Christ as "the man for others" in the cross in all of its historical and political dimensions. "This touches us to the bottom of our heart," causing us to love and follow him because the crucified Christ "lets us see into God's heart."<sup>47</sup>

Her understanding of salvation is predicated upon several Christological assumptions. One, Jesus and his crucifixion must be understood in their original historical sense. The cross does not express the relationship between the Father and the Son in an obscure metaphysical dimension that is abstracted from the real suffering of the world. Rather, "the cross expresses the bitter, realistic depth of faith and is a symbol of this-worldliness and history."<sup>48</sup> Two, Jesus Christ is more than an heroic figure in the past. To say that Jesus was a "mere man" overlooks God's power in him. He has "collective meaning" which is rooted in the suffering of the historical Jesus. "Christ is the name which for me expresses solidarity, hence suffering with, struggling with."<sup>49</sup> Christ is the mysterious power which was in Jesus and which continues on in the struggles for liberation.

When Soelle talks about the cross, she usually makes an immediate leap to the ethical implications of bearing one's cross as an act of faithful

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., pp. 115, 106.

<sup>46</sup>*Thinking about God*, p. 118.

<sup>47</sup>*Theology for Sceptics*, p. 96.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>49</sup>*Thinking about God*, 116-117.

resistance. The cross is not involuntary suffering or suffering in general. It is the “unavoidable consequence of doing the will of God” in working for human liberation and resisting injustice and oppression.<sup>50</sup> In contrast to some feminist theologians, Soelle retains a positive role for voluntary suffering in her theology.

Thus, the cross functions in two ways in her theology. On one level, it is an expression of God’s solidarity in Christ with those who are suffering injustice today. “It is impossible to distinguish Jesus’ suffering from that of other people as though Jesus alone awaited God’s help. The scream of suffering contains all the despair of which a person is capable and in this sense every scream is a scream for God.”<sup>51</sup> Because of this divine solidarity, the cross draws us into their struggles for liberation. So, on another level, the cross is a symbol of our acts of faith that challenge oppression. “When I read of [the deaths of King, Bonhoeffer, Romero, and other modern-day martyrs] I find pieces of life, of ongoing, indestructible life. I see in the dead ones and in their dying something that transcends the tragedy, that is more than a despairing cry to God. God is here, also in the dying.”<sup>52</sup> The death of Christ is only significant when we see its “continuation” in the modern suffering of those who struggle against injustice.

Soelle’s understanding of the cross can best be described as a mystical-revolutionary reworking of the moral influence theory of the atonement. Her interest in mysticism appears in her early work, such as *Suffering*, and comes to fruition in her later work *The Silent Cry*. As she moves toward mysticism, she shifts from being Christocentric to universalistic, but loses the ability to further refine her earlier insights into Christ as the Representative.<sup>53</sup> Instead, she explores a wide variety of mystical expressions which she believes can cultivate activism.

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>51</sup>*Suffering*, p. 85.

<sup>52</sup>With Fulbert Steffensky, *Not Just Yes and Amen* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 77-78. In this same vein, she critiques Luther’s unwillingness to identify Jesus’ suffering with ours as an unfounded fear of it becoming a works-righteousness. The result is “that [it] means an end to the worth that human suffering had as an extension or completion of Christ’s suffering. The assertion that in Christ everything has been fulfilled remains in that case completely without content, an ideal of lordship that excludes us. Thus, it renders our suffering as inconsequential. It belittles us,” *Suffering*, p.131.

<sup>53</sup>“Reclaiming some form of the image of Christ as representative that functioned as Soelle’s early Christological vision could actually provide a more robust



The two mystics which come closest to helping her further develop her views of the cross are Simone Weil and Thomas Muntzer. Weil helps her understand the experience of suffering, but more importantly, Muntzer provides her with a model process for engaging the cross. Supporting his revolutionary activities in the Peasants' War was a three-fold mystical process ("wonderment," "entgrobung," and "lange Weile"). Soelle updates Muntzer with her own three-fold "praxis of mysticism." The first stage is "being amazed" during which God gives us a sense of radical amazement, be it through nature, eroticism or other forms of beauty. It is a "via positiva" that is qualitatively different from the temporary satisfaction of commodities and manipulated passions. In order to embrace this experience of amazement, the believer must enter the second stage of "letting go." This is the "via negativa" of relinquishing the possessions, violence and ego that come from the objective cynicism of capitalism. This stage allows us to experience the third stage, which she referred to as "healing/resistance." The experience of being healed extends outward in compassion and justice. It is the "via transformativa" in which the mystic is the revolutionary.<sup>54</sup>

Soelle was never fully satisfied with moral exemplar, because of its inherent weakness to assume that knowledge is power. Yet, she always rejected the conservative paradigm of substitutionary atonement because of the ways it reinforced human passivity in the face of injustice. By combining a politicized moral influence model with element from the mystical traditions the cross could function for Soelle as an agent of change in the life of the activist.

### Assessment

Dorothee Soelle rightly criticizes conservative versions of substitutionary atonement for reproducing oppressive forms of human passivity which support the status quo. Her insistence on the historical and political

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image for her later Christology. Since she claims that it is Jesus as the Christ who enables her to see God in a different way, Jesus really does re-present God and fundamentally changes our understanding of the God-world relationship. This is exactly the power of Soelle's theology when it comes to her political, mystical vision." "Christ in the World: The Christological Vision of Dorothee Soelle," Dianne L. Oliver, *The Theology of Dorothee Soelle*, ed. Sarah K. Pinnock (New York: Trinity Press International, 2003).

<sup>54</sup>*The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance*, trans. by Barbara and Martin Rumscheidt (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001) pp. 88-93.

dimensions of the crucifixion is a helpful correction to the misdirection that Wesley's understanding of atonement can take. By equating faith with resistance, she keeps the *via salutis* from being reduced to an individualistic emotionalism that reinforces objective cynicism. Thus, one of the marks of the new birth is faith as resistance because it is grounded in Jesus' act of resistance to evil on the cross. To be sure, faith is more than political resistance, but it is a necessary expression of faith in the one who "suffered under Pontius Pilate."

However, resistance to oppression requires that one be able to see and acknowledge one's place in a system of oppression. Yet the self-deception inherent in sin prevents us from sustaining such a level of honesty. It either degenerates into self-defense or shame. Even if one can overcome the self-deception and look squarely at one's situation, paralysis will set in because the individual will be overwhelmed with a sense of guilt for having participated in the oppression, or he or she will be stymied by a sense of fatalism about the hopelessness of the situation. In other words, neither guilt nor truth alone can sustain faith as resistance. Thus, we need a source of validation outside of our context to sustain this conversion process. We need a source of forgiveness and acceptance—justification—that does not come from us.

Yet, Soelle's modified moral influence paradigm is not powerful enough to do this. It runs the risk of reinforcing other aspects of the status quo. Her description of the cross as political activism can too easily slip into a prescription for what one should do to be saved. It can become a works-righteousness with a politically progressive slant. This mirrors capitalism which only values people for their work. In an economy where your value is inseparably linked to the exchange value of your labor, any definition of salvation must acknowledge our inherent worth before God that has nothing to do with our ability to act. Unfortunately, she fails to see that helplessness is not equivalent to worthlessness.

Here is where Wesley helps Soelle. Wesley rightly sees substitutionary atonement as God's initiating act to overcome our helplessness. Leaving aside the specific way he construed the doctrine of atonement, Wesley's insight is that our activism must be predicated upon the prior activism of Christ on the cross. He had to die *for* us in order for *us* to carry the cross. To say that the grace of Jesus Christ pardons us for our participation in objective cynicism is to say that our sinful context is not the source of our identity and validation. Because apathy is no longer the

foundation for our lives, we are free to “resist evil and injustice in whatever forms they present themselves.”<sup>55</sup>

Trusting in the grace of Jesus Christ to justify us is the first act of resistance. If all people, regardless of their social or economic status, are saved by the work of Christ on the cross and not by their own efforts, then all social distinctions are relative and ultimately arbitrary. If a person who is abused or exploited is accepted and protected by the blood of Christ, then the power of shame and fatalism recedes under the power of grace. Grace, then, is the great social leveler and the revolutionary presence of God.

What makes this more real and vibrant is the political-historical dimensions of the cross which Soelle emphasizes. Precisely because this atonement, which is for all people of every age, took place in a specific political-historical context, it has the capacity to address our specific political-historical context through the Spirit of Christ which activates it in our lives today. By integrating Soelle’s political emphasis with Wesley’s substitutionary logic, the participatory experience, on which they find common ground, becomes a wholistic experience of salvation that integrates the spiritual and the political, the individual and the social.

The necessity for substitution—or representation, which is more acceptable to Soelle—does not imply that satisfaction or penal substitutionary theories are the only valid interpretation of the cross. One can find substitutionary elements in *Christus Victor* and, to a lesser degree, in *Moral Exemplar*. Nor does substitution necessarily demand that God be the agent of the violence of the cross. However, the ironic solution to the problem of passivity necessitates a substitutionary dimension to one’s understanding of the cross.

The problem with substitutionary theories of atonement, as with any other theory, often stems from the way other doctrines are conceived and influence it. For example, particular views of divine transcendence tend to make the atonement into an ahistorical event, which is what Soelle’s criticism; or an overemphasis on omnipotence together with an under emphasis on the Holy Spirit turns the atonement into a pretext for moral indifference, which was a part of Wesley’s criticism. The problem is not with the cross per se, but with how it is distorted by other presuppositions. And so, one’s understanding of the cross can be very “bloody,” but it need not

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<sup>55</sup>Rubric 4, “The Baptismal Covenant I,” *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989) p. 34.

lead to passivity as long as it is supported by the correct formulation of other doctrines.

### **Conclusion**

So, what about Ruby and her daughter? As she described her intercessory prayers, I scrambled in my mind to be ready with a good response. I was convinced that she was going to advise her daughter to take him back. How was I going to explain to that her that her faith in the blood of Jesus might exacerbate the crisis?

Then she said something that jarred me out of my patronizing pastoral care. “Pastor,” she said with no hint of guilt or apology, “after I got done praying I went in the kitchen and called that social worker. And I told him that if he ever called my daughter again I personally was going to drive down there and cut his balls off!”

As inappropriate her last comment may have sounded, I needed to hear her blunt truth that her trust in the blood of Jesus in no way made her passive in the face of potential violence against her daughter. It was hyperbole (maybe), but it illustrated something that feminist theologians tend to overlook: for many white working class women, their evangelicalism is not an opiate of the masses. For Ruby, the cross, with all of its bloody imagery, gave her daughter protection in the midst of her helplessness, and it gave herself the power to act in defense of her daughter. Soelle and Wesley helped me to hear the power and dignity in Ruby’s faith.

## BOOK REVIEWS

Meeks, M. Douglas, ed. *Wesleyan Perspectives on the New Creation*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004. 200 pages. ISBN 0687038855.

Reviewed by Michael Lodahl, Professor of Theology, Point Loma Nazarene University, San Diego, California.

*Wesleyan Perspectives on the New Creation* is a welcome addition to the growing body of Wesleyan theological reflections devoted to the proposition that Christian soteriology, if it is to be faithful to John Wesley's own increasingly wholistic proclamation of the gospel, to say nothing of the nature of the biblical hope, must embrace all of creation as the object of God's rich, redeeming love in Jesus Christ.

Edited and introduced by Vanderbilt theologian Douglas Meeks, the book is a collection of eight essays whose genesis was the 2002 gathering of Methodist and Wesleyan scholars at Christ Church, Oxford, for the Eleventh Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies. In his introductory essay, Meeks effectively thematizes the overarching theme of the volume: "Christian faith withers unless it is embodied in love, and love falters unless it is energized by hope in God's new creation of all things" (11). This proposition provides an apt setting for the ensuing contributions of the book's eight essayists.

Randy Maddox offers a typically informative and insightful opening chapter, "Nurturing the New Creation." He revisits an important theme rudimentarily explored already in the final chapter of his 1994 work *Responsible Grace*. Maddox deftly traces the detectable shift in John Wesley's eschatology from the earlier dominant notion of deliverance of souls from this probationary world to that of a "general deliverance" of all creation, such that "the new creation became one of the most prominent themes of his late sermons" (47).

Argentine New Testament scholar Nestor Miguez, in his essay titled “The Old Creation in the New, the New Creation in the Old,” levels an incisive critique of postmodern economics rooted in (1) the virtual goods and products of computer technology and (2) a global market by which “the poor are being excluded from the globe” (57). He then offers careful biblical exposition to demonstrate that “new creation was a concept that grew as the people [of Israel] confronted three successive [and oppressive] empires: Assyria, Babylonia, and Persia” (62). His argument, well constructed, is that the hope of new creation should function as a critique of oppressive powers-that-be. “The new creation, therefore, as informed by Isaiah, Paul, and John the Revelator, is a critical horizon against which the imperial culture of power is judged” (69).

Church historian Russell Richey, in his essay “Methodism as New Creation: An Historical-Theological Enquiry,” writes that the book contributors’ late-18th- and early 19th-century Methodist forebears “celebrated and acknowledged our polity, our organization, our structured discipline as God’s new order in eschatological, eucharistic, ecumenical gatherings, gatherings that we termed conference” (74). The Methodists described themselves as God’s “Zion,” charged with the task of “reforming the continent” (79). Thus, a kind of eschatological optimism among North American Methodists merged with this new frontier of forests and streams.

Indeed, in a fascinating section on “Nature, the Woods,” Richey argues that “‘the woods’ figure in the American Methodist lexicon in places where Wesley and his contemporaries used the word ‘field’” (82). These romanticized, transcendentalized “woods” provided a natural-yet-mystical milieu for Methodist encounters with “the Second Person of the Trinity” (82). One recalls the claims of a young man named Joseph Smith, significantly influenced by Methodist preaching in the “burned-over district” of New York, who testified to his own heartwarming encounter deep in the woods with two bodily figures who identified themselves as Jesus Christ and his Father. It is no coincidence that his own followers would eventually come to call themselves Latter-day Saints who were called to construct God’s eschatological Zion on this New World continent.

In her chapter “New Creation: Repentance, Reparation, and Reconciliation,” Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore connects her reading of Lukan healing narratives with Wesley’s message of holiness, proposing that we

“ask relational questions of Wesley’s texts” (102), questions of the individual’s relation with God, of relations within the church, of relations with the world of human society, and ultimately of relations with all of God’s creation. Her reflections lead her to “point to God’s self-giving and the intimate mutuality of relationship between God and every precious creature. The self-giving of God and humanity are critical to New Creation, and it is already glimpsed in the sacraments and in Jesus’ giving of his life for his friends” (112). Repentance, reparation and reconciliation are the divinely-graced activities of the body of Christ that bear witness to the New Creation in lively anticipation.

Jong Chun Park, in “Christian Perfection and Confucian Sage Learning: An Interreligious Dialogue in the Crisis of Life,” explores the thought of Yi Yolguk, a 16th-century Korean Neo-Confucianist. One of the characteristics of neo-Confucianism was its indebtedness to a more typically Taoist meditative appreciation for nature; accordingly, Park argues, “in dialogue with contemporary Confucian scholarship, Wesley’s doctrine of perfection needs to be located in the wider framework of his theology, that is, in his stress on the New Creation” (129). Park offers a moving meditation on Wesley’s striking passage in Plain Account that begins, “The sea is an excellent figure of the fullness of God” (133-134), eventually comparing Wesley’s “sea” to Chinese cosmology’s *ch’i* (material energy). Park develops this dual concept of sea/*ch’i* interflowingly, like yang and yin, to argue that “our sanctification is linked to the sanctifying of the world, and our perfection is directed toward cosmic perfection” (143).

In “Those Who Belong to Christ and ‘The This-Worldly Character of the New Creation,’” Josiah U. Young III draws primarily on the texts of M. L. King, Jr. and Jurgen Moltmann to raise questions regarding the relation between church and world. Indeed, Young’s essay explores King’s tendency to collapse the distinction between the two. For example, in “A Christmas Sermon on Peace,” King preached, “We are all one in Christ Jesus. And when we truly believe in the sacredness of human personality, we won’t exploit people, we won’t trample over people with iron feet of oppression, we won’t kill anybody” (159). Young could have driven home even more powerfully the question regarding who King meant by “we.” Young does, however, observe that King moved too readily from Paul’s language of “one in Christ Jesus” to the liberal Bostonian “sacredness of human personality.”

Manfred Marquardt, in “The Kingdom of God and the Global Society,” writes that “globalization is neither our fate nor our salvation; it is a process in history. We have to ask and to learn how God’s kingdom is both different from and related to the globe on which we live. But this, of course, is easier to demand than to execute” (171). Marquardt suggests that the church is “a counter-reality” and “a consciously alternative society” that in its common life and liturgy bears witness to “the One who has drawn near to them, creating in them a desire for true life and fulfillment” (172). The church, then, is a sign of God’s kingdom in the world, distinct from and yet participating in the world. Rather than striving for a consumerist freedom to buy more stuff, in the kingdom of God “freedom is community and communion with one another through the Body of Christ. . . . Independence gives way to interdependence and interdependence to life in the way of Jesus Christ” (177).

The book’s final essayist, H. Mvume Dandala, presents the book’s most tantalizingly practical suggestions for how the church might truly be communities of new creation. In “Methodist Mission to Ecological Challenges in Africa,” Dandala argues that Christian missionaries generally have failed to appreciate that “African teaching about life is all-inclusive, with the environment and ecology central to all the teaching. Maybe with this discovery they would have changed their methodology of mission, so that it embraced all creation” (182). Drawing upon the work of Roger Hudson, Dandala explores the imaginative vision of “eco-villages as enacted parables of earth-keeping” to offer a tremendously exciting model for Christian community in Africa or anywhere (188).

In my estimation, the strongest chapters are the first and the last: Maddox’s introductory exploration of John Wesley’s shift in eschatology from the individual and spiritual to the social and corporeal; and Dandala’s suggestions regarding how local church congregations could become new creation communities that embody Wesley’s eschatology. The chapter that seems least appropriate to the collection is Park’s, largely because only his essay deals at all with non-Christian religious thought. This essay whetted my appetite for more engagement with the eschatological hopes and practices of other religious traditions, and would fit perfectly in a book devoted to such engagements. In this collection of essays, however, it felt out of place.

My own thinking about a particularly Wesleyan reading of eschatology continues to wonder whether we have yet fully appreciated the nature



of gracious synergism. In his editorial introduction, Meeks observes that “the gulf between the new age and the present age tends to provide fertile ground for apocalypticism” (13). But if we find apocalypticism inadequate, misleading and surely unfaithful to a Wesleyan soteriology, we are left with the challenge of formulating a more adequate rendering of eschatological hope. Of course, this volume of essays contributes much that is helpful, but even here too often eschatological verbiage is invoked with insufficient attention to its implications. So, for example, Meeks writes that “the final fulfillment of God’s reign will be realized only at God’s determination” (17)—but we should ask whether this claim is this truly coherent with a Wesleyan interpretation of the Creator-creature relation. If we do not believe that any particular human being is redeemed “only at God’s determination,” can we coherently claim that all of creation is—or shall be?

Abraham, William J. *Wesley for Armchair Theologians*. Armchair Theologians Series. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005. ISBN 0664226213. 192 pages.

Reviewed by Bradford McCall, Regent University.

Professor Abraham (Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University) has written an excellent introduction to John Wesley for those who have little or no familiarity with him. This is one in a book series titled “Armchair Theologians.” The writer of each book within the series aims to make the deep theological insights of the person studied accessible to the masses.

Abraham states that his offering is a fresh interpretation of Wesley, one that attempts to make Wesley come alive for the beginning inquirer. It should be noted that Wesley needs to “come alive” within our own generation. He would have little tolerance for the insipid lemonade often spewed from pulpits within the spiritual lineage of Wesley’s offspring, as Abraham himself intimates. Wesley’s method of preaching, often in contrast to our own, consisted of a presentation of a little bit of good news, the presentation of what is wrong within humanity (the bad news), followed by a presentation of the Good News. It is precisely for this reason that Wesley offers the church such an interesting and stimulating dialog partner for today’s environment.

Moreover, the implicit ecumenism in Wesley is laudable. For instance, Wesley was a Roman Catholic insomuch as he insisted that humanity is intrinsically good; Pentecostal insomuch as he was insistent on the present-day experience of the Spirit; Lutheran insomuch as he insisted on justification as the primal doctrine within Christianity; and Reformed insomuch as he was adamant that one would fight sin until the last day of breath taken. Wesley is novel in his synthesis of various theological doctrines. Regarding this attempted synthesis, Abraham notes that Wesley vexed him in his youth since Wesley was an amazingly complex, diverse, and (at times) inconsistent theologian. Due to the growth within Wesley’s theology over the years of his life and writing (which, one should note, Abraham counts as inconsistency), Wesley often posited contrary assertions to that which he had previously published. However, any theologian who is in a relationship with God that has matured will similarly show such “growth” from the onset of his theological writings to the end of them.

Abraham intends to show that Wesley's theology is at foremost an intellectual one, springing from the traditional faith of the mother church (Roman Catholic) and established by the creeds of the first six centuries of the Common Era. Many of us who are familiar with the traditional (and, I judge, accurate) depiction of Wesley, as has arisen over the last two plus centuries, will find points of Abraham somewhat challenging.

This book is a good read for a number of reasons. First, it rightly summarizes Wesley's core doctrines. Second, it gives an excellent overview of the years prior to Wesley's death, which saw the exorbitant growth of Methodist meetings within Europe, as well as in the newly found and colonized North American continent. Third, it gives one many notions to grapple with, which may sharpen and hone one's understanding of Wesley's life, his desires (torn though they may have been at times), and his vision for a renewal movement within Anglicanism.

Although Wesley himself never desired to begin a new denomination, Abraham notes that it was inevitable that fracture would occur with his renewal movement and the Anglican communion at large. Moreover, Abraham makes the strong assertion that several actions by Wesley (e.g., his allowing an Eastern Orthodox priest to ordain various members of the Anglican Church to administer the sacraments, as well as his own ordination of others to do the same) furthered the fissure between his movement and the Anglican communion. Abraham implicitly asserts that Wesley himself pushed his movement toward independence from the Church of England. He asserts that Wesley's attempt to belie predestination, but at the same time also posit the notion of prevenient grace, was contradictory. I would counter that Wesley was attempting to keep apparently dichotomous vantage points in tension, much like the Apostle Paul did with respect to grace and law. Abraham asserts that Wesley's attempted harmonization was less than compelling.

In spite of certain questionable challenges to Wesleyan orthodoxy, if there be such a thing, Abraham's volume is heartily recommended by this student of Wesley to the readers of the *Wesleyan Theological Journal*.

Vaux, Kenneth. *An Abrahamic Theology for Science*. Eugene, OR.: Wipf and Stock, 2007. 184 pages. ISBN:1556350988.

Reviewed by Bradford McCall, Regent University, Virginia Beach, VA.

Kenneth Vaux is an emeritus professor of ethics at the University of Illinois College of Medicine, is a professor of theological ethics at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, and is a member of the graduate faculty at Northwestern University. Within this book, Vaux advocates an Abrahamic theology as the dynamic paradigm for science and technology and argues for its continuing importance for both a pertinent and humane science. Vaux demonstrates a historical correlation between an Abrahamic theological tradition (monotheism) and the rise of science. His thesis is simple: theology has grounded, founded, prompted, and promoted science in the past years. He illustrates this development explicitly in the work of six scientists: Avicenna, Robert Boyle, Albert Schweitzer, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Amartya Sen, and Leon Kass. In the course of his discussion, he directly engages the contemporary dialogue between religion and science, writing as a Christian for the Christian church, although attempting to also engage searchers from the sister Abrahamic faiths (Jewish and Islamic).

The six persons that Vaux explicitly studies within this volume interpenetrate the supposed barriers between science and theology. Avicenna, for example, was an eleventh-century physician, philosopher, and theologian. Robert Boyle was a seventeenth-century Anglican scientist and theologian. Albert Schweitzer was a twentieth-century Reformed Christian physician and theologian. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was a twentieth-century Catholic theologian and paleontologist. In a curious selection, Amartya Sen is a twentieth-century Hindu economist who has also delved into scientific ventures. As the last person studied, Leon Kass is a twentieth-century physician, philosopher, and theologian. One will notice, then, that Vaux covers three different centuries, spanning over seven hundred years in selecting his representatives for his case study regarding *An Abrahamic Theology for Science*.

Avicenna is selected by Vaux to illustrate the *alethic* (truth) dynamic for the science and religion relationship. Avicenna placed epistemology in the central position within his philosophy and theology, and as such he influenced many twentieth-century theologians (Karl Rahner, e.g.).

Robert Boyle emphasized the *aesthetic* (beauty) quality of ethics in relation to science and religion in the restlessness of the seventeenth century, and Vaux thus selects him as the representative for that dimension within his thesis. For Boyle, theology undergirds science, and science enlivens and illuminates theology. Elegance, beauty, symmetry, and cohesion were the measuring sticks for Boyle for a productive scientific theory, as the reality of God and the reality of the world stand in a dialectical tension.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin asserted the *aetiologic* (creation) dimension of the relationship between science and religion. In so arguing, Teilhard was adamant that evolution does not refute religious notions, but is, rather, complimentary with them. In fact, Teilhard asserted that evolution was the mechanism(s) that God employed in continuing creation. Albert Schweitzer is selected by Vaux to express the *aeschatologic* (finality) dimension of the science and religion relationship. Schweitzer's theology prompts a reverential zoology, anthropology, and sociology, Vaux contends. Leon Kass, according to Vaux's paradigm, expresses the agapic (love) dimension of the relation between science and theology. Kass depicts awe, duty, and love within the macroscopic and microscopic evolution displayed in the earth's history.

Although Vaux attempts to examine representative scientists from the Abrahamic tradition to illustrate his point, he nonetheless selects a Hindu, Amartya Sen, to represent the *axiologic* (ethical) dynamic for the science and religion relationship. Vaux justifies this selection by his statement that Hinduism, Buddhism, and Chinese ethics are to be seen as historically cognate and resonant religious movements. Pointedly, I question his assertion since Hinduism (inherently polytheistic) and Buddhism (non-theistic) are not in any way cognate to the Abrahamic faiths. I suggest an alternative for Vaux's chapter concerning ethics and theology: instead of Amartya Sen, I much prefer Colin Gunton's *The Triune Creator: a Historical and Systematic Study* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 1998), or Celia Deane-Drummond's *Reordering Nature: Theology, Society, and the New Genetics* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), as representatives of the *axiologic* (ethical) dynamic for a truly Abrahamic theology for science.

Moreover, I question Vaux's selection of Leon Kass as the paradigmatic example of the *agapic* (love) dimension of the relation between science and theology. I suggest John Polkinghorne instead, who explicates the kenotic creating Spirit who does not over-rule God's creatures, but

interacts with them in a loving manner (John Polkinghorne, “Kenotic Creation and Divine,” in John Polkinghorne, ed. *The Work of Love* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001], 96.). This kenotic creating Spirit is present within the historical contingency of evolution, as well as its lawful regularity. The Spirit acts within the *causal nexus* of creation (i.e., natural law, divine providence, and later human action). By kenotically interacting with the created world, Polkinghorne asserts that the Spirit of God lovingly allows created creatures authentic freedom and limits divine eternity and omnipotence in a qualified sense.

Vaux admits at the onset of this volume that he is a Reformed theologian, coming from the Presbyterian religious tradition. His intention in producing this book was to characterize the type of theology that can *ground* and *guide* science in the twenty-first century and beyond. Despite employing a non-Abrahamic faith representative in Amartya Sen, a confessing Hindu, Vaux is convincing in his overall argumentation, and hence this book is a worthy read for those who are interested in the greater science and religion dialog.

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Mann, Alan. *Atonement for a "Sinless" Society: Engaging with an Emerging Culture*. Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster Press, 2005. 224 pages. ISBN 1-84227-355-8.

Reviewed by Aaron Perry, Calvary Community Church, Johnson City, NY.

Alan Mann, in *Atonement for a "Sinless" Society*, applies "narrative" from theological, therapeutic, and liturgical vantagepoints in a soteriological manner to a culture he believes suffers from chronic shame. This application examines how narrative, from all these directions, can be a concept that illumines and applies salvation for our current culture. In sum, Mann presents the ontologically coherent narrative of Jesus as invitation to the chronically shamed individual to join the bonded community of the church, which enjoys "mutual, intimate, undistorted relating" (19) through the Eucharist. This relationship is the remedy for shame. Mann unpacks this abstract thesis over four sections.

First, Mann's hamartiological analysis of contemporary society suggests that its prevalence makes shame an accurate category for the sin experience of the "post-industrialized." Shame has a double-edged social effect. Although it is countered with deep, mutual relationship, shame leads individuals to hide their real identity, thus negating the possibility of healing relationship. Further, contemporary society encourages self-realization to the point that sin is failing this realization. As a result, the post-industrialized self, looking in the mirror, says, "Against you alone have I sinned" (21). Such self-serving attitudes negate mutual relationship. Therefore, Mann suggests we speak "about the atonement as a restoration and reconciliation between relational beings, both human and divine, who too often live with an *absence* of mutual, intimate, undistorted relating" (49). The category, he believes, captures atonement is "story."

In section two, Mann unpacks this category, using narrative therapy as his source. The chronically shamed individual, who feels insufficient as a person and incoherent in his/her narrative, needs a counter-narrative. Because the chronically shamed person presents an "ontologically-incoherent self"—a person whose cover story does not match the real self—a coherent counter-narrative must be presented to, accepted, and indwelt by the chronically shamed person. This allows for mutual relationship because presenting real stories to the other is necessary for true friendship. Since this cannot simply happen, Mann suggests that *listening* to the

narratives of the chronically shamed may produce intimacy (88), providing a sense of accountability and allowing a merger of narratives. This merger Mann calls *conversion*. Christian salvation includes such conversions or reconsiderations of identity by reworking personal narratives (90) around Jesus Christ.

But how is this salvific? How does Jesus save? Mann, in section three, presents his answer: Jesus' narrative is salvific/atonement because Jesus is at-one with himself, and his obedience to Golgotha shows "mutual, undistorted, unpolluted relationship" with his Father (112). Jesus, and *Jesus alone*, presents an ontologically-coherent self, providing hope that the chronically shamed can be liberated from their own narrative incoherence (113), to enjoy similar relationship with God through and by the work of Jesus' narrative. The cross' literal and figurative exposure of Jesus—exposure the chronically shamed avoids at all costs—reveals Jesus' at-one-ment with his story (136-137). Because Jesus is willing to suffer the cross, he presents his true self. Participating in Jesus' story by joining the community united around the death and resurrection of Jesus unites the individual with God, making them "at-one."

In section four, Mann examines the Eucharist as an act through which one might indwell the counter-narrative of Jesus. Jesus' narrative, displayed in the Eucharist, calls the celebrants to reorient their lives with Jesus' story (159-160), so that they may enjoy mutual, undistorted, unpolluted relating. The Eucharistic table, then, mirrors the symbolism of the cross by allowing others to show their true selves (167). Mann's discussion of the Eucharist will provide Wesleyan theology with a broader understanding of how it can be a means of grace to those suffering chronic shame. Just as Wesley, in his sermon "The Duty of Constant Communion," encouraged partakers to disregard their unworthiness in accepting communion, so could Mann's theology provide an understanding to how contemporary sufferers of chronic shame might need the Eucharist communicated.

*Atonement for a Sinless Society* pushes for creative, yet practical theology. Mann's work takes both atonement theology and contemporary culture, and their intersection, seriously. The category "chronic shame" facilitates Mann's desire for a "new Pentecost" (2), enabling better speakers and listeners in this culture. Contemporary Wesleyans familiar with John Fletcher and the conversation surrounding his work and his theology developed from Pentecost will see the importance of Mann's work for the



practices of listening and conversation. In the Wesleyan tradition, conversation has played an important role in mutual edification and transformation. Mann's discussion of listening to the narratives of chronically shamed individuals provides a good launching pad for Wesleyans interested in continuing and developing the Wesleyan tradition of conversation for and with their contemporaries, potentially with Pentecost in mind. More work is required, however, to connect the presence of the Spirit in Pentecost with his presence in conversations to see how transformation by the Spirit may occur in these settings.

In spite of its many merits, I believe Mann's work must be made more accessible for lay practitioners. It is overly abstract. For example, Mann writes:

. . . as Jesus stretches his arms out along the crossbeam, he is . . . symbolically holding together his own story and "exposing" his real-self without fear of incoherence or . . . chronic shame that haunts the postmodern self; for he is, at this moment, "at-one." (136-137)

Such language risks ignoring the physical pain of the cross and divorcing it from an historical context. Mann would also benefit from a more in-depth consideration, either for or against, of penal substitution. Mann believes that atonement is "concerned above all" with mutual relationship rather than "appeasing . . . a God angered by the misdeeds of his creatures" (94). However, he does refer to Jesus' "substitutionary death" (144)—one that demands our own response—and does not deny a penal element to the crucifixion, explicitly. With penal substitution being such a critical discussion in current atonement theology, Mann would have done well to consider the doctrine forthrightly.

Finally, Mann's concern for shame overemphasizes individuality. He writes, "The self-stories [the post-industrialized] tell, which isolate them from meaningful, human interface, effectively turn them into a-moral or, perhaps more accurately, pre-moral, beings." This also makes them pre-social (53). Contra Mann, the pre-social individual is non-existent. No individual has ever emerged into being by herself, but is always produced by another human. Without community, shamed individuals could not learn a language by which to express their stories, so *any telling* is already influenced by *some* community. The individual who is able to share the personal story via language, even if it is a false story, has learned this language in community and, therefore, cannot be pre-social.

In all, Mann has written a valuable book for contemporary atonement studies, certainly pertinent to an upper-level undergraduate course on evangelizing post-moderns. While its abstractness forces a careful read, this practice *may* develop listening skills for conversing with the chronically shamed who struggle to concretize personal narratives. Mann's work will also benefit those at the intersection of counseling/therapy and theology, and those interested in a psychologically sensitive praxis of atonement. Wesleyans will find most significant resources in developing a praxis of conversation and appropriately celebrating the Eucharist for a culture that suffers chronic shame.

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Barry L. Callen & Richard P. Thompson, eds. *Reading the Bible in Wesleyan Ways: Some Constructive Proposals*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2004. ISBN 083-412-0488

Reviewed by Thomas E. Phillips of Point Loma Nazarene University

We Wesleyan/holiness folk have not done a very good job either of influencing the trends of biblical scholarship in significant ways or even of representing ourselves well to biblical scholars outside of our tradition. I had hoped that this book, one of the best to roll out of Beacon Hill Press in years, would help to make up for one or both of these inadequacies. On the one hand, Beacon Hill, one of the largest Wesleyan/holiness publishing houses, seldom publishes books that are this scholarly or this well-documented. Sadly, on the other hand, this book does not provide the significant boost to Wesleyan Biblical studies that many of us were hoping for.

The co-editors of the book (who are also the editor [Callen] and book review editor [Thompson] of this journal) set a lofty goal for themselves. They intend “to serve the Spirit-listening resolve and skill of pastors and of students and [of] teachers in colleges and seminaries” (p. 13). They have sought to accomplish this end by assembling “a group of significant essays by outstanding Biblical scholars and theologians who both present and address the Wesleyan theological tradition in particular and convey insights vital for today’s Bible readers . . .” (p. 13).

The contributors are indeed distinguished scholars. Five of the book’s nine contributors are theologians and four are biblical scholars (although all four are New Testament scholars, and three of the four are primarily scholars of Luke-Acts). Most of these contributors, but not all, are self-identified Wesleyans and contribute a single chapter to the book. However, Rob Wall and the book’s co-editor, Richard Thompson, each contributed two chapters. The book’s resulting eleven chapters are arranged around two themes: “foundations” and “frontiers.”

Three of the four articles in the book’s “foundations” section and six of seven articles in the book’s “frontiers” section originally appeared in this journal between 1996 and 2001. I, like many readers of this review, know nearly all of the contributors quite well. In fact, I heard nearly all of the papers presented before the Wesleyan Theological Society even before their appearance in the journal. By the time that the book appeared in 2004, all but two of the chapters were available on the society’s web-

site. With no discernible editing of the articles since their appearance in this journal, and no index to the book, many readers of this journal will wonder whether they really need a copy of this book.

The foundations section of the book is strongly weighed toward historical analysis of John Wesley's use of Scripture. It contains significant redundancy. Particularly juicy Wesley quotes tend to recur (e.g., pp. 23, 84, 130; pp. 63, 84-85; pp. 62, 103-04). However, the cumulative effect of the essays (Geoffrey Wainwright, Robert Wall, Richard Thompson, and Don Thorsen) is clear and compelling: Wesley was not a fundamentalist in the contemporary sense and his use of Scripture was focused upon what may be broadly defined as "spiritual formation." Thorsen's essay, taken from his classic—but now dated—1990 book on the Wesleyan quadrilateral, is the only essay in this section of the book which was not previously published in this journal. These "foundational" chapters will prove useful to Wesleyan students who are seeking justification within their theological tradition for rejecting fundamentalism's obsession with biblical inerrancy.

Of the seven articles in the "frontiers" portion of the book, only Callen's article on Clark Pinnock is newly published. Although Callen offers a fine exposition of Pinnock's long and arduous ascent out of fundamentalism, it is unclear why an article on Pinnock's experience as a recovering Southern Baptist fundamentalist would be included in this volume about Wesleyan biblical interpretation. Perhaps the inference is that Wesleyans are experiencing a collective separation from fundamentalism which is somehow analogous to Pinnock's personal experience. In any case, it's not clear to me why the rejection of fundamentalism is associated with the frontiers of biblical scholarship (Wesleyan or otherwise). Additionally, to Wesleyans who have never identified with Evangelicalism's fundamentalist impulses, this chapter may seem somewhat out of place. The same critique of an awkward "fit" could be applied to the (interesting) chapter which follows from Pinnock's Baptist pen. In spite of the skill with which Pinnock writes, some of us will be left wondering why Wesleyan biblical scholarship should be located in galaxy with Evangelicalism as its north star? Wesley was not an Evangelical in the contemporary American sense and Evangelicalism seldom provides the leading voice in the world of biblical scholarship.

The chapters by Rob Wall and Joel Green provide as good an introduction to the issues of being a Wesleyan interpreter of Scripture as can

be found anywhere. These chapters provide eloquent apologies for an overtly soteriological reading of Scripture, but it is difficult to discern how either can be understood as exploring new frontiers (although Wall does advocate for his now well-known version of canonical criticism). Similar accolades can be cast upon Thompson's essay on reader response criticism. It works nearer to the frontiers of contemporary biblical scholarship and demonstrates Thompson's mastery of that helpful set of reading strategies.

The two closing essays also move closer to the frontiers of biblical scholarship by offering feminist perspectives. Sharon Clark Pearson offers readings of the key biblical texts that bear on the ordination of women, but her exegesis is often strained. Like Pearson, this reviewer maintains an unqualified endorsement of the ordination of women, but, unlike Pearson, this reviewer is forced to admit that some New Testament writers would sternly reject that practice. The closing essay by Diane Leclerc provides an impressive historical survey of the practice of ordaining women within the Wesleyan and holiness movements, but the relevance of this essay to the biblical theme in this volume is hardly clear (as Leclerc herself seems to recognize [p. 217]).

Overall, the essays in this volume are all worthy of publication, but it is not clear that they hang together very well in this volume. The most commonly recurring themes—negatively, the rejection of fundamentalism and inerrancy, and positively, the affirmation of women's ministry—are important starting points for mature Wesleyan interpretation, but they probably do not represent the true frontiers of Wesleyan biblical scholarship. It would have been nice to find Wesleyan dialogue with more contemporary methods of biblical interpretation (e.g., social-scientific criticism, post-colonial theory, rhetorical criticism). We Wesleyans probably owe our college and seminary students a more comprehensive treatment of contemporary strategies for reading the Bible than we get in this volume.

This book will make a welcome contribution to libraries and some pastors, particularly those with no print copies of this journal. It will prove useful to those who desire a handy copy of the kind of articles that are helpful for teaching undergraduate courses in Wesleyan biblical interpretation. The usefulness of the volume would have been enhanced by the presence of an index and greater attention to the dominant trends of critical biblical scholarship. Perhaps Beacon Hill will allow these talented editors to give us that volume next time.

Brendlinger, Irv A. *Social Justice Through the Eyes of John Wesley: John Wesley's Theological Challenge to Slavery*. Guelph, Ontario: Joshua Press, 2006. 271 pp.

Robert G. Tuttle, Jr., Professor of World Christianity, Asbury Theological Seminary

Having just seen the movie “Amazing Grace,” I was eager to read Dr. Brendlinger’s timely book on Wesley’s theological challenge to slavery. I’ve read all of Wesley’s *Works* several times, but was still surprised to see the breadth and depth of Wesley’s commitment to social ethics as a whole. I remember quotations from my own studies like, “Methodists that do not fulfill all righteousness [feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick and imprisoned] will have the hottest place in the lake of fire.” Brendlinger’s research, however, gives that focus critical mass.

Although other books by Theodore Jennings and Manfred Marquardt (now over 15 years old) have addressed Wesley’s social ethics, Brendlinger is far more sympathetic to Wesley’s theological balance between personal and social. Wesley was first of all an evangelist, “nothing to do but save souls,” but *soul* for Wesley (true to the Hebrew understanding) included body, mind and spirit. That is an incredibly important distinction. Most books that speak to Wesley’s social conscience tend to write off his evangelical conversion as a midlife crisis. Brendlinger shows us how Wesley’s theology of grace actually fueled his passion for social justice.

Brendlinger convincingly links Wesley’s spiritual journey with his antislavery journey. Although on some issues Wesley was clearly no martyr to the bugbear of consistency, he was amazingly consistent (both before and after his “evangelical conversion”) with regard to his views against slavery.

Wesley was also known for his utter devotion to the various means of grace. Brendlinger notes that these means have their inevitable fruit. Wesley, at his best, taught that we are saved by grace through faith as confirmed by works of piety *and* mercy. In fact, if forced to choose between works of piety and works of mercy (God forbid!), works of mercy took priority. Wesley did not give a fig if it looked like a grapevine; if it produced apples he called it an apple tree.

I lived in Bristol, England for two years. I remember preaching in a church atop “Black Boy Hill” just off the Clifton Downs. I was told that

this was where the block once stood where slaves were auctioned for the new world (virtually the third corner of the Triangle Trade—molasses/sugar/rum for manufactured goods for slaves). I knew that the little chapel Wesley built close by had an elevated pulpit with a rail built in front of it to give Wesley enough time to escape through a back door when angry parishioners would storm the pulpit. What I did not understand was that most of these were angry slavers who took offense when Wesley unashamedly waxed against their livelihood.

Read and use Brendlinger's book for several reasons. First, the author gives ample evidence that John Wesley's social ethic was driven by his post-Aldersgate theology. Second, it is important to be reminded that John Wesley's views on the abolition of slavery (contrary to some of his friends) not only spoke against the abuse of slaves but against the institution itself. Third, Wesley's influence (encouraging people like William Wilberforce) draws a straight line to the abolition of slavery throughout the Commonwealth in 1833. Fourth, Brendlinger provides important details as to Wesley's relationships with friends like Anthony Benezet and John Newton. Fifth, read this book for its splendid insight into the late 18<sup>th</sup>-century and early 19<sup>th</sup>-century socio-political scene. Finally, read this book for its balanced interpretation of the prevailing theologies of its day.

I must confess that I liked Irv Brendlinger before I read his book. He listens to NPR and has made several calls to the Tappet brothers on "Car Talk." Here, however, I also find an honest man. I like it when a scholar has courage enough to admit it when an apparent lead does not quite pan out. For example, he tells us when Wesley's treatise on *The Dignity of Human Nature* did not make the point he had every right to expect (74). Wesley's views on slavery did not arise from his conviction that everyone had equal dignity, but that (oh, the wages of sin) no one had dignity and that everyone (slave and free alike) stood in need of a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. All of this is to say that you can trust the scholarship here and recommend the book to those who need to understand John Wesley as a man whose theology drove him to take socio-political stands that should make every Christian proud.

R. Larry Shelton, *Cross and Covenant: Interpreting the Atonement for 21st Century Mission*. Tyrone, Georgia: Paternoster, 2006, 268 pp.

Reviewed by D. R. Wilson, University of Manchester, Manchester, England.

*Cross and Covenant* is a fresh and thought-provoking contribution to contemporary soteriology and missiology. It is not, however, merely the outline of yet another theory of the atonement. Larry Shelton's own exegetical and biblical-theological intent persists in its implications for mission and praxis where the focus of theology remains on the life of the church as God's covenant community. The daunting yet essential task of cross-cultural contextualization of the message of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ as good news is at the forefront. Shelton asserts the biblical, theological, and historical basis of a covenantal understanding of the atonement and its supreme importance for shaping ecclesial identity and mission (e.g., worship, proclamation of the gospel, and discipleship), while subverting theories of the atonement (e.g., the penal substitution view), that have become dominant because of what he refers to as theological "paradigm slips" in the history of Christian thought.

The focus on ministry in a postmodern context has produced in recent years an array of publications, from sermon websites to scholarly articles. If there is a hint of what might be called consensus among those who consider postmodern culture worth engaging in the first place, it is that thoughtful theological response and the application of this response to the ministry of the church is at least called for, if not vital to its identity and continuing mission. Thus, Shelton's first chapter is an introduction to this calling along with the challenges such contextualization presents, and he is keen to point out that this is not only for would-be followers of Christ but for those who already have a faith commitment, yet find the "theological dogmatism and rationalism" of some forms of "rigid, evangelical orthodoxy" (p. 5) stifling and confusing to their faith. Alternatively, he posits that the covenantal context of faith, resting at the core of the biblical story, is community-oriented and particularly well-suited for communicating the atonement message to a postmodern culture which places high value on relationships.

This relational aspect of the atonement forms the center of the argument of the text, expressing covenant in terms of "divine expectations." From the beginning God has desired relationship with humans created in



the divine image, and, as with all relationships there are expectations by both parties. However, the relationship has been broken by human assertion of self-will over God's (i.e., sin). God's consummate concern to reconcile that relationship is the heart of the biblical story and the Christian message. In the second chapter, Shelton tells the story of his experience of having a heart transplant, of the new life offered by the life of another, which was a gift "sacrifice," but in no way a penalty. However, acceptance of the gift comes with significant expectations, and the transplant recipient must commit to a strict regiment if she/he is to live. This metaphor is recapitulated in successive chapters as an example of how a covenantal understanding of the work of Christ might be communicated in a covenantal context.

The remainder of the book is divided almost equally, the first half being given to a biblical analysis of covenant and the atonement, and the second half devoted to a substantial historical survey of atonement theories. The significance of both parts is revealed in Shelton's use of the biblically rooted covenant model as an integrative motif for evaluating all other theories of the atonement. Thus, in chapters 3-5, covenant provides a hermeneutical lens by which to interpret concepts intrinsic to the atonement, such as the "image of God," "sin," "law," "sacrifice," and "salvation." When understood as relational rather than transactional concepts, the atonement can be seen for what it is, the reconciliation of estranged sinners to a merciful God. Crucial to the argument is an exposition on the Old Testament sacrifices, compellingly demonstrating that sacrifices were never intended to connote a penalty for sin, but rather, sacrifice was understood relationally as a gift. Thus, sacrifice was part of a ritual renewal of relationship with God, a commitment in faith-obedience to divine expectations.

In chapters 6-7 the Old Testament framework of covenant becomes the basis for understanding New Testament concepts such as the "wrath of God," "justification," "identification," and "sanctification." Shelton explains the implications for both evangelism and discipleship—the good news is not only that the relationship can be restored through Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection, but provides the power to live in committed faith-obedience has been made possible by God's grace.

Chapter 8 offers an important excursus on "Divine Expectations in Christian History," exploring how the penal substitution theory that now dominates western evangelical orthodoxy was propagated by a series of

“paradigm slips” which began as attempts to clarify and contextualize Christian theology, but over time reified metaphors and concepts foreign to the biblical covenant theme. This excursus is followed by a clearly written four-chapter historical survey, helpfully organized into four sections: classic theories (e.g., ransom, Christus victor), forensic theories (e.g., penal substitution, governmental), moral influence theories (e.g., Abelard’s theory, sacramental, mimetic), and covenant interpersonal perspectives. Each section utilizes the foundation built on biblical study in the first half of the book to evaluate both the theological accuracy and missional relevance of the theories. The last chapter recapitulates the argument that the relational nature of covenant and its centrality to the biblical story is essential to understanding and communicating the atonement.

Many books on the atonement provide either a biblical analysis or an historical one; *Cross and Covenant* provides both, making it particularly well-suited as a classroom text. Shelton’s scholarly approach is equally met by his concern to communicate the gospel with clarity to contemporary culture. While the book repeatedly emphasizes the importance of finding metaphors that maintain biblical-theological foundation and contemporary relevance, an outline of specific implications and application to the ministry of the church remains to be offered. This, however, may be appropriate, leaving individual faith communities to engage the Bible and to participate in the dialogue of faith as they work out the implications of divine expectations in their own contexts. *Cross and Covenant*, then, becomes a springboard for both the classroom and the church and deserves to be read by pastors and scholars alike.

David M. Chapman, with forewords by Geoffrey Wainwright and Michael Putney, *In Search of the Catholic Spirit: Methodists and Roman Catholics in Dialogue*. Peterborough, Great Britain: Epworth Press, 2004, 312 pp.

Reviewed by John W. Wright, Professor of Theology and Christian Scriptures, Point Loma Nazarene University.

When one steps back to observe the early 21<sup>st</sup> century church, two opposed emphases define its witness: (1) addressing apologetically select political, economic, ethnic, or sexual-orientation interest groups (including denominational self-identity); and (2) recovering the catholicity of the church through time and space. This divergence even divides contemporary ecumenical discussions. The World Council of Churches has moved to an ecumenicity of praxis through adopting a liberationist agenda; issues of “Faith and Order” have largely moved to dialogues between various historical Christian traditions and the post-Vatican II Roman Catholic Church. David M. Chatman’s book belongs to this second trajectory. He helpfully surveys the history of Methodist and Roman Catholic relations from the perspective of a British Methodist.

The book follows a simple chronological framework. The author moves from Wesley, to and through the nineteenth century, to twentieth-century historical interpretations of early Methodism in relationship to the church catholic by Methodists and Roman Catholics until Vatican II, to the World Methodist Conference dialogues with Rome and national efforts at similar dialogues, to John Paul II’s encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* (1995) and the subsequent chilling of ecumenical relations by the release of the *Dominus Iesus* (2000). The survey, however, has a theological end. Through the historical research, Chatman probes for an answer to the question that drives his study: “What is the place of Methodism in the Holy Catholic Church?” (251).

The story Chatman tells is not surprising. John Wesley had a “complex reaction to Roman Catholicism” (12). It is “undeniable” that “Wesley was stoutly anti-Catholic” (41). Chatman argues, however, that Wesley “was able to transcend conventional Protestant attitudes towards Roman Catholicism and go much further than the vast majority of his contemporaries in recognizing Roman Catholics as fellow Christians and members of the Holy Catholic Church” (42). During the nineteenth century, Methodism’s anti-Catholicism provided a unifying characteristic. A

fragmenting Methodist group could always justify its action by accusing its opposition of being papist in behavior (61).

As historical research grew in the late nineteenth into the twentieth century, more nuanced interpretations of early Methodism within the broader scope of the Catholic tradition emerged. Chatman identifies Hugh Price Hughes as “among the first Methodists to observe certain similarities between the early Methodist preachers and the friars in the Roman Catholic Church” (72). Other Methodist theologians such as Herbert Workman and R. Newton Flew, and Roman Catholic theologians such as Maximin Piette, Louis Bouyer, and John Todd explored similar commonalities in the time building up to Vatican II.

The great ecumenical changes wrought by Vatican II provided the opportunity for earlier historical research to move to institutional dialogue. Chatman summarily covers the documents resulting from these dialogues over a half-century of Methodist/Roman Catholic dialogues. These dialogues have not been without fruit. As Monsignor Richard Stewart reflected, “In particular, Methodists and Roman Catholics have a great deal in common in their understanding and spirituality of holiness” (129). Yet even positive results arising out of the dialogues have been “hampered by its indifferent reception among Methodists and Roman Catholics at every level of church life” (167).

How then does Methodism fit within the “one, holy, catholic, apostolic church”? Chatman suggests that the “most promising” way to “describe the ecclesial location of Methodism is by analogy with the various religious orders found in the Roman Catholic Church” (254). He concludes, “there is sufficient phenomenological evidence to warrant a theological study of Methodism in relation to the various religious orders and ecclesial movements within the Roman Catholic Church as a possible basis for describing the ecclesial location of Methodism” (255).

Chatman’s book provides an important read for those entrusted with theological reflection within the American Holiness movement. We tend to define ourselves as “Wesleyan” and, therefore, against rather than within the Methodist ecclesial tradition (often even for those still within United Methodism!). The return to a purported originary Wesley without attention to the 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century shifts in Methodism often obscures modernist theological presuppositions that underlie the claim of “Wesleyan.” More significantly, it moves our tradition towards the apologetic localities of interest groups, from liberationist “social justice” causes

characterized by the World Council of Churches to “conservative” denominational identities for “church growth” and institutional self-preservation.

By raising the question of our tradition within Methodism and Methodism in relationship to Roman Catholicism, perhaps we can re-embrace the early Methodist mission to Christianize Christianity through holiness of heart and life. If so, it might be interesting to attempt to begin a formal dialogue between the Christian Holiness Partnership and the Roman Catholic Church. In discovering our genuine evangelical and orthodox heritage within the church catholic, perhaps we could regain what Chatman argues is most promising about the Methodist tradition: a type of monastic renewal movement within the church catholic through the pursuit of Christian perfection, perfect love of God and neighbor.

Joerg Rieger and John Vincent (eds.), *Methodist and Radical: Rejuvenating a Tradition*. Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 2004, 218 pp.

Reviewed by John W. Wright, Professor of Theology and Christian Scripture, Point Loma Nazarene University

Few scholars in the Wesleyan tradition will need a reminder of John Wesley's insistence on the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. As liberation theology developed in the 1970's and 80's, Wesley's concern for the corporal works of mercy provided an intersection for the academic and ecclesial mediation of Wesleyan theology and Marxist theory. Theologians correlated Wesley's anchorage in early Christian practices with Marxist practices, subtly shifting the ontology from Wesley's classical Christian orthodoxy to a dialectical materialism. God experientially discovered within the movement of history provided the onto-theological guarantee of the impulse for human liberation. In Henri de Lubac's terms, the supernatural became naturalized; God was collapsed into the movement of history towards a Marxist utopia of freedom.

Twenty years have passed. Marxist theory has disintegrated from its Enlightenment foundations through post-structuralist critics, the fall of the Soviet Union, and the rise of neo-liberal economics; liberation theology has likewise staggered. Now this carefully crafted collection attempts to revive the liberationist mediation of the Wesleyan tradition to this new setting. In the process, it ironically submits theologically to the very neo-liberal forces that it seeks to criticize economically.

The editors of the volume, Joerg Rieger and John Vincent, frame the work effectively with a brief preface, two introductory essays, and a brief conclusion. The essays "are united in the vision that the church as a whole is best shaped and transformed not from the top down, but from the bottom up, by perspectives from the margins" (9). Given the post-modern incredulity of a single Marxist master narrative, the individual essays correlate experiences of liberation from various oppressed "margins" to fragments of Wesley and the early Methodists to enliven a Methodism mired in the "center." Gay and lesbian, Afro-American, Salvadoran American, Asian American, feminist, Primitive Methodist, indigenous South African, Ghanan, Korean, and South Pacific Islander voices all speak from their own experiences of oppression at the margins to add their liberationist images of God in order to subvert the ruling ideology of the projected God of the center (28-29).

A final essay by José Míguez Bonino provides a historical and theoretical connection of the previous reflections to earlier liberationist thought (193-206). This essay provides an interesting entry into the philosophical background of the mediating theology that supports the book. As Marxist claims have collapsed from within through its own Eurocentric colonialism, the importance of Hegel as the source of Marx has re-emerged. Bonino writes:

Our rejection of the present order is not merely a negation of the existing conditions, it is a movement toward a new project of freedom. Latin America has to move beyond its 'liberal' history in the double Hegelian sense of "assuming" and "negating." This is not easy because Latin America has not lived this stage as a self-generated project in which we have been a fully active subject, but as a project induced from outside, in the framework of neocolonial relations of dependence. It is, however, a transition without return, which has to be evaluated as a necessary moment of our historical process. . . . The only possible route is to move forward, through this crisis, to a new moment in history. (210-212)

Bonino turns from Marx to Hegel for the liberationist task. In *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (trans. by J. N. Findlay, Oxford: Oxford University, 1977), Hegel writes,

the living Substance . . . is in truth actual only in so far as it is the movement of positing itself, or is the mediation of its self-othering with itself. This Substance is . . . pure, *simple negativity*, and is for this very reason the bifurcation of the simple; it is the doubling which sets up opposition, and then again the negation of this indifferent diversity, and of its antithesis [of immediate simplicity]. . . . It is the process of its own becoming, the circles that presuppose its end as its goal, having its end also as its beginning; and only by being worked out to its end, is it actual. (10)

Bonino, explicitly as the other essays do implicitly, gives a left-wing Hegelian interpretation of the movement of history from the "margins" against the neo-liberal, right-wing, Hegelian interpretation of the "center."

Once we recognize the subtext of Hegel, the dialectic agony of the book emerges. The criticism of the neo-liberalism of Methodism "at the center" rings true and loud. Who could contest that "Methodism becomes

the story of the margins being drawn into the center” (16) or that “the two camps within the mainline—liberals and conservatives—do not differ much when it comes to ‘the least of these’ . . . in both cases the movement still is from the top down, seeking to ‘lift up’ people on the margins. . . . This is true even for the somewhat more radical idea of ‘community organizing’” (22). In language reminiscent of Donald Dayton, “we discern a more or less universal tendency among Methodists to move toward conformity with the cultural establishment, toward *embourgeoisement*” (31).

Yet inverting the dialectic from the center to the margins merely duplicates the same agonistic captivity of the Christian faith as the neo-liberal consumerist of the center. In words that ring similar to George Barna, Vincent writes: “Our tradition is not that of the settled, institutional, ‘established’ churches, as static supporters of the status quo. Rather, our tradition is of endless pioneering, constant innovation, and a demanding ‘work ethic’ of laboring for God’s kingdom. . . . A Methodist radicalism for today would take our version of Christianity out into the streets in new manifestations. It would be based in shops, not sanctuaries. It would place itself alongside the searchers of new spiritualities and New Age” (46). The only difference between Barna and the perspectives of this book is the product marketed. Rather than experiential goods and services to maintain the center, Vincent will have the “radical” spiritual entrepreneur stock the shelves with a different commodity: “Its shop window would be the contemporary ‘big issues’—globalization, climate change, population, migration, pollution, poverty, genetically modified foods, consumerism, lifestyle” (45). The agonistic logic of the market, the driving force of Hegel’s thought, remains the same, whether one moves the dialectic to the right or to the left. Jesus becomes absorbed as representative of a type of a socially conscious spirituality, rather than the constitutive revelation of God, fully human, fully divine in one person. Corporate raiders, right or left, dissolve the unity of the faith handed over to the saints through the dialectic of history in order to sell off unprofitable units and place the remaining fragments into a new, synthetic whole.

Hence, the book’s project implodes. It remains within the neo-liberal dialectic that it purportedly attempts to resist by commodifying the Wesleyan tradition itself. Vincent claims that “our mission entrepreneurship is not intended to extend the omnipotence of market forces and compliant culture, but to make viable the Kingdom of justice, equality, and wholeness of life of all, in practical, street-level projects and communities”



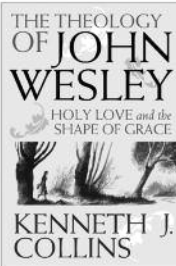
(46). However, he and the other essays in the book must surrender the evangelical and orthodox faith of the church catholic (and Wesley) to the very market forces that the book attempts to resist in order “to constantly challenge the center with viable, relevant alternatives, so that the center can itself be part of the margins” (46).

Methodist? Not without a serious historical and ontological rupture from the life and thought of John Wesley. Radical? Not really; simply the tired repetition of the next new and improved mediating theology, an endless repetition of the historical dialectic that fuels a global capitalistic market that threatens to absorb all within its own agonistic, dialectical movement while destroying the poor and the earth in its wake.

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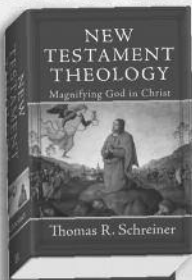


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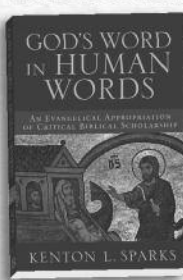
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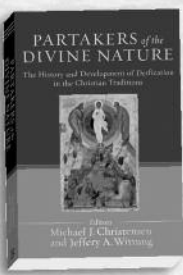
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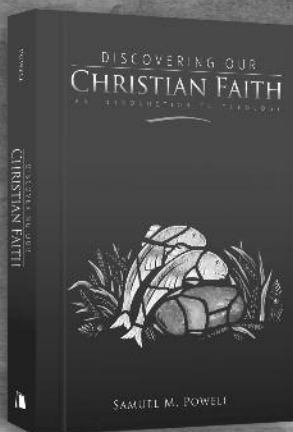
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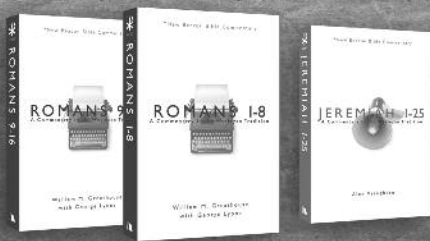
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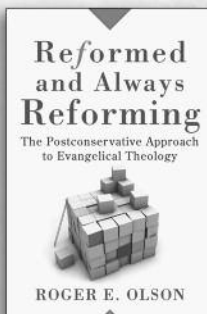
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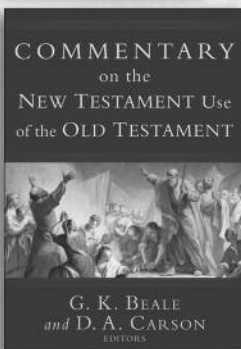
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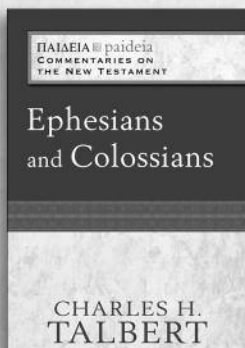
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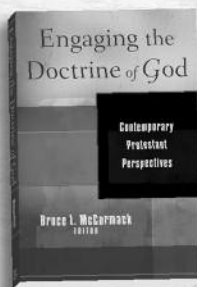
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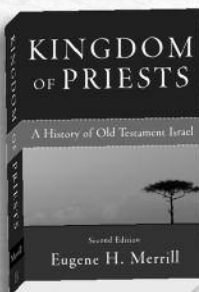
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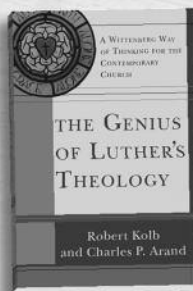
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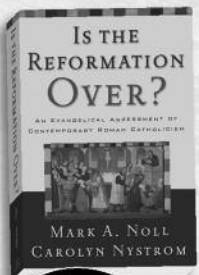
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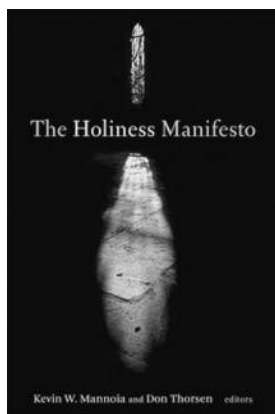
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