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# ***Wesleyan Theological Journal***

Volume 20, Number 1, Spring, 1985

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## THE WESLEYAN QUADRILATERAL — IN JOHN WESLEY

Albert C. Outler

For five full decades, John Wesley served as theological mentor to “the people called Methodists,” with no peer and no successful challengers. Throughout that half century, he was embroiled in one doctrinal controversy after another—with Anglican priests and bishops, with Calvinist partisans (clerical and lay) and with occasional dissidents within his own “connexion.” Doctrinal consensus was a prime concern with him and a prerequisite for stability in the Methodist Societies. Thus, at the outset of his first “conference” with his “assistants” (1744), the first questions posed for discussion were:

- (1) What to teach?
- (2) How to teach?
- (3) What to do (i.e., how to regulate our doctrine, discipline and practice)?

There was, of course, no question in anyone’s mind as to who would have the final word in these conversations but everyone agreed that these were the right questions for a religious society within an established church.

As the Methodist movement spread and matured, Wesley supplied it with reams of theological and ethical instruction, in different genres: sermons, letters, tracts, exegetical notes, a huge Journal, even a full-length monograph (on *Original Sin*). But—and this, of course, is my point—there is only one instance in all of this of anything resembling a doctrinal credo (in his open “Letter to a Roman Catholic,” 1749) and even this was an obvious borrowing from Bishop John Pearson’s classic *Exposition of the Doctrine of the Creed*—the bishop’s counterpart to the *Westminster Confession* and *Shorter Catechism*. Wesley seems never to have toyed with the notion of a *summa theologiae*—not even a catechism. What then did he expect his people to identify as their “standards of doctrine”?

His first move had been to abridge the first four Edwardian *Homilies* (of 1547) into a brief theological charter: *The Doctrine of Justification according to the Church of England* (cf. *Journal* Nov. 11, 1738). Then as the Revival gained momentum, he turned to the method of conciliar dialogue, gathering his

assistants together by invitation. He himself recorded the upshot of their discussions and published this in a cumulative set of *Minutes of Conversations Between the Rev. Mr. Wesley and Others* (1744 et seq.). The theological substance of these “minutes” reflects the mind and spirit of early Methodism very well indeed. A version of them (“The Large Minutes”) was accepted by the fledgling Methodist Episcopal Church in America and so may be considered as included within the scope of that notoriously ambiguous phrase in “The First Restrictive Rule” (1808) in the *Methodist Book of Discipline* concerning “our present existing, and established, standards of doctrine.”

In 1763, in what came to be known as “The Model Deed” Wesley proceeded to stipulate the negative limits of Methodist doctrine—viz. that preachers in Methodist chapels were to preach ‘no other doctrine than is contained in Mr. Wesley’s *Notes Upon the New Testament* and four volumes of Sermons.’ This provided his people with a doctrinal canon that was stable enough and yet also flexible. In it, the Holy Scriptures stand first and foremost, and yet subject to interpretations that are informed by ‘Christian Antiquity’, critical reason and an existential appeal to the “Christian experience” of grace, so firmly stressed in the *Explanatory Notes*. The “four volumes” mentioned in the “Model Deed” contained either forty-three or forty-four sermons, depending on whether or not one counts “Wandering Thoughts” (it was not in the first edition of the “four volumes” [1760] but appeared in subsequent editions [before ‘63]). All this suggests that Wesley was clearly interested in coherent doctrinal norms but was equally clear in his aversion to having such norms defined too narrowly or in too juridical a form. Thus, he was content with exegetical “notes” (eager to borrow heavily from others), plus a sampling of sermons (he would have dismissed all haggling over the number of “standard sermons!”) and, of course, the Wesley hymns (Charles’ and his own). These non confessional norms served his people well for the better part of two full centuries.

Wesley’s refusal to define “doctrinal standards” too narrowly was a matter of principle: it was in no way the sign of an indecisive mind. Such a notion makes no sense when one considers how confident his own theological self understanding was (as reflected in his controversial writings), and in his arbitrary decisions as an editor. Take a single example from several hundred: in *A Christian Library* (vol. 31), he felt free to make some fairly drastic revisions of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* and thus on his own authority to “correct” what was a semi sacrosanct text! Then, too, there were his equally drastic revisions of the Book of Common Prayer, with his brusque self justification for simply having omitted a large fraction of the Psalter, characterizing the excluded Psalms as “not fit for the mouths of a Christian congregation.” No, Wesley’s refusal to provide the Methodist people with a confession for subscription was the conviction of a man who knew his own mind on every vexed question of Christian doctrine, but who had decided that the reduction of doctrine to any particular form of words was to misunderstand the very nature of doctrinal statements.

But does this mean, then, that Wesley was an indifferentist? *Me genoito!* His working concepts of doctrinal authority were carefully worked out; they were complex and dynamically balanced. When challenged for his authority, on any question, his first appeal was to the Holy Bible, always in

the sense of Article VI in the XXXIX Articles—to which he had subscribed but which he was prepared to quote inexactly. Even so, he was well aware that Scripture alone had rarely settled any controverted point of doctrine. He and his critics had repeatedly come to impasses in their games of proof-texting—often with the same texts! Thus, though never as a substitute or corrective, he would also appeal to “the primitive church” and to the Christian tradition at large as competent, complementary witnesses to “the meaning” of this Scripture or that. Even in such appeals, he was carefully selective. For example, he claimed the right to reject the damnatory clauses in the so-called “Athanasian Creed”; he was prepared to defend Montanus and Pelagius against their detractors. He insisted that “private judgment was the keystone of the Protestant Reformation.”

But Scripture and tradition would not suffice without the good offices (positive and negative) of critical reason. Thus, he insisted on logical coherence and as an authorized referee in any contest between contrary propositions or arguments. And yet, this was never enough. It was, as he knew for himself, the vital Christian experience of the assurance of one’s sins forgiven, that clinched the matter.

Thus, we can see in Wesley a distinctive theological method, with Scripture as its pre-eminent norm but interfaced with tradition, reason and Christian experience as dynamic and interactive aids in the interpretation of the Word of God in Scripture. Such a method takes it for granted that faith is human re-action to an antecedent action of the Holy Spirit’s prevenience, aimed at convicting our consciences and opening our eyes and ears to God’s address to us in Scripture. This means that our “knowledge of God and of the things of God” is more nearly a response of trusting faith in God in Christ as Grace Incarnate than it is a mental assent to dogmatic formulations however true. This helps explain Wesley’s studied deprecations of “orthodoxy,” “theological opinions,” “speculative divinity” and the like. It illumines his preoccupation with soteriology and his distinctive notion of grace, in all its modes, as the divine constant in every stage of the “order of salvation” (from repentance and justification, to regeneration, sanctification to glory). And it justified Wesley’s willingness, given honest consensus on essential Christian doctrine, to allow for wide variations in theological formulation and thus for Christians “to think and let think.” This was less a mood of doctrinal compromise than it was a constructive alternative to the barren extremes of “dogmatism,” on the one side, and “indifferentism,” on the other.

Wesley’s theological pluralism was evangelical in substance (firm and clear in its Christocentric focus) and irenic in its temper (“catholic spirit”). It measured all doctrinal statements by their Biblical base and warrants. He loved to summon his readers “to the letter and the testimony,” understood as “the oracles of God.” But this reliance on Scripture as the fount of revelation was never meant to preclude a concomitant appeal to the insights of wise and saintly Christians in other ages. And it never gave license to “enthusiasm” or to irrational arguments. Finally, since the devils are at least as clear in their theological assents as believers are, real Christians are called beyond “orthodoxy” to authentic experience—viz., the inner witness of the Holy Spirit that we are God’s beloved children, and joint heirs with Christ. It is this settled sense of personal assurance that is

“heart religion”: the turning of our hearts from the form to the power of religion. Christian experience adds nothing to the substance of Christian truth; its distinctive role is to energize the heart so as to enable the believer to speak and do the truth in love.

This complex method, with its fourfold reference, is a good deal more sophisticated than it appears, and could be more fruitful for contemporary theologizing than has yet been realized. It preserves the primacy of Scripture, it profits from the wisdom of tradition, it accepts the disciplines of critical reason, and its stress on the Christian experience of grace gives it existential force.

The Edwardian reformers (Cranmer and Harpsfield in particular) had placed the Church of England under the authority of Scripture, but they had then refocused its use more largely in the liturgy (so that “the Christian folk could be immersed in Scripture as they prayed!”). The Scripture is equally the baseline of Anglican doctrinal essays, especially those born of controversy. One has only to notice the differences in method and intention in, say, Richard Hooker’s *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (1594 et. seq.) to see how far Anglicanism stood apart from continental Protestantism. In Hooker, Scripture, tradition and reason are carefully balanced off in a vision of natural law, “whose seat is the bosom of God, whose voice is the harmony of the world” (*E.P.*, I, xvi, 8). There is no contradiction between reason’s discoveries of natural law and faith’s discoveries of revelation (cf. *E.P.* III, ix, 2). Bishops John Bramhall and Simon Patrick had mastered “Christian Antiquity” and had put it to good use. Thomas Tenison (Archbishop of Canterbury when the brothers Wesley were born) had defined “the Protestant theological method” as the conjoint “use of Scripture, tradition and reason” and had defended this against the Socinians (who had, as Tenison believed, down scaled tradition and ended up with nothing better than a tepid Biblical rationalism). Even after Wesley, Francis Paget (Hooker’s best editor) could claim, quite plausibly, that “the distinctive strength of Anglicanism rests on its equal loyalty to the unconflicting rights of reason, Scripture and tradition.” This, then, was the tradition within which Wesley took his stand; before “the judgment bar of Scripture, right reason and Christian Antiquity” (*Works*, Preface, vol. 1, 1771).

It was Wesley’s special genius that he conceived of adding “experience” to the traditional Anglican triad, and thereby adding vitality without altering the substance. What he did was to apply the familiar distinction *between fides que creditur* and *fides qua creditur* (from a theoretical faith to an existential one) so as to insist on “heart religion” in place of all nominal Christian orthodoxy (cf. “The Almost Christian”). He had found support for this in Cranmer’s wry comment (in Homilies, IV) about the devils who assent to every tenet of orthodoxy, “and yet they be but devils still.” It was this added emphasis on “experience” that led Gerald Cragg (in his *Reason and Authority in the 18th Century*) to entitle his chapter on Wesley, “The Authority of Revitalized Faith.” Wesley would have amended that to read “The Authority of Vital Faith.”

With this “fourth dimension,” one might say, Wesley was trying to incorporate the notion of conversion into the Anglican tradition—to make room in it for his own conversions and those of others. It is not irrelevant that in his report of the so-called “Aldersgate experience” of May 24th,

1738, he takes us back to his very first conversion (to “seriousness” and self dedication in 1725); thence on to his grand mystical illumination in 1727. After “Aldersgate” and after his ambivalent encounters with the Moravians in Herrnhut, the Journal recounts his rediscovery of a vital doctrine of justification by faith in his own tradition, in November of 38. But this had then been followed by a lapse into the depths of religious anxiety (in January 1739). The process then reached its climax in the spring of ‘39, with the “discovery” of his true and life-long vocation as an evangelist and spiritual director.

The success of Methodism as a religious society within the Church of England bolstered his sense of freedom to amend Anglican customs without rejecting the Anglican heritage. He quietly ignored the possibility that, in the process of reforming the national church, he was opening a way for his “societies” eventually to “separate” and go it alone as “sects” trying to become “churches” on their own. Over against the Anglican tradition of the church as *corpus mixtum*, Wesley demanded more of his societies, as disciplined communities of true believers. Against the Anglican reliance on church as ministrant of the means of grace, Wesley opposed the doctrine of justification by faith alone (and argued, mistakenly, that this doctrine was novelty in Anglicanism!). To the Anglican tradition of baptismal regeneration he added conversion and “new birth” as a Gospel requisite. To the Anglican contentment with the *Prayer book* as a complete blueprint, Wesley added a medley of “irregularities”: field preaching, extempore prayer, itinerancy, class meetings and the like. To the Anglican tradition of the “natural” alliance between church and state, he opposed the concept of church as a voluntary association. The effect of such changes was to put the question of authority into a new context: to relate it more nearly to the individual’s conscience, to small group consensus, and also to link it practically with the ideal of “accountable discipleship,” (to use an apt phrase of David Watson’s). The practical effect of this was to make every Methodist man and woman his / her own theologian. He nowhere gave his people an actual paradigm for their theologizing; somehow, he hoped that they would adopt his ways of reflection as their own. The truth is, however, that his bare texts, unannotated, did not suffice to make true “Wesleyans” out of those who have continued to bear his name and who honor him as patriarch. This is why the editors of the new edition of his Works hope that more ample annotations will help both “Wesleyans” and non-Wesleyans in the “discovery” of the richness and sophistication of his special sort of “folk theology.”

Even that cheerful thought may be thwarted, however, so long as the phrase “the Wesleyan quadrilateral” is taken too literally. It was intended as a metaphor for a four element syndrome, including the four-fold guidelines of authority in Wesley’s theological method. In such a quaternity, Holy Scripture is clearly unique. But this in turn is illuminated by the collective Christian wisdom of other ages and cultures between the Apostolic Age and our own. It also allows for the rescue of the Gospel from obscurantism by means of the disciplines of critical reason. But always, Biblical revelation must be received in the heart by faith: this is the requirement of “experience.” Wesley’s theology was eclectic and pluralistic (and I confess my bafflement at the hostility aroused in some minds by such inno-

cent adjectives). Even so, it was a coherent, stable, whole, deriving its fruitfulness from its single, soteriological focus in the Christian evangel of Jesus Christ—“who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was made man!”

When I first began reading Wesley’s entire corpus with some care (after many years as a credentialed professor of the “history of Christian thought”), I was puzzled by the score or more brief summations of “the Gospel” that Wesley sprinkles almost casually along the way—never twice in the same form of words (which suggests that, before Coleridge or Wittgenstein, Wesley had come upon the secret that language [and the language of religion in particular] is, by its nature, “incomplete”). Little by little, it dawned on me that Wesley’s purpose in these summaries was to refocus the entire range of his theological reflection upon the crux of the matter: which is to say, salvation. For example:

“Let us prophesy according to the analogy of faith”—as St. Peter expresses it, “as the oracles of God”—according to the general temper of them, according to that grand scheme of doctrine which is delivered therein touching original sin, justification by faith and present, inward salvation. There is a wonderful analogy between all these, and a close and intimate connexion between the chief heads of that faith “which was once for all delivered to the saints.” [*Explanatory Notes*, on Romans 12:6, on “the analogy of faith”].

He is eager for theological dialogue, but his real concern is with:

the most essential parts of real experimental religion: its initial rise in the soul, that goes on to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ which issues in regeneration, is attended with peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, thence to our wrestlings with flesh and blood, and finally to perfect love. [*Second Letter to Bishop Lavington*, X, 17].

All Wesleyans are familiar with his metaphors of “porch,” “door” and “room” of “true religion” [*The Principles of a Methodist*, in Jackson, VIII 472-74]. Similar encapsulations of the *ordo salutis* abound, some in obvious places but some in unexpected places—as, for example, in the “Preface” to the Explanatory Notes on the Old Testament (the vast bulk of which was simply lifted from others):

[In your reading of the Scriptures] have a constant eye to the analogy of the faith, which is to say, the connexion there is between those grand fundamental doctrines of original sin, justification by faith, the new birth, inward and outward holiness.

As an Anglican priest, he will assume a shared faith with “A Gentleman of Bristol” (Jan. 6, 1758) in

the principles of the Church of England as being confirmed by our Liturgy, Articles and Homilies—and so also by the whole tenor of Scripture [notice this catch phrase; it is a favorite, repeated in many different contexts].

In another place, he summarized the essential Gospel in yet another set of theses:

1. That without holiness no man shall see the Lord;
  2. That this holiness is the work of God, who worketh in us both to will and to do;
  3. That he doeth it of his own good pleasure, merely for the merits of Christ;
  4. That holiness is having the mind that was in Christ, enabling us to walk as He walked;
  5. That no man can be sanctified till he be justified;
  6. That we are justified by faith alone
- [“The General Spread of the Gospel,” para. 13]

This comes in a sermon; this particular form of words is never used again.

The obvious methodological question posed by summaries like this is whether such variant expressions oversimplify or distort “the essence of the Christian Gospel.” For Wesley, it was enough to point to its soteriological core in evangelical terms. As far as the full range of theological opinions is concerned, he is more relaxed—even to the point of tolerating the “over beliefs” of the Roman Catholics and also the Reformed doctrines of election and predestination. It is this skillful balancing of the essentials off from the adiaphora that allows Wesley to escape both the rigidities of dogmatism and the flabbiness of indifferentism.

In the new edition of Wesley’s Works, we have tried to alert even the casual reader to the extent to which Wesley was, as he claimed he was, *homo unius libri*. To an extent that I had not realized before I wore out the first of two concordances we used in tracing down Wesley’s Scripture citations (quotations, paraphrases, allusions, echoes) the Bible was truly his second language. His rhetoric throughout is a tissue woven from the Biblical texts and paraphrases and his own crisp Augustan prose (“plain truth for plain people”). His appeal to Scripture goes far deeper than the use of texts in support of his own views. His larger concern was to let each part of Scripture be pondered in the light of the whole, obscure texts in the light of the more lucid ones—and all of them, always, in the spirit of prayer, *coram Deo*. Scripture is not merely God’s address to the believer—it is inspired by the Holy Spirit who in turn inspires the believer’s understanding. The Bible is to be read literally, save where such a reading leads to an absurdity or to an impugnation of God’s goodness. Scriptural commands are not to be construed legalistically; they are to be seen also as “covered promises.” Even allegory is occasionally resorted to (as with the image of “The Wilderness State”). The Apocrypha may be used for edification, though not for sermon texts. Wesley was capable of partisan proof-texting; and yet also felt free to alter the *Textus Receptus* by appeal to older MSS; and he had no qualms in nuancing some Greek words arbitrarily (as with *paroxysmos* in Acts 15:39), where he insists that only Barnabas lost his temper, but never St. Paul. The clearest impression that remains after all the tedium of tracing Wesley’s Biblical sources is of a man very much “at home” in the Bible and quietly confident of his understanding of its “general tenor.”

There is another sense, however, in which the notion of Wesley as the man of “one book only” is patently absurd. He read voraciously and in all



genres. He had a special fondness for “the Fathers” of the early centuries. He thought that the Greek theologians had understood the Gospel more profoundly and therapeutically than their Latin counterparts. He came at the Fathers with an Anglican bias (he had been at Oxford in the twilight of a great age of patristic scholarship), in the tradition of Richard Field, Henry Hammond and Simon Patrick. He was not in the least intimidated by learned detractors of patristic wisdom (like Jean Daille and Conyers Middleton).

What Wesley learned most from the Eastern fathers was the rich notion of the Christian life as a participation in the divine (i.e., salvation as the restoration of the ruined image of God in the human soul). The stage for his “Aldersgate experience” had been set by the Scripture with which he began that day: II Peter 1:4 (cf. Wesley’s paraphrase: *ta megista hemin timia epangelmata dedoretai, hina genesthe theias hoinonoi physeos*, and the crucial phrase, “partakers of the divine *physis*.” It was in this sense of “participation” in the divine life that Wesley had already understood the mysteries of grace and free will, of prevenient grace as the Holy Spirit’s constant initiative, of “perfection” as a process rather than a completed act. There is much Anselmian language in Wesley (“acquittal,” “imputation”), but there is even more that stresses the notion of healing (*therapeia psyches*). He was neither “Augustinian” (indeed, he has some tart comments about the great bishop), nor “Pelagian” (he actually doubted that Pelagius had been a “Pelagian”)—and he could interpret *dikaiosyne* not only as the “imputation” of Christ’s righteousness to the repentant believer but also its “impartation” as well.

From the Latin traditions, he seems to have learned most from men like William of St. Thierry—who had taught that love is the highest form of knowledge—and from the Victorines (Ruprecht of Deutz, Hugh et al.) with their bold notion that God had used the Adamic Fall to bring about a greater total good than if Adam had not sinned (*O felix culpa!*).

All of this is a way of saying that, for Wesley, the Christian tradition was more than a curiosity or a source for illustrative material. It was a living spring of Christian insight. Reading Wesley against his sources amounts to an eccentric excursion through the length and breadth of the history of Christ thought. And because a lively sense of “tradition” has now come to be a prerequisite in ecumenical dialogue (cf. J. J. Pelikan’s recent essay, *The Vindication of Tradition*), it is all the more important for “Wesleyans” (and others), to discover how much he had learned from the Christian past and thus also to learn for ourselves the importance of being truly “at home” in that past.

But Wesley was no antiquarian. We know of his inborn tendency to require a reason for everything from his father’s well-known complaint to Susanna about his personal habits. He never discounted his university training in logic nor his life-long interest in contemporary science and culture. He lived in the perilous transition from an earlier theocentric rationalism that sought to reconcile religion and science (as in John Ray’s *Wisdom of God in Creation*—the prototype for Wesley’s *Survey of the Wisdom of God in Creation*) to the ‘Enlightenment’s’ outright rejection of supernaturalism (as in the deists and David Hume). To be a theologian in 18th century Britain was to struggle with deism and secularism (cf. Joseph

Butler, William Paley *et al.*). Wesley's acknowledgment of rationality as normative was both principled and pragmatic. He took logical order as a paradigm for the order of being itself (as any good Ramist would, or later, the Kantians). He remained a disciple of Locke and Aldrich all his days. But his vivid sense of mystery kept him aware of reason's limitations (as in "The Case of Reason Impartially Considered"). Richard Brantley (in Loche, *Wesley and the Method of English Romanticism* (1984) has analyzed Locke's influence on Wesley. But no one, to my knowledge, has provided a comparable study of Wesley and Malebranche, or the Cambridge Platonists, or John Norris, or Bishop Berkeley, *et al.*

Wesley's understanding of reason led him to a religious epistemology that hinges, crucially, on his view of intuition as a "spiritual *sensorium*" in the human mind that constitutes what is most distinctively human: viz., our capacity for God. This is part of God's creative design and it points to the chief inlet of the Holy Spirit into the human soul and spirit. Just last year, a dissertation was accepted by Rome's Angelicum University on The Perceptibility of Grace in John Wesley (by Daniel Joseph Luby—a layman!). It is a superb probing of the importance, for Wesley, of "immediate perception" [of spirituality reality]. Such unexpected developments remind us of how much we also need a full-fledged monograph on "rationality in the Wesleyan spirit." Even so, "our knowledge of God and of the things of God" does not come from intuition, inference or deduction alone. Always it is a prevenient and unmerited gift and must, therefore, be experienced as an inward change of heart and head in which the mind's intuitions of the truth are realized in the heart (as when *Christus pro nobis* becomes *Christus pro me*).

Here a careful distinction is needed. The "experience of grace" is indeed deeply inward, but it is not a merely subjective "religious affection." It is an objective encounter (within "the heart," to be sure) of something not ourselves and not our own (something truly transcendent). It is an inward assurance of an objective reality: viz., God's unmerited favor, his pardoning mercy, an awareness of the Spirit's prevenient action in mediating the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ to the believer. It is, therefore, the experience of a given—a divine action that can only be re-acted to, in trusting faith or in prideful resistance. It is this stress upon the sheer givenness of spiritual insight and of divine grace that distinguishes Wesley from Pelagius—and for that matter, from Arminius and Episcopius. Had he known of Kant (his younger contemporary!) Wesley would have agreed with at least the first two paragraphs of his first *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788):

There can be no doubt that all our knowledge begins with experience. . . . In the order of time, therefore, we have no knowledge antecedent to experience and with experience all our knowledge begins.

But though all our knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow that it arises out of experience . . .

When, therefore, zealous and pious souls conclude that the intensity or inwardness of their own feelings is the measure of truth (and when they invoke Wesley's "strangely warmed heart" as a witness to such a

correlation) nothing but pious sentimentality can ensue and, with it, a sort of narcissism that readily turns into an anti-intellectualism. The verb forms in the familiar phrase, “I felt my heart strangely warmed” give us an underdeveloped clue. “I felt” is in the active voice; “strangely warmed” is passive.

In this light, one may read with profit another of Wesley’s “summaries,” this one of the gist of Christian experience at its best:

Words cannot express [and he was serious in his conviction that religious language is apophatic and, therefore, also polysemous] what the children of God experience. But perhaps one might say (desiring any who are taught of God to soften or strengthen the expression) that “the testimony of the Spirit” is an inward impression on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God directly witnesses to my spirit that I am a child of God, that Jesus Christ hath loved me and given Himself for me—and that all my sins are blotted out and that I, even I, am reconciled to God [“The Witness of the Spirit,” I, i, 7].

Dr. Sugden’s comment on this passage, invoking the authority of W. B. Pope, takes Wesley to task for this emphasis on the objectivity of the Spirit’s activity and of the human role as wholly reactive. This reminds us of how, in the history of Methodist theologizing, Wesley’s heroic efforts to save us from subjectivity and sentimentality have so often gone so largely for naught. Wesley’s theological method was distinctive, and maybe unique (for one cannot identify any of his disciples who adopted it as a whole or in his theological spirit). Adam Clarke, Richard Watson, W. B. Pope, and others grasped much of the substance of the patriarch’s teaching, but they were bent on remaking him into a biblicist (Clarke) or a systematic theologian (Watson and Pope). Indeed, Watson went so far as to entitle his own exposition of Wesleyan theology in the Calvinist fashion, *Theological Institutes*.

All Wesleyans have agreed on the primacy of Scripture and then differed (not always helpfully) in their hermeneutical perspectives. This seems to me to have come from a neglect of Wesley’s own hermeneutical focus on “the analogy of faith”; I cannot cite a single essay by a Wesleyan exegete or theologian in which the *analogia fidei* is a governing notion. In the 19th century, Wesley’s reliance on the Christian tradition as a whole (and especially “the Fathers”) was quietly jettisoned (even by Methodist historians, like Sheldon and Cell). His confidence in reason, within its proper limits, has given way to an emotive anti-intellectualism or else its opposite: e.g. an overconfidence in reason (as in Bowne and Brightman). His focus on “experience”—as a soteriological category—has been turned into a variety of empiricisms, bolstered by a pragmatic appeal to “practical results.”

The term “quadrilateral” does not occur in the Wesley corpus—and more than once, I have regretted having coined it for contemporary use, since it has been so widely misconstrued. But if we are to accept our responsibility for seeking *intellecta* for our faith, in any other fashion than a “theological system” or, alternatively, a juridical statement of “doctrinal standards,” then this method of a conjoint recourse to the fourfold guide-

lines of Scripture, tradition, reason and experience, may hold more promise for an evangelical and ecumenical future than we have realized as yet—by comparison, for example, with biblicism, or traditionalism, or, rationalism, or empiricism. It is far more valid than the reduction of Christian authority to the dyad of “Scripture” and “experience” (so common in Methodist ranks today). The “quadrilateral” requires of a theologian no more than what he or she might reasonably be held accountable for: which is to say, a familiarity with Scripture that is both critical and faithful; plus, an acquaintance with the wisdom of the Christian past; plus, a taste for logical analysis as something more than a debater’s weapon; plus, a vital, inward faith that is upheld by the assurance of grace and its prospective triumphs, in this life.

The epoch that looms before us, whether we like it or no, is a postliberal age, in which the dogmatism of the pre—Enlightenment orthodoxies and the confident dogmas of “liberalism” (e.g., “progress” and “human perfectibility”) will come to seem increasingly outmoded. It is, predictably, a time of troubles for the whole world, with no assured future for our plundered planet or for a humanity addicted to self—defeating strategies masked with the illusions of good intentions. The still—divided fragments of the Christian community are more interested in honest doctrinal consensus than ever before. But this is also to say that it is a time when the study of Wesley has a distinctive contribution to make.

Neither the Wesley theology, nor his methods are simple panaceas. They are not like the TV dinners that can be reheated and served up quickly for immediate use. They call for imaginative updating in the new world cultural contexts (the sort of thing that John XXIII spoke of as *aggiornamento*—care in preserving the kernel, imagination in renovating the medium). Wesley’s vision of Christian existence has to be reconceived and transvalued so that it can be as relevant in the experience of the late 20th century as it was to alienated English men and women in 1740! This requires that it must be refocused in ways neither doctrinaire on the one hand, nor trendy on the other. Wesley avoided such barren polarizations and so, one thinks, we may also—if our theologians, like his, are as deeply immersed in Scripture (“at home” in its imagery and mystery), as truly respectful of the Christian wisdom of past ages, as honestly open to the disciplines of critical reason, as eagerly alert to the fire and flame of grace.

Wesley’s complex way of theologizing has the ecumenical advantage of making fruitful linkages with other doctrinal traditions without threatening to supplant any of them and without fear of forfeiting its own identity. There are, however, at least two prior conditions for such linkages: that Wesley be rescued from the stereotypes in which his professed disciples have cocooned him and that we recover for ourselves the rich manifold of tradition from which he drew so freely and creatively. These conditions can be best met by learning more and more from Wesley himself (the whole Wesley, including “the later Mr. Wesley” as reflected in *A Christian Library* and *The Arminian Magazine*) and yet also learning more and more, and on our own, from the rich manifold of Christian traditions from which Wesley learned so much.

This is a daunting challenge and I freely confess that it is more of a task than I have myself been able to bring off to my own satisfaction. But I can

testify, with great gratitude, that my communing with Wesley and his sources has been immensely enriching, in my theological concerns and in my own growth in grace. It is, therefore, with full assurance that I commend such explorations, not only to those who bear the Wesleyan insignia, but to all others who may care to extend their acquaintance with a rare man of God.

# THE WESLEYAN QUADRILATERAL IN THE AMERICAN HOLINESS TRADITION

Leon Hynson

## *I. Introduction*

The task at hand is the assessment of the place of Scripture, reason, experience and tradition in the American Holiness tradition.

That movement represents the societies and sects which emerged from Methodism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For this particular study, limited attention is given to the National Association for the Promotion of Holiness. The focus turns more toward the popular preaching of some of the early spokesmen for the Pilgrim Holiness Church and the Church of the Nazarene, (c.1900-1920). A brief analysis of systematic theology takes place at the close of the paper. You will note that some subjective elements are found in the analysis.

In researching this essay, the preliminary assumption has been that Scripture possesses a normative place in the movement, and that experience, reason, and tradition possess relative weight. It is assumed that Scripture brings experience, for example, under its regulative influence; while experience replicates the Biblical standards of spirituality and ethics. What of reason and tradition? Were they servants of the scriptural message? Did they bring any balance to what was often a limited hermeneutic? Does reason play any significant part in the movement, since a sturdy strand of anti intellectualism existed in its formative stages?

The Holiness tradition would achieve a self-conscious autonomy in the holiness revival in Methodism following the Civil War. It did not surrender the classical foundations of Wesleyanism, but its specialized intentions seem to have led it to shape Wesley's perspective toward a more experiential focus. This is apparent, I believe, in the manner in which Pentecost was interpreted, stressing the personal experience of Pentecost to the neglect of the corporate (or community) dimension of the event.

## *II. In Search of Authority in the Holiness Movement*

What may we hypothesize regarding the quadrilateral in the American Holiness tradition? First. it is claimed that the essential ingredients of the

quadrilateral may be found in the theology and preaching of the tradition, but lacking the balance of Wesley, especially in its preaching. Preaching, more than systematic theology, would dominate the movement and set forth the lines of its authority. The preaching would build squarely upon Biblical grounds, developing an experiential accent. Scripture would be assumed as the revelatory norm by which experience is authenticated. Even when experience was regarded as so important, it was acknowledged that experience must square with revelation. Because the interpretive center was consistently the doctrine of holiness, the experiential focus was the experience of entire sanctification.

Second, Scripture questions are developed less in terms of its full authority than by the hermeneutic of holiness. Thus, Jesse T. Peck's classic *The Central Idea of Christianity* became one of its key sources. (As Luther developed a hermeneutic of justification<sup>1</sup>, the Holiness people developed a hermeneutic of holiness.)

Thirdly, experience was to assume powerful proportions. Although the theology of the movement developed some years later never raised experience above Scripture, in practice this sometimes took place in earlier days. Experience was largely defined and informed by pneumatological emphases. Pentecost, the inauguration of the Christian church, became the norm for measuring the authenticity and completeness of the Christian life. The apostolic question to the disciples of Ephesus, "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" (Acts 19:2), was interpreted as the description of a two stage reception of God's grace. It would be a personal, identifiable experience: "Your Pentecost," "My Pentecost." In the experience of regeneration, the Spirit is "with you" and in Pentecostal experience "in you." This Pentecostal dimension was to take the holiness tradition beyond Wesley's position on Pentecost, as seen in his *Notes on the New Testament*.<sup>2</sup>

Fourth, tradition was embodied in an ethos of separation and the experience of the pilgrim, remnant community. In the early years of my life, we perceived ourselves as strangers and pilgrims in the world. We sang the Lord's songs in a strange land, songs like:

*I'm going through, I 'm going through,  
I'll pay the price whatever others do,  
I'll take the way with the Lord 's despised few,  
I'm going through, Jesus, I 'm going through.*

Our consciousness raising led us to transvaluate "despised few" to "chosen few," but still there were "few."

Tradition was perpetuated through the specialized ritual of conversion and the baptism of the Spirit, which involved "praying through," and achieving certainty through the Spirit's witness. The matrix was revival, a regular schedule in spring and fall, with summer camp meetings. There were class meetings for hearing the testimonies of the saints. Even though these differed from Wesley's classes, the function of witness and mutual support remained. Those whose spiritual life was flagging might feel a certain persuasion to "lift up the hands that hang down." At times, the testimonies were perfunctory, and the class leader a spiritual whip (as in the Congress,) but the witnesses were seldom insincere.

Their traditions were formed by a reading of the history of Israel; from Sinai and Zion, the Red Sea and the Jordan River, wilderness and promised land, Egypt and Canaan. As these spoke of great moments in the past, they also described present experiences of believers. The Red Sea was the way from bondage, but not the full deliverance. First there was the wilderness, then the passage into Canaan. The holiness movement would develop this pattern or typology into a fine art. What saved it from serious aberration was the restraint imposed upon it by the larger scriptural teaching. The call to holiness was simply and beautifully illustrated by the stories, events, and places of Scripture. The typological motif is evident in many of the hymns, songs, and sermons.

H. J. Zelle wrote “*He Rolled the Sea Away*” reflecting the crossing of the Red Sea as the analogy of deliverance from sin, sorrow, and as a prayer for grace to die:

*When Israel out of bondage came,  
A sea before them lay;  
The Lord reached down His mighty hand  
And rolled the sea away.*

*And when I reach the sea of death,  
For needed grace I'll pray;  
I know the Lord will quickly come  
And roll the sea away.*

Or, M. J. Harris (c. 1908)

*I long ago left Egypt, for the promised land,  
I trusted in my Savior, and to his guiding hand,  
He led me out to victory, through the great red sea  
I sang a song of triumph, and shouted I am free.*

The next stanzas show the progress from Egypt to Canaan to heaven, and the chorus follows:

*You need not look for me, down in Egypt's sand  
For I have pitched my tent, far up in Beulah land.*

Fifth, the Scripture's call to maturity, to fullness and wholeness was developed by a consistent logic of faith. The holiness people reasoned from Scripture and experience. Their logic was similar to the “practical syllogism” which asserts the validity of personal faith on the evidence of a manifestly changed life, or the fruits of faith. So, if the “rushing, mighty wind” is the stuff of my personal experience, it might be reasoned that my experience corresponds to Scripture. But this is a rational argument, an inference which builds upon Scripture and experience but which was not simply Scripture or experience. Theirs was a reasoned faith, as logical to them as the inerrancy argument was to fundamentalism.

#### *A. Scripture in the Holiness Tradition*

When we consider the living witness of this segment of the Wesleyan heritage we recognize the authority and inspiration of Scripture to be an unquestioned assumption. The hermeneutical issue in preaching and teaching is of central importance. The hermeneutic of holiness becomes the rule



for interpreting Scripture. What does the Bible teach about holiness of heart and life? To discover this, the Scriptures were frequently typologized. Geography, topography, ethos, nations, societies, and cities acquired a significance sometimes hidden beneath the surface of the obvious meaning. Some in the movement displayed an affinity for allegorism. In a sermon preached at my parish thirty-three years ago, an evangelist turned the wedding feast at Cana of Galilee into the festivities of Christian experience. The best wine kept until the last was descriptive of the exhilarating wine of spiritual vitality, the second grace of sanctification. Dr. W. B. Godbey, on the other hand, developed the message through more careful study of the Greek text, with a steadfast interest in the holiness message.

The diversity of the hermeneutic of holiness almost defies categorization. Much was anecdotal with Scripture developed according to a view of the chronological priority of regeneration, and the soteriological priority of sanctification. Scripture passages which gave content to the sequence of salvation were cited. Matthew 11:28-30 is an example of two kinds of rest: rest for the weary; rest for those yoked to Christ. Holiness was found in the “whole tenor of scripture.” As Harold Greenlee pointed out in 1963, the truth rested on the “whole message of the Bible.”<sup>3</sup>

The contrasts between the lifestyles in Egypt and Canaan became important. The Exodus was a departure from the old ways, hence salvation, while crossing the Jordan was an entrance, the life of victory in holiness. Holiness is a highway through the wilderness (Isaiah 35).

No one gave voice to the centrality of holiness in Scripture more than Martin Wells Knapp, a founder of the Pilgrim Holiness Church. *His Pearls From Patmos* 4 interprets the book of Revelation consistently as a book about holiness. The “silence in heaven” passage, e.g., (Rev. 8:1) is heaven’s watch of the outcome of holiness in the world. Holiness for Knapp is not simply the center of Scripture, it is the circumference.

Holiness is more likely to be interpreted in terms of categories of the Spirit and Pentecost, than of the Son and Calvary or the resurrection.

Phineas Bresee, founder of the Church of the Nazarene, eloquently pursued this track. Pentecost Sunday, May 31, 1903 was the occasion for affirming the coming of the Spirit:

We celebrate the date when the Incarnation dawned . . . We remember with holy reverence the day He suffered. We live it over on Good Friday, amid shadows and tears. The Easter Day that marks His coming forth from the grave is . . . beyond expression.

But all of these go before and pave the way for the Pentecost . . . But for the coming of the Holy Ghost, all else were lost. Jesus came, suffered, died, and rose from the dead that the Holy Ghost might come, and He makes effective and glorious Christ’s coming and ministry. But for the coming of the Holy Ghost, all that went before would have disappeared.<sup>5</sup>

In a sermon based on Philippians 3, Bresee affirms that “The power of the resurrection of Jesus is the baptism of the Holy Ghost . . . The Evidence, the manifest power of the Resurrection, is the baptism with the Holy Ghost.”<sup>6</sup>

E. A. Girvin, biographer of Bresee, and friend for more than twenty-five years, drew upon his close association with Bresee. Speaking of his love for the Bible, Girvin wrote:

He realized that in the holy Scriptures are contained and presented the vital, inspired truths, . . . that these living truths are absolutely needful to every degree of spiritual life, growth, and activity; . . . And yet he insisted that the truth was like the wire which is the conduit of the mysterious and mighty electric current and that as the wire without the current was dead, the truth without the very life and personality of God was inert and powerless . . . He declared that it was possible to proclaim the truth . . . entirely disassociated from the Holy Spirit, and utterly valueless as a means of grace; [or] . . . overflowing with the divine nature and energy . . .<sup>7</sup>

Girvin here is making the point so clearly spelled out later by Wiley concerning the internal testimony of the Spirit. Bresee felt his “especial divine call was to experience, preach, and push holiness in life and doctrine . . . He was in favor of every belief that would melt into holiness . . .”<sup>8</sup>

### B. *Reason*

The place of reason in the holiness tradition may be discerned by following the line of criticism in which the reasoned approach to faith is muted. Attention is placed on “heart” religion while the sharpening of reason through the educational process received a qualified endorsement: “Important, but.” “But” not the answer to spiritual hunger. “But” not adequate to achieve the ends of faith. Occasionally, the line of critique achieves the deepest suspicion of reason and the processes enhancing careful analysis of Christian faith. The theological “cemeteries,” the educated fools, or the ridicule of academic degrees, all represent this line of attack. While this describes an earlier polemic in the movement, the fear of intellectual pursuits does not die easily.

More gently, others placed the priority of faith over reason by the proper reminder that reason may never bring the certitude which experienced faith provides. George B. Kulp, a General Superintendent of the Pilgrim Holiness Church (in which I was reared and found faith) wrote:

Only as I stand before the Word of God can I understand the mysteries that come into our lives. Reason fails me; rationalism explains nothing to the satisfaction of my soul. But I look over the past and I see the Second Person of the Godhead [this as you know is a formula built from the rational reflections of the church at Nicaea and Constantinople]-the Jehovah-step out of the Council chambers of eternity and declare, ‘Lo, I come . . . to do thy will, O God.’<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, Kulp also allowed for natural revelation: “You can see God not only in nature, in history, and in His providences, but . . . in His Word. I believe that an unsaved man with ordinary common sense, and intelligence can see God in His Word.”<sup>10</sup> Kulp affirmed the importance of “apostolic practice, prayer, faith, staying on your knees until KNEEOLOGY, rather than so much theology.”<sup>11</sup>

Martin Wells Knapp, a Methodist Episcopal pastor who became a founder (with Seth Cook Rees) of the Pilgrim Holiness Church (actually of the International Holiness Union and Prayer League-1897) spoke of a “head sanctification” or a “theological sanctification” which creates zealots. Deeper down, there is a sanctification of the knees. A genuine, full-fledged case of entire sanctification clarifies the head, purifies and fills the heart, controls the pocket [wallet] and fully consecrates the knees.”<sup>12</sup> That’s holistic sanctification!

### *C. Experience*

In developing the focus on experience in the essay, one may recognize a diversity of streams. In the commentary of George Hughes regarding the National Camp meetings, the experiential focus is strong. Sometimes Scripture virtually takes a secondary place in practice although certain Scriptural emphases are woven compellingly into the experiential focus. The epoch of Pentecost, set forth in Acts 2, is central. Pentecost becomes the central scriptural event of the movement; the central focus of the tradition.

Reason is subordinated to pneumatological counsels. In essence, there is a tendency toward the subjectivity which prevails in overbalanced pneumatology<sup>13</sup> When this imbalance occurs, the objectivity of Christology—incarnation, death, resurrection—is submerged in the subjectivity of the wind of God. Daniel Steele’s view that “An experience is worth a thousand theories”<sup>14</sup> is the central thesis of his chapter on “testimony” in *Love Enthroned*. As the patient who has been healed best authenticates that healing, so the person cleansed from sin is the best witness to Christian perfection. “Experience is one of the chief elements of evangelical power.”<sup>15</sup> Steele, the self designated “coolest and least demonstrative man in the Methodist Episcopal Church”<sup>16</sup> set forth his experience in terms of freedom and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Charles Fowler describes an (his own?) experience of a ministerial student, who sought to convince a skeptical roommate that Christianity is proved by experience. When the Christian learned about the promise of Pentecost, he was hesitant to accept it. The skeptic stated: “Charlie, is it not to be tested by experience? Is not this a matter of knowledge?”<sup>17</sup>

The focus on experience is so evident in some of the literature as to be overwhelming. It is illustrated in George Hughes’ commentary on the second National Camp Meeting at Manheim, Pennsylvania (1868):

Rev. Alfred Cookman . . . had purposed preaching on a certain text; but it had vanished, and he was left without text or sermon. The Master had him in hand and knew what to do with him. He moved out on the line of testimony . . . He dwelt upon the work of the Holy Ghost the definite work of entire sanctification, and related how he had been led into the holiest.

Hughes described the Pentecostal content of the experience and the occasion:

Nothing short of a PENTECOST was commensurate with the occasion. It came! Oh, how the glory waves swept over the

ground. It was as if the flood-gates had been suddenly uplifted and down rolled the ocean surges.<sup>18</sup>

The motif of dynamism, crisis, unleashed and uncontrolled power, prevailed in much of the early days of the holiness movement, especially in the work at Cincinnati under Martin Wells Knapp, and God's Bible School, and the weekly paper God's Revivalist, which advertised "God, Whom we serve" as its proprietor and M. W. Knapp as editor. It was Pentecostal through and through, with the focus on getting the experience, and getting it "shockingly" so as to leave no question.

Knapp and others authored the series *Electric Shocks from Pentecostal Batteries*. Knapp's book *Lightning Bolts from Pentecostal Skies* contained thirteen chapters: The Pentecostal Baptism, Pentecostal Sanctification, Pentecostal Homes, Pentecostal Giving, Pentecostal Revivals, and more. Among the so-called "striking illustrations" was one titled "Struck by Lightning." Another book was *Revival Tornadoes*. A. M. Hills wrote *Pentecostal Light* and Seth C. Rees, *The Pentecostal Church*. Wm. B. Godbey's prayer opening the 1901 camp meeting at Salvation Park (Cincinnati), invoked the deity generally, and the Holy Spirit particularly, but did not name the name of Jesus as a specific source of divine help. In his sermon, the balance was better. Godbey declares, "The Holy Ghost crowns Jesus in your hearts."<sup>19</sup> One long time observer of the movement describes another veteran's response to the Christological focus of his preaching: "Anyone can preach about Jesus. We need preaching about the Holy Ghost."<sup>20</sup>

#### D. Tradition

The influences which shaped the movement: the Scriptures accepted confidently; the special concern for experiences; the focus on Pentecost and the sanctifying Spirit; the hermeneutic of holiness, were reflected in a tradition of revivalism and an ethos of separation. In the early stages of the Pilgrim Holiness Church, the work of Knapp, Godbey, Rees, and others at Cincinnati, was characterized by a search for a better past. Some were convinced even then that the former years were more glorious, and that their fervor was diminished and often lost.<sup>22</sup> This was Charles Fowler's position. President of the National Association for the Promotion of Holiness, Fowler's book *Back to Pentecost* queried: "Why back? Because we have gotten away from Pentecost . . . We mean by Pentecost what the New Testament means by it-what Methodism has always meant by it . . . ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION."<sup>23</sup>

That zeal for former glory continued to shape much of the movement through the years of World War I and the Great Depression. The quest for past glories was elusive as it always is. The Pilgrims evidently perceived the problems in terms of cultural intrusion. The answer was a decisive separation from the world expressed through an ethos which incorporated modesty of dress, avoidance of the world in such areas as movies or jewelry, and a sense of alienation and even persecution.<sup>24</sup> Sometimes the structured symbols of separation became the substance. The core of their faith could become law and letter rather than love. Love, for a minority of these folk, could be scorned as the expression of tolerance or compromise.

Extremes of course only illustrate the contrasts between good sense and fanaticism.

It is wrong to deny the validity of the movement's quest for an authentic world-denying piety. The symbols of that piety were acquired through sacrifice. It is never easy to reject one's own culture. Nevertheless, these symbols, honestly raised as the objective expression of these Christians' integrity, at times became the reality.

Revivalism became the dominant note or mark of the holiness movement. In camp meetings across the country (Denton, Maryland camp began in 1898) and in regular revival meetings, the word was hurled forth to win the sinners, to lead the saved into sanctification, and generally to revive the saints. The Psalmist's plea: "Will you not revive us again?" (Psalm 85:6) was repeated in the gospel song "Revive Us Again":

*We praise Thee, O God, for the Son of Thy Love  
For Jesus who died and is now gone above*

*Hallelujah, Thine the Glory  
Hallelujah, Amen!  
Hallelujah, Thine the Glory*

*Revive Us Again! We praise Thee, O God, for Thy Spirit of Light  
Who has shown us our Savior and scattered our night.*

The revival was a structured event. The pattern of revival was the planned gathering, which would be surrounded and saturated by prayer and fasting, until the meeting reached a crescendo, a "break." Then sinners would surrender. The psychology of revival might evoke the stand off. Who would prevail? The preacher as God's representative, or the souls who were resisting Christ?

In time the revival became tradition, planned as part of the church year, but sometimes only a meeting, not a revival.

### III. *The Systematic Analysis*

It may be claimed that the systematic theologians of the church reflect (even as they correct) the faith and life of the collective experience of the people of God. Of course, systems makers influence the thought and life of the church and at best, they express the Church's witness. If not, they serve themselves and not the Church. Having reviewed aspects of the Church's life of witnessing in preaching, singing, and testimony, we need to assess the subsequent perspective of theologians in the holiness movement. How did the theologies sum up the Church's experience?

H. Orton Wiley, a Nazarene and the movement's prime theologian, draws upon Samuel Harris Dwight, Professor of Systematic Theology at Yale, 1871-96, a Reformed theologian to develop the quadrilateral. Initially, he developed a trilateral. Three elements are perceived to contribute to our knowledge of God, the experiential, the historical, and the rational. Wiley states, "Each of these must test, correct, and restrain the others, and at the same time clarify, verify, and supplement them." This may result in a synthesis. However, the synthesis "can be attained only through the medium of historical revelation."<sup>25</sup> The objective testimony of Scripture

is vitalized by the inner witness of the Spirit. Wiley has thus stated the essentially Wesleyan quadrilateral. Elsewhere, Wiley spells out the relationship of faith and reason by placing faith in the primary place and reason, secondary.<sup>26</sup>

Wiley further directs attention to the credentials of revelation miracles, prophecy, the unique personality of Christ, and the witness of the Holy Spirit.<sup>27</sup> In Willie's view of Scripture, concern is expressed for both the written and living word. The same Spirit who indwell Christ the Living Word, inspires the written word, so that the Word is continually enlivened and fresh.

The Reformers themselves strove earnestly to maintain the balance between the formal and the material principles of salvation, the Word and faith, but gradually . . . men began unconsciously to substitute the written Word for Christ the Living Word. They divorced the written word from the Personal Word. . . . No longer was it the fresh utterance of Christ, the outflow of the Spirit's presence but merely a recorded utterance which bound men by legal rather than spiritual bonds.<sup>28</sup>

The focus of Nazarene theologian, W. T. Purchaser's *Exploring Our Christian Faith* seems to express a more scholastic view of Scripture:

The importance of the inner testimony of the Spirit to the truth of Scripture must not be obscured. But it must be balanced by a recognition of the inherent authority of the Bible.<sup>29</sup>

Once stated, however, the rest of Purchaser's analysis centers on the formal issue of authority. His special interest rests in the "Christological analogy" of Scripture, that is, the balance of divine and human elements in Scripture. This union of the transcendent and the incarnation deserves our appreciation.

Nazarene, A. M. Hills' position represents a different trend. Born and raised in a Congregational home, educated at Overlain and Yale, Hills states that his earliest reading of theology came from "strongly Calvinistic" sources. He encountered Wesleyan thought after some years of ministry in his first pastorate. In reading his *Fundamental Christian Theology* (1931, abridged in 1932), his debt to Reformed thought, especially Charles Hedge's *Systematic Theology* emerged. He evinces substantial dependence on John Miley's mediating theology; and draws from Richard Watson, the British systematician whose theology shaped the lines of much Wesleyan theology in the nineteenth century. Both Miley and Watson are criticized by Robert Chiles who claims that they

ground the authority of the Christian faith in its relation to a rationally verified reality external to itself; methodologically, they are more concerned with the evidence for revelation than they are with revelation itself.<sup>30</sup>

Hodge was the gifted representative of the Princeton theology, "a highly intellectualized tradition that understood faith in a largely doctrinal sense," writes Donald Dayton.<sup>31</sup>

Hills insists initially that “Reason is not an Independent and Adequate source of theology,” but develops guidelines by which to judge the credibility of revelation. Reason must judge the evidence of a revelation, he suggests, leading us to the impression that criteria separate from revelation may be used to evaluate Scripture, and to declare Scripture to be deficient (or incredible).<sup>32</sup>

Paul Bassett’s assessment of Hills’ view of Scripture in his W.T.S. paper given in 1977, traces the fundamentalist lines of Hill’s theology of revelation. Bassett writes:

There is not one word of the continuing work of the Holy Spirit in revelation, i.e., the *testimonium Spiritus sancti*, nor one word of Jesus Christ . . . in the 65 pages Hills expends on the topic of revelation.<sup>33</sup>

Hills’ position depends primarily upon Charles Hodge<sup>34</sup> and Richard Watson. He makes these points:

1. Reason is presupposed in revelation, which is only communicated to the thinking mind. (The affective domain as receiver of revelation is not indicated.)
2. Reason must judge the credibility of a revelation. Only the impossible is incredible. Reason must decide whether something is impossible. It is, for example, impossible for God to do anything morally wrong. (Is this a normative theological judgment based on revelation, not reason?)
3. Reason must judge of the evidence of a revelation. “Faith without evidence is either irrational or impossible.” “Faith is an intelligent reception of truth on adequate grounds.”
4. Reason affirms that the highest certainty of religious truth is profoundly important. Human speculation cannot meet the needs of man. On the a priori ground of a personal God (for Hills the existence of God is “an immediate datum or intuitive truth of the reason.”) “reason decides that revelation is rationally probable.”
5. Reason decides that the truth the world needs cannot be had apart from revelation. “Human thought shows that apart from the Bible, there has never been certain knowledge about God Therefore revelation is a rational probability.”
6. Reason declares that God’s revelation must be attested by miracles, the “proof that a declared revelation is really from God.”<sup>35</sup>

In summary, Hill’s position represents a tilt to rationalism in several ways.

First, the evidential aspect of miracle. Does miracle become another standard of authority? Second, reason has a role in determining whether a revelation is credible. What constraints are placed upon reason to ensure that it will recognize, and not reject, revelation?

Hills also claims more for reason than he delivers, when he suggests on rational grounds what is really a revelational conclusion. That God cannot approve the morally wrong must be a revelational, not a rational claim.

W. T. Purkiser makes the suggestion that “faith and reason, belief and understanding are two halves of a complete whole.”<sup>36</sup> Reason assembles evidence, from which are derived inferences and understanding to undergird faith. In the absence of such evidence, faith may be judged as mere imagination.

Purkiser is impressed with the discoveries of reason. Hear his comment of the relation between faith and understanding:

Faith is the pioneer explorer; understanding is the homesteader and settler. Belief is the necessary early stage of knowledge. Knowledge is belief for which objective evidence has accumulated to a sufficient degree to bring about general acceptance.<sup>37</sup>

Purkiser stresses the inspiration of the record of Scripture:

The Holy Spirit has provided an accurate and true record and interpretation of His redemptive act in Christ set down in documentary form by “holy men of God!”<sup>38</sup>

That is standard evangelicalism. Compared to Hills and Wiley, Purkiser’s position seems to be moderating, but Willie’s emphasis is less scholastic, more dynamic. I

#### *V. The Quadrilateral in Practice*

In the Holiness movement, does Scripture represent the center of authority, with experience, reason, and tradition on the circumference? What is the actual relationship between these criteria of religious knowledge and authority?

The conclusion here is that the movement’s central affirmations are clearly scriptural, while experience assumes major import. At the heart of the heritage, in its earlier years, especially, the story of Pentecost assumes powerful influence. Pentecost is a Biblical event with significant experiential implications. However, for the movement to interpret Pentecost mainly (but not solely, I must add), in terms of personal experience, is to reshape the witness of Luke and Paul. Lacking the understanding of the Church as *koinonia*, the churches developed a more individualist view of church life. May this partly explain the struggle to achieve unity in the movement?

Did the movement develop its understanding of the normative place of Scripture, with a thorough hermeneutic for testing experience? It is my opinion that Scripture was too narrowly focused by the hermeneutic of holiness to test experience, tradition, reason. In some early preaching, experience became virtually self-authenticating. Occasionally, this meant some exotic forms of expressing the joy and enthusiasm some of the people experienced. However, that was the exception. The larger development of the ethical dimensions of holiness led to a general balance here.

Sometimes the early movement was tilted toward sanctification at the expense of justification. Immediacy was stressed over development. The experience orientation could lead some in the movement away from a clear emphasis on trusting faith to a focus on emotion. (Emotion of course, is an aspect of experience.) In the strong introspection fostered by the revivals and teaching, the movement could be more Catholic than Protestant.



The place of tradition in the movement represents an attempt to legitimate the promise of Scripture and the experiential dimension, through a formal matrix. The movement focused on crisis experience and sought forms for realizing such experience. One recognizes crisis language (“Pentecostal lightning”), crisis rituals like altar calls, praying through, “dying out,” and more.

Attempts to accredit reason in the whole mix were often weak. Heart religion was superior to head religion. In the earlier work of Martin Wells Knapp, *On Impressions*, there is some corrective. In this important book written in 1892 before his more radical days at Cincinnati, he sought to demonstrate the danger of untested impressions. He stated:

All impressions which are from above bear the four following distinguishing features. They are:

1. Scriptural. In harmony with God’s will as revealed in His Word.
2. Right. In harmony with God’s will as revealed in man’s moral nature.
3. Providential. In harmony with God’s will as revealed in His providential dealings.
4. Reasonable. In harmony with God’s will as revealed to a spiritually enlightened judgment.”<sup>39</sup>

As Knapp’s arguments are developed, a specific Protestant position emerges: Spiritual illumination is not superior to Scripture, but it is confirming and complementary. Moral convictions, when right, are in accord with Scripture. “The voices of Scripture and of right always agree.”<sup>40</sup>

Knapp cites George D. Watson on the place of providence: “The Holy Ghost never guides us contrary to the Word. The Word never guides us contrary to Providence, and Providence does not guide us contrary to the Word or Spirit.”<sup>41</sup>

Reason, or “spiritually enlightened judgment,” must bow down before the Word.<sup>42</sup>

Knapp concludes his statement of the criteria of judgment by emphasizing that God’s guidance: is persuasive, not characterized by clamor; allows time for testing; is open to the light, not afraid of testing. When the tests are thoroughly made, the believer presses ahead to do God’s will, even if “Feelings may weep, perverted Scripture protest, . . . prejudices and preconceived notions be abandoned . . .”<sup>43</sup>

Helpful as these tests are, it is my tentative judgment that Knapp, in the years to come, did not hold steadfastly to the tests of Scripture, but allowed Pentecostal tornadoes, and floods of experience to become dominant.

The most worthy perspective comes from Wiley, who reflects the proper place of Scripture, inspired by, and continually attended by the Spirit’s inner authenticating testimony, with the balancing of experience, reason and tradition. The larger movement seems to treat reason as of lesser significance than the other facets of the quadrilateral.

Finally, I may suggest the need for the movement to continue strengthening its trinitarian theology and its use of Scripture by a return to the Church Fathers, and by developing its hermeneutic broadly enough to incorporate the vast concerns of Biblical faith. I am at an end. Since

prophecy is not my gift, I may here express the hope and expectation that these tasks will be carried on. I believe they will! *Gott Hilf uns*.

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### Notes

1 Paul Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), pp. 3-24.

2 See Notes (Acts 2:1f).

3 Professor Harold Greenlee addresses the issue properly by asserting that “holiness is not a matter of mere proof texts but of the whole message of the Bible.” Just as the outcropping of ore reveals potential underground strata, so texts point to a larger sub-stratum of holiness. See his “The Greek New Testament and the Message of Holiness,” *Further Insights Into Holiness*, ed. Kenneth Geiger, (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1963), pp. 82-83.

4 Martin Wells Knapp, *Holiness Triumphant; or, Pearls From Patmos: Being the Secret of Revelation Revealed* (Cincinnati: M. W. Knapp, 1900).

5 Phineas Bresee, *The Certainties of Faith* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1958), pp. 37-38.

6 Ibid, pp. 86-87.

7 E. A. Girvin, *Phineas F. Bresee: A Prince in Israel* (Kansas City: Pentecostal Nazarene Publishing Co., 1916), pp. 386-387. Bresee loved Isaiah and Paul, considering the truths of the Gospel to be found in Isaiah.

8 Ibid, p. 388.

9 George B. Kulp, *Truths that Transfigure: Faith Tonics* (Cincinnati: God’s Revivalist Press, 1927), pp. 22-23.

10 Ibid, p. 60.

11 Ibid, p. 197. On “Apostolic practice,” Kulp, following Wesley, argued that the new relation between Church and State, wrought by Constantine and Licinius, and later, Theodosius, brought about the loss of apostolic power.

12 A. M. Hills, *A Hero of Faith and Prayer; or, Life of Martin Wells Knapp* (Cincinnati: Mrs. M. W. Knapp, 1902), pp. 149-150.

13 H. Richard Niebuhr, “Theological Unitarianisms,” *Theology Today* (July, 1983), pp. 150-157, for comment on the over-emphasis on pneumatology.

14 See Steele, *Love Enthroned*, pp. 268-302. The quote is from an editorial in *Zion’s Herald*, written by Gilbert Haven.

15 *Love Enthroned*, p. 269.

16 Ibid., p. 276. In *Milestone Papers* (New York: Phillips and Hunt 1878), pp. 253-256, Steele described himself as a descendant of David Brainerd, and as one whose temperament was “naturally melancholic, an introspective self-anatomizing and self accusing style of piety characteristic of my ancestry.”

17 Charles J. Fowler, *Back to Pentecost* (Philadelphia: Christian Standard Co., 1900), pp. 73-74.

18 George Hughes, *Days of Power in the Forest Temple* (Boston: John Bent and Co., 1873; reprint Salem, Ohio: The Allegheny Wesleyan Methodist Connection, 1975), p. 113. The camp meeting movement was declared by Hughes to be “pentecostal in character.” Ibid., p. 422. Hughes stressed the removal of experimental standards in Methodism, i.e., the class meeting as reason for the camp meetings. Ibid, p. 10.

19 M. W. Knapp, *Electric Shocks From Pentecostal Batteries*, III (Cincinnati: M. W. Knapp, 1901), pp. 6-7, 16. Seth C. Rees described the occasional visits of the Father to this world, and the sending of His Son. Then Jesus sent the Spirit to abide forever. “So the Father and the Son came and went, and the Holy Ghost came to stay.” Ibid, pp. 23-24. See M. W. Knapp, *Holiness Triumphant; or Pearls From Patmos: Being the Secret of Revelation Revealed*, pp.100-101 for both a Christological and a pneumatological emphasis. Knapp, in this study of the Book of Revelation employs the hermeneutic of holiness and Pentecost to interpret Revelation. Concerning Rev. 5:14, “And the four living creatures said ‘Amen,’ “ Knapp writes: “This model holiness meeting in heaven was also characterized by demonstrations . . . Holiness meetings are demonstrative meetings.” Throughout the book, holiness is the central theme and goal. “Our object . . . is to proclaim and magnify holiness as revealed in this ‘Revelation,’ “ wrote Knapp.

20 Author’s conversation with J. R. Mitchell, June 29, 1984, Wilmore, Kentucky.

21 See *Electric Shocks*, No. III, pp. 23-24, for Seth Rees’ sermons which described “things that always go with the Holy Ghost or a *Holy Ghost experience*.” (my emphasis).

22 See *Electric Shocks From Pentecostal Batteries*, I, II, III, IV, V.

23 Charles J. Fowler, *Back to Pentecost* (Philadelphia: Christian Standard Co.,1900), p. 7. Fowler was a minister of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

24 Ibid, pp. 56-61, for Rees’ sermon on the trials of the believers, and pp. 72-74 for the trial of Knapp for disorderly behavior, i.e., noisy demonstration, at the camp. See *Electric Shocks* No. V (Cincinnati: 1903), p. 25.

25 Wiley, *Christian Theology*, I, (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1940), pp. 146.

26 Wiley, I, pp. 143-46. Wiley here echoes Daniel Steele’s distinction between the immediateness of religious consciousness and the mediateness of the objective world. See Steele, *Love Enthroned* (New York: Nelson and Nelson, 1875), p. 233. Wiley cites Steele at length in his discussion of reason. See Wiley, I, p. 145.

27 See Paul Bassett, “The Fundamentalist Leavening of the Holiness Movement,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* (Spring, 1978), pp. 81-85.

28 Wiley, I, p. 140.

29 W. T. Purkiser, ed., *Exploring Our Christian Faith* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1960), p. 77

30 Robert E. Chiles, *Theological Transition in American Methodism: 1790-1935* (New York: Abingdon, 1965), pp. 95-104. Hills cites Miley at least thirty-three times in his first 300 pages.

31 Donald W. Dayton, *Discovering An Evangelical Heritage* (New York: Harper, 1976), pp. 130-131.

32 Chiles' argument regarding Miley and Watson seems to apply here to Hills. See Chiles, p. 103.

33 Bassett, "The Fundamentalist Leavening of the Holiness Movement," p. 81.

34 Hodge insisted that "while the theology of reason derives aid from the impulses of emotion, it maintains its ascendancy over them. In all investigations for truth the intellect must be the authoritative power employing the sensibilities as indices of right doctrine, but . . . superintending them from its commanding elevation." Charles Hodge, "The Theology of the Intellect and That of the Feelings," in Mark A. Noll, ed., *The Princeton Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), p. 194.

35 A. M. Hills, *Fundamental Christian Theology* (Pasadena: C. J. Kinne, 1931), pp. 16-20.

36 Purkiser, op. cit., p. 28.

37 Ibid, p. 30.

38 Ibid, pp. 68-69.

39 M. W. Knapp, *Impressions* (Cincinnati: Revivalist Publishing Co., 1892), pp. 52.

40 Ibid, p. 55.

41 bid, p. 59. Watson's work is not noted by Knapp.

42 Ibid, p. 63. Wesley is quoted by Knapp.

43 Ibid, pp. 64-68.

**ON HOW TO DISMANTLE THE WESLEYAN  
QUADRILATERAL:  
A Study in the Thought of Albert C. Knudson**

William J. Abraham

If Albert Knudson's commitment to Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience, owes anything to self-conscious appropriation of the Wesleyan heritage then the debt was entirely accidental. For one thing, Knudson's immediate successors, represented most capably by Miley, had reduced Wesley's four-fold appeal to a two-fold appeal to Scripture and reason.<sup>1</sup> Miley was forthright in his rejection of creeds, confessions, and historical theology as warrants in theology. Valuable as these were, they possessed no authoritative quality. Indeed, in the hands of Rome, the appeal to tradition had become a source of serious error and had led not only to a sense of the incompleteness of Scripture, but also to a denial of the Scriptures to the people. Equally, Miley was opposed to experience as a source of Christian theology. Thus, he allowed an element of truth in mysticism but insisted that it provided no new revelation and that it drove out prudence and wisdom. Moreover, he acknowledged the reality of the Christian experience of sin and fully accepted that there was a specific form of Christian consciousness, but he argued that these necessarily presupposed a prior commitment to Christian doctrine and therefore could not function as a true source of Christian theology. Hence, Knudson could not have gained his analysis of the sources from Miley. To have done this, Knudson would have had to create a vast overdraft on Miley's account, for Miley had only two items in his theological bank and Knudson increased these to four.

Knudson's lack of debt has a much deeper reason than this, however. Expressing it sharply, Knudson's attitude to his predecessors in the Wesleyan tradition is little short of contemptuous.<sup>2</sup> As Knudson read the history of Methodist theology up to his own time, the work was at best competent. Wesley and his preachers do not really count for, in their day "comparatively little was done in the way of systematic theological study."<sup>3</sup> And as for the great giants of the nineteenth century, that is to say Watson and Pope in England, and Raymond and Miley in America, they did "creditable work in systematizing Methodist doctrine."<sup>4</sup> However they left much to be desired: ". . . they were not creative thinkers, they were

guided by no new organizing principle, they gave no new direction to theological thought.”<sup>5</sup> It should come as no surprise, therefore, that Knudson saw the work of his own generation as the inauguration of a whole new era in Methodist theology.

The initial question that this poses is the consistency of this claim with Knudson’s commitment to the four elements of the Wesleyan quadrilateral. Is Knudson actually recovering a vital element in the original Wesley tradition which had been lost in the nineteenth century? Of course, one can dismiss this by saying that the Wesleyan quadrilateral is a modern invention skillfully developed by twentieth century Methodist theologians to foster their own theological agenda. Indeed, I predict that, if it has not already happened, those opposed to the so-called Wesleyan quadrilateral may in the light of this paper seek to argue that the quadrilateral is really an invention of Methodist apostates like Knudson rather than an essential feature of the Wesleyan legacy.<sup>6</sup>

That aside, what we have to explain is how Knudson, on the one hand, speaks so favorably of the ingredients in the Wesleyan quadrilateral and, on the other, self-consciously seeks to initiate a whole new era of Methodist theology. Is there here a fascinating and genuine reworking of the tradition in that one aspect of the heritage is being used to articulate a brilliant new synthesis in systematic theology? Or is there here merely a superficial commitment to a crucial element in the classical Wesleyan legacy patched on inadvertently to a radical deconstruction of Wesleyan theology? Sensitive observers will surely agree that it is these options which are not only the most entertaining, but by far the most important in any debate about the renewal of the Wesleyan tradition in our day.

That Knudson was committed to Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience is beyond doubt. A whole chapter on his Doctrine of God makes this quite explicit.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, Knudson was committed to the kind of grading or ranking of these four sources that one finds in Wesley. Thus Scripture stands apart from the other three. Scripture has a primacy and priority not possessed by tradition, reason, and experience. Not only is it generally admitted that the Bible should be the chief source and norm of Christian theology, “it is the Bible that in a special and pre-eminent sense is the source and norm of Christian belief.”<sup>8</sup> The reason Knudson offers for this ranking echoes the kind of reason offered by Wesley. Fundamentally, the Bible has priority because, “in it we have the earliest and most trustworthy record of that unique revelation of God which was mediated to the world through Jewish and early Christian history and which constitutes the foundation of the Christian faith.”<sup>9</sup> So the Bible is uniquely inspired, it is the one original and authentic record of God’s special revelation of Himself, it is properly spoken of as the Word of God. These considerations, together with its historical primacy in furnishing data for the nature of primitive Christianity, constitute “adequate ground for ascribing to the Bible a position of transcendent significance. To it, therefore, as to no other source theology will go back for its material and for its validation.”<sup>10</sup>

When Knudson fills out his account of authority by exploring the limits of the canon and how it is to be used then, again, he writes like a good Wesleyan. Thus, he repudiates any Marcionite move to reject the Old Testament and he quite rightly insists that the Christ of faith is essential to

a normative reading of the New Testament documents. Moreover, he suggests that we should use the Bible inclusively rather than exclusively in our theology. Hence, he argues that the tradition of the church, the insights of reason, and the content of Christian experience should have a genuine but subordinate role in the articulation and defense of Christian theology. His summary conclusion is worth quoting in full:

We have, then, as definitive of the unique or special field of theology, one main source, the Bible, and particularly the New Testament, and three additional sources which may be described as supplementary or regulative; namely, the church the natural reason as expressed in the theistic philosophies, and Christian experience.<sup>11</sup>

Initially, then, Knudson stands firmly within the Wesleyan tradition on the issue of authority. Indeed, his position on the issue of authority is much closer to Wesley than that of Miley. Ironically, Knudson never saw thus. Nowhere does he point out that he is in fact very close to Wesley in his inclusivist use of Scripture. In fact, I think he would have been quite surprised, for Knudson saw the significance of Wesley entirely differently. Wesley's great contribution, as Knudson saw it, did not lie in the quadrilateral; it lay in Wesley's emphasis on religious experience.<sup>12</sup> According to Knudson, Wesley rightly saw that the only genuine religion is experienced religion and this insight had in itself the germ of a new empirical type of theology. Thus, Wesley did much to prepare the way for the empirical theology commonly associated with Schleiermacher and Ritschl. On this reading, Wesley's greatness really lay in his initiation of classical liberalism rather than in his suggestions about Biblical authority. So if the use of a quadrilateral links Knudson to Wesley, this is our perception not his.

There is a clear hint in this observation that all is far from well in Knudson's avowals about the nature of authority. How can he hold to the quadrilateral and the common warrant for construing Scripture as preeminently authoritative and at the same time see Wesley's greatness in his providing the germ of the new era associated with Schleiermacher and his Methodist admirers in America? The inconsistency inherent in this unfolds as we explore how Knudson explains the distinction between the old and new eras in theology.

For Knudson, the new era meant the end of supernaturalism and an end to the old dogmatic theology which appealed to an external standard such as the Bible. It meant an end to divine intervention in the world construed as a violation of the laws of nature and an end to the old argument from miracles and prophecy. It meant an end to the old distinction between natural theology and revealed theology and an end to the notion of Biblical or ecclesiastical infallibility. It meant an end to the subordination of faith to reason and an end to the warfare between theology and philosophy. Positively, a whole new era had been born. This meant the beginning of a new kind of critical theology where the norms and standards were located within the human mind. It meant a new analysis of divine activity which saw God at work in all events and a new emphasis on divine immanence which gave substance to thus proposal. It meant a new view of revelation which saw divine revelation as another dimension of human insight and discovery. It

meant a new alliance between faith and reason where theology turned to the post-Kantian idealism of Lotze and Bowne to find suitable metaphysical muscle for its future endeavors.

It is surely clear by now that there is a fundamental contradiction within Knudson's doctrinal commitments. On the one hand, when he deals with the sources of theology, he speaks as if the authority of the Bible remains intact and secure. One can read this section of his work and easily imagine that it is Wesley who is speaking to us afresh. However elsewhere, when he deals with such issues as the nature of knowledge, the character of divine action, the status of revealed theology, the nature of method in theology, the necessary conditions of rationality, and the like, he dismantles the conceptual and intellectual foundations without which his own account of the authority of Scripture becomes a mere orphan bereft of status and parentage. As one reads these sections of Knudson, one meets an entirely different Knudson. One encounters a figure utterly unlike Wesley in his commitments. Indeed, Knudson either ignores Wesley entirely on these issues or seriously misreads what he has to say about the nature of religious experience. It is the latter Knudson who in my opinion is the real Knudson of history and it is certainly the latter Knudson that is the Knudson of faith who has shaped much of modern Methodist theology.

Actually, the ignoring and reshaping of Wesley's ideas already takes place in Knudson's rendering of the four elements that are constitutive of the Wesleyan quadrilateral. Thus, initially, Knudson makes clear that when he refers to Scripture as the primary source of theology, he means the whole canon of sixty-six books. However, elsewhere, this disintegrates by degrees. Thus, although opposed to Marcionite tendencies in theory, in practice the Old Testament is reduced to a strong bias in favor of the prophetic material;<sup>13</sup> and this in turn is totally subordinate in an uncomplicated way to the New Testament. The Hebrew Scriptures have value,

but there is much in them that is sub Christian or extra Christian, and this needs to be distinguished from the Christian element. What is truly Christian can be determined only by appealing to the New Testament. It is the revelation made in and through Christ that is the source and norm of Christian truth.<sup>14</sup>

By the New Testament, Knudson means here all the books of the New Testament, at least initially. "It is the Whole New Testament, not any selection of the Synoptic Gospels, that is and that will remain the chief source and norm of Christian theology."<sup>15</sup> Yet even the New Testament in due course ceases to be a norm in any serious sense of the word. When Knudson elaborates his views on theological method, he returns to the theme that it is Jesus Christ who is the norm and then leaves wide open what that might mean.

The accepted norm for determining what is truly Christian and what is not will be found in Jesus Christ. But what in Him is actually normative? Is it His teaching? Is it the principle of Christianity embodied to Him? Is it His inner life? Or is it the transcendent fact that He is the incarnate Son of God? All of these are value judgments. To some extent, their correctness



can be determined by a study of Biblical and Christian history. But answers cannot be decided by purely objective considerations. A subjective factor is involved in every answer to it.<sup>16</sup>

What began as a clear thesis about the limits of the canon has degenerated by degrees into vague discourse about the subjective dimension of value-judgments.<sup>17</sup> Later, we shall see why this confusion is inevitable Knudson.

Knudson is also reworking the meaning of tradition, reason, and experience and turning them into something radically different from anything one finds in Wesley. Take tradition. For Wesley, this meant primarily the creeds of the early church mediated through the cardinal documents of the Anglican tradition. Knudson expounds tradition to include not only the whole history of the Christian church, but also the religious life and beliefs of humans in general. This immediately increased the work load of the theologian considerably. The study of history, psychology, and philosophy of religion are now regarded as “contributory to Christian theology.”<sup>18</sup>

Reason, too, is changed out of all recognition to what one finds in Wesley. Wesley was utterly committed to reason, but he was very careful to spell out what he meant by reason and what its limits were. Wesley’s qualified appeal to reason understood primarily as the art of perceiving, description, and inference<sup>19</sup> is replaced in Knudson by reason understood as the “contributions made by theistic philosophy to the Christian faith.”<sup>20</sup> This is a crucial shift, for it undergirds Knudson’s move to incorporate the metaphysics of idealism as developed by Kant, Fichte, and Bowne into the substance of his theology. It also provides the warrant for Knudson’s unbounded confidence in a speculative philosophy which has no place for anything derived independently from special revelation. Where Wesley is guarded and cautious enough to confess that natural theology without revealed theology and evangelical experience drives him to despair and suicide, Knudson rests his whole case for the intellectual foundations of Christianity on the viability and superiority of a personalist metaphysics.<sup>21</sup> The whole tone and concept of Wesley’s approach to reason has been turned on its head.

Equally with the concept of experience. For Wesley, evangelical experience is utterly crucial. Without a deep encounter with the living God wherein we become aware of the things of the Spirit through the witness of the divine Spirit, we are in darkness and death. Knudson, however, is very ambivalent in his attitude to any religious experience construed on perceptual lines. For him, the concept of experience properly defined stands for the religious a priori. There is a native religious capacity of the human mind which is underivable and autonomously valid.<sup>22</sup> Like moral experience, sense experience, and aesthetic experience, religious experience stands as an autonomous region of reason, constituted by its own ultimate standard and test of truth. This religious a priori is constitutive of human nature;<sup>23</sup> it is the creative source of religious experience;<sup>24</sup> it is logically distinct from specifically Christian experience or consciousness;<sup>25</sup> it is self justifying, requiring no extraneous support;<sup>26</sup> it provides its own immediate certitude of God;<sup>27</sup> and it takes the place of the Biblical, ecclesiastical, and rationalistic authorities of the past.<sup>28</sup> This is an entirely different world from anything even remotely available in Wesley. The darkness and despair

of the human condition outside divine revelation and the intimate work of the Holy Spirit has been replaced by a thoroughgoing epistemic optimism about the human condition. This is based on a post-Kantian theory of knowledge which construes religious truth as universal, necessary, underivable, and autonomous. In turn, this leads to a complete dismantling and reworking of the material content of Wesleyan theology. Everything from the Trinity, the incarnation, faith, the witness of the Spirit, miracle, sin, freedom, regeneration, special revelation, inspiration, assurance, natural theology, and the like, are either rejected or reformulated to fit in with the epistemology and metaphysics of personal idealism.

We are now in a position to see why Knudson, although he is initially and superficially committed to Biblical authority and the warrants for its special place within the quadrilateral, ultimately undermines this avowal. Originally, the quadrilateral only made sense against the background of the kind of classical supernaturalism which one finds in Wesley. Wesley can appeal to Scripture as he does because he believes that God has intervened in history and in the production of the Scripture to give us knowledge of God's saving activity and intentions. As Wesley sees it, this knowledge is not available either in the common religious experience of the world religions, nor in human intuition, nor in some religious a priori, nor in some inference from the natural world. Moreover, for Wesley, Scripture has primacy not because the community says it has primacy, nor because we simply agree to give it primacy in an act of faith, nor because we encounter some ineffable divine word when we read it; Scripture has primacy because it was objectively and actually brought into being by divine inspiration and divine dictation. To be sure, we will never see or believe this unless we are reconstituted or repaired in the depths of our nature by the operation of the Holy Spirit in our inmost beings. Until the Spirit makes us new creatures in Christ, giving us new senses to understand the divine world, then we will be in darkness about God and His activity. But it is divine supernatural activity in the origins of the Bible and in the events it narrates which provides the crucial warrant for construing the Bible as the controlling, external source in theology. In Knudson, however, the concept of an external standard and the concept of supernatural action in the world have both been rejected as unacceptable in the new era of Methodist theology. We need now to pause and explore this in some detail.

The concept of an external standard was unacceptable because it ran foul of the epistemological principle that all standards of truth must be located within the mind rather than outside the mind. "There is no fixed body of revealed truth, accepted on authority, that stands opposed to the truth of reason. All truth today rests on its power of appeal to the human mind. There is no external standard of truth. The only standard is within the human mind itself."<sup>29</sup> As a result, the distinction between revelation and natural reason is empty, for we now look upon the highest insights of reason as themselves divine revelations.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, theology must now become "critical" rather than "dogmatic," renouncing all appeal to an external, infallible Bible and find the basis for theology in some sort of religious epistemology.<sup>31</sup>

This treatment of the concept of an external standard explains why Knudson becomes so confused and obscurantist in his treatment of the

canon of Scripture. We noted earlier how he destroyed by degrees any serious appeal to the Bible in theology, jettisoning first the Old Testament for the New Testament, and then jettisoning the New Testament for Jesus Christ, and then dissolving Jesus Christ into a series of questions that in turn became semi subjective value judgments.<sup>32</sup> Knudson is here halfheartedly working out the logic of his confused epistemology. If the Bible is an external standard and has to go; so, too, does Jesus Christ have to go for He, too, constitutes an external standard on Knudson's analysis. So no wonder he is obscurantist about what it is in Christ that can function as a warrant in theology. He is still clinging to the worn-out vestiges of an external standard that has been deliberately repudiated in the name of religious epistemology.

That epistemology is itself thoroughly confused. Knudson could have seen this if he had read either Wesley, Watson, or even Miley with any care. Miley, for example, is adamant about both Biblical authority and giving reasons for accepting Biblical authority. Indeed what is striking in Miley is the length to which he goes to ground Biblical authority in claims which he thinks are acceptable to reason and the mind. It matters little whether Miley's appeal to miracle and prophecy to ground Biblical authority works materially. What matters is that the project is entirely coherent, something it could not be if Knudson was correct.

This point needs to be expressed formally rather than historically. What Knudson has rightly seen is that A will not believe p unless p is acceptable to A's mind. We can construe this either as a psychological remark about belief or a comment on the logic of the verb "to believe." This should not, however, be confused with a claim about the evidence or warrants or standards of belief, as if these should be internal to the mind. Criteria, standards, warrants, evidence, and the like can in a perfectly good sense be either internal or external to the mind. Thus, if I want to know the meaning of an obscure French verb, it is futile to appeal to some standard internal to my mind (whatever that would be); I will appeal to an external standard like a dictionary or a native French speaker to resolve this issue. To be sure, the standard itself will for some reason or other be acceptable to my mind else I would not appeal to it. But this does nothing to show that I cannot appeal to the external standard in the first place for that is exactly what we all would do. Knudson has confused certain conditions of believing with the criteria or warrants of belief.<sup>33</sup> These are logically distinct and it is intellectual folly to argue from the character of the former to the character of the latter. Hence, his rejection of Biblical authority on epistemological grounds is in that respect a manifest error.

The other reason Knudson offers for rejecting Biblical authority involves an interesting and now widely accepted analysis of divine action. Over against any view which would involve divine intervention in the world, Knudson holds that divine action is always immanent in the natural order. For Knudson, there are no miracles in the Humean sense—supernaturalism in the classical sense is dead. When God acts in the world, He does so in, with, and through normal events of nature and history.

. . . there is no fundamental or metaphysical difference between the natural and the miraculous. All nature is grounded in the will of God, and by "natural," we mean simply the familiar and

by the “miraculous” an unfamiliar method of the divine working. Both are divine or supernatural in their causation.<sup>34</sup>

Modern versions of this thesis have deployed a variety of arguments to secure its acceptance. Knudson grounded his acceptance mainly in his idealistic metaphysics. “According to idealism, a miracle is simply an extraordinary event that reveals divine agency in a more striking way than do ordinary events.”<sup>35</sup> He explains his position more fully as follows.

On the basis of an idealistic theism, nature as a whole owes its existence to the direct cause of God. All events are supernatural in their causation. There is in the material world no distinction between The First Cause and “secondary” causes. The First Cause is immediately operative in all things. Hence, there is no special class of “miraculous” events that owe their origin in an exclusive way to divine agency, nor are there any “natural” events that owe their origin to a metaphysical nature or to impersonal forces resident in it. From the standpoint of idealistic theism what is called the “natural” means simply the familiar, and what is called the “miraculous” means the unfamiliar. In other words, miracle is *mirabile*, not *miraculum*.<sup>36</sup>

Given such an account of divine action, it is only consistency that drives Knudson to dismantle his initial commitment to Biblical authority. Until recently, it was normal to construe Biblical authority as part of a wider vision of the universe which saw God as intervening within history. In other words, Biblical authority was intimately related to supernaturalism. Thus, Biblical authority was tied to a doctrine of divine revelation which stressed divine intervention in Israel, in Christ, and in the complex process which led to the production of the Bible. Knudson sums up his attitude to this type of view with characteristic boldness.

This exclusive supernaturalistic method of grounding the finality of the Christian religion stands close to popular religious thought. It was developed during the medieval period, and in its most pronounced form was widely held by Protestant theologians down to a century or two ago. It crumbled, however, before the advance of Biblical criticism, of natural science, and of the modern philosophy of the divine immanence, and today represents an “overcome standpoint.”<sup>37</sup>

It is worthy of note here that Knudson goes beyond an appeal to his idealistic metaphysics to support his rejection of divine intervention. He appeals to the impact of history and science to provide further warrants for his position. Clearly, Knudson’s proposals at this point are of pivotal significance. The issues he raises continue to enliven the modern discussion about the concept and character of divine action, the relation between God and the world, the nature of divine revelation, the concept of miracle, the logic of historical inquiry, the grammar of scientific explanation, and the like.<sup>38</sup> Hence, it is difficult to say anything definitive or convincing in a paper only tangentially related to such complex issues. At the risk of oversimplifying, I think the following points deserve at least a brief mention.

First, it is interesting that Miley’s concept of miracle represents an unstable half-way house between the classical, Humean conception and

that of Knudson. For Miley, miracles are supernatural events wrought by the immediate agency of God, but they do not involve any abrogation or suspension of the laws of nature.

The divine energizing touches the law of nature simply at the point of the miracle, and in a manner to produce it, but no more abrogates or suspends such law, as a law of nature, than the casting a stone into the air annuls the law of gravitation.<sup>39</sup>

Knudson's account, whether acceptable or not, represents a vast improvement on this analysis.

Second, Knudson is correct to insist that his revised "idealistic" analysis once accepted calls for drastic reconstruction in one's theology as a whole. His failure to carry through the program in the area of Biblical authority does not detract from his formal recognition of this fact nor from the valiant efforts he made to rework the material content of systematic theology. One cannot reject divine intervention and then proceed to insist that we can borrow from Wesley and his classical forbears as if life goes on as usual. Knudson had the courage to see this. He bent his efforts to breaking point to provide Methodism with what he hoped would be a better legacy than that bequeathed to it by Wesley and his nineteenth century successors.

Thirdly, as an academic theologian, Knudson stands without peer among Methodists and Wesleyans in his generation. Even the best conservatives look mediocre beside him. It is small wonder that he captured the hearts and minds of a host of followers and admirers within Methodism. His clarity of expression, his pious spirit, his skillful assault on materialism and positivism, his well read mind, his grasp of the history of doctrine, his contribution to the highways of post-Kantian philosophy, his deep desire to serve the intellectual cause of Christianity in the modern world, all these and much more reveal a man who comes close to being a genius.

Yet the end result was a tragic disaster. What Knudson said about Miley's works could be applied to his own proposals: they were obsolete as soon as they fell from the press. Knudson's idealism is a lost cause. The epistemology and tortuous arguments that undergird it are now of purely historical interest. Knudson's attempt to develop a theory of the religious a priori as a way to salvage the appeal to religious experience lacks the perceptual dimension or content that can alone give it cognitive purchase. His analysis of science is strikingly naive and his remarks about the impact of historical criticism are too dogmatic and cryptic to carry much weight. Neither do justice to the complex results and logic of historical and scientific investigation. Nor do they begin to fathom the way in which a classical vision of divine action, complete with a substantial but sensitive commitment to divine intervention, can be combined with these as mutually enriching friends rather than mortal enemies. His brief and very general analysis of divine agency lacks conceptual vigor. Nor does it begin to map the complex logic of divine action mediated in such concepts as creation, providence, revelation, inspiration, incarnation, regeneration, justification, adoption, sanctification, and a host of other actions and activities that God has performed for our salvation. Perhaps when we make some advances in this area, we will be able to return to our Wesleyan sources and make a fully

consistent appropriation of the Wesleyan quadrilateral. So long as our talk of divine action amounts to little more than rhetorical flourishes about divine presence, divine immanence, divine providence, or general divine agency, then we are in much the same old, rickety boat that was constructed by Knudson. The paint work may have been patched up here and there, sails may have been added for decorative purposes, but the leaks in the fuel tanks and engine room have been left unattended. In such circumstances, the quadrilateral will remain exactly what it was in Knudson, a mere theological orphan, hopelessly lost at sea and bereft of status and parentage. Clearly, Wesleyans who want to reinstate the quadrilateral have plenty to occupy them in the coming years.

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### Notes

1 John Miley, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, (New York: Hunt and Eaton, 1893), pp. 7-12.

2 Knudson rarely enters into serious dialogue with his predecessors in the tradition.

3 Albert C. Knudson, "Methodism," in *An Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Vergilius Ferm (New York: Philosophical Library, 1945), p. 488.

4 Idem.

5 Idem.

6 In my view, the Wesleyan quadrilateral is a genuine element in Wesley's own theology. I have argued this in an unpublished paper, "The Wesleyan Quadrilateral."

7 Albert C. Knudson, *The Doctrine of God* (New York and Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1930) chap. 5.

8 Ibid, p. 175.

9 Ibid., pp. 175-6.

10 Ibid, p. 176.

11 Ibid, p. 187.

12 "Methodism," p. 488. Elsewhere, Knudson suggests that it is an emphasis on some degree of human freedom which is the chief Wesleyan contribution to Christian theology. See *The Validity of Religious Experience* (New York: Abingdon, 1937), p. 206.

13 This emerges most clearly in his use of the prophets as the symbol for the essence of the best or true type of religion. See *The Doctrine of God*, pp. 54-60.

14 *The Doctrine of God*, p. 178.

15 Ibid., p. 182.

16 Ibid, pp. 196-7.

17 This vagueness also surfaces in Knudson's discussion of the "essence" of religion. See *The Doctrine of God* pp. 123-4.

- 18 Ibid, p. 175.
- 19 These are not Wesley's terms, but this is fundamentally what Wesley meant when he spoke of apprehension, judgment and discourse.
- 20 Ibid., p. 184.
- 21 Knudson is insistent that personalism provides the metaphysical foundations for Christian belief. Ibid, p. 170.
- 22 *The Validity of Religious Experience*, p. 166. Cf. *The Philosophy of Personalism*, p. 251.
- 23 *The Validity of Religious Experience*, p. 162.
- 24 Idem.
- 25 Ibid, pp. 186-7.
- 26 Ibid, p. 161.
- 27 Idem.
- 28 Idem.
- 29 *The Doctrine of God*, p. 173.
- 30 Idem.
- 31 Ibid, p. 190.
- 32 See above p. 8.
- 33 Compare Roderick Chisholm, *Theory of Knowledge* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1977), p. 98.
- 34 *Basic Issues in Christian Thought* (New York and Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1950), p. 152.
- 35 *The Doctrine of Redemption* (New York and Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1933), p. 60.
- 36 Ibid, p. 58.
- 37 *The Doctrine of God*, p. 110.
- 38 There is striking similarity between Knudson's views on some of these issues and Maurice Wiles' position. See the latter's *The Remaking of Christian Doctrine* (London: SCM, 1974).
- 39 *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, p. 33.

## THE THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF AMERICAN WESLEYANISM

Daniel N. Berg

There was always a little sense of uneasiness when, in a worship service in a British holiness church, we would sing, “And Can It Be” or “Arise My Soul, Arise.” The uneasiness grew especially keen when the objective of the service was evangelism. Why would we use these “great hymns” in an evangelistic service? Surely we should be singing “Jesus Saves” or “Revive Us Again” or even “Come Thou Fount.” The songs of revival that I had known growing up in America in first a Methodist and then a Nazarene Church were not these stalwart expressions better suited to a worship service that teetered on the brink of the liturgical, they were instead, what my mother once called the “good old hymns” like “Blessed Assurance” and “Tell Me the Old, Old Story.”

The source of my uneasiness I now know! The hymns of Britain’s evangelical revival of the eighteenth century are not the hymns of the American revival of the nineteenth century. The latter revival is not just a renewal of the earlier one. Robert Chiles evaluates great periods of revival as “renew(ing) the lives of men, releasing them from old ties and necessities and opening them to new demands and possibilities. Revival does achieve a new liberty for the Christian man.”<sup>1</sup> That liberty is manifested in the way the American Wesleyan sings in revivals which is different from the way his spiritual siblings in Britain sing in revivals.

A study of Chiles’ book reveals that he is not altogether happy with that liberty. The possibilities afforded by revival include the possibility of significant changes in the tradition as it moves from the beginning of the revival to the talk of conserving its fruits. So Chiles describes what he views as a declension in the vitality of the Wesleyan tradition as it has developed in the American setting in terms of three subtle but significant conceptual shifts. American Wesleyanism has shifted its emphases from 1) revelation to reason; 2) sinful man to moral man; and 3) free grace to free will.<sup>2</sup>

There is no doubt that American Wesleyanism is not a theological mirror image of its eighteenth century originator. More has been changed than just the hymns it sings at revival meetings. There are substantial changes to account for as Chiles, and Thomas A. Langford,<sup>3</sup> and John



Peters,<sup>4</sup> and the scholarly products of this Wesleyan Theological Society over its twenty years of existence attest.

The objective set for this paper is to describe the Theological Context of American Wesleyanism. I understand this objective as entailing an appreciation of both the continuity of the Wesleyan tradition in America with its origins in the work of the Wesleys and the ways in which that tradition has been modified by its adaptations to the singularities of American Christianity.

But there is more to be seen in fulfilling this objective than simply the changes established. There is, in particular, a curious preservation of certain, original Wesleyan themes. I say curious, because the themes as we appreciate them in our present theology, reflect not just the Wesleys or even Adam Clarke or John Fletcher, but are grafts from the stock of American Christianity in general. What we assume to have received from our theological ancestors may, upon closer examination, be seen to be semantic cartons in which we carry theological cargo loaded not by Wesleyans, but by a more general American Christianity.<sup>5</sup> What I am saying in a negative way is that we cannot rest in the easy assumption that present-day Wesleyan theology is pure, original Wesleyanism mediated through American thinkers and institutions that were themselves self-consciously Wesleyan at every point.

American Wesleyanism continues the tradition of the Wesleys inasmuch as it values certain themes in its theology. The definitions of those themes, however, are not mediated to modern Wesleyanism through Wesleyan channels, but are instead derived from more general American theological values and imposed as fulfilling the intentions of the Wesleys, were they alive to understand the issues and articulate their positions on them. Whether such impositions, in fact, fulfill the intentions of the Wesleys is the question that creates the forum for significant discussion about the Wesleyan tradition.

Four Wesleyan themes will illustrate this thesis. I doubt if they will exhaust the store of possible illustrations. I will present them in the order the logic of this paper demands. The final two themes I anticipate investigating in the special light of the literature produced by this Wesleyan Theological Society through the twenty years of its existence. The first is the theme of human responsibility. The second theme is Christian Perfection and will be divided to deal with two sub-topics: 1) the work of the Holy Spirit; and 2) the idea of “perfection.” The third theme is the authority of Scripture and the fourth is social responsibility.

### **The Wesleyan Theme of Human Responsibility**

Wesley’s keen theological appreciation for the fallen state of mankind brought him, he says, to “within a hair’s breadth of Calvinism.” Such a near miss contrasts sharply with the sarcasm extended to Reformed theology in other soteriological contexts.

God is unchangeable, and therefore so are you:  
And therefore, they can never fail who once His goodness knew.  
In part perhaps you may, You cannot wholly fall  
Cannot become a castaway like non elected Paul.<sup>6</sup>

The serpent at the end of this harpoon is clearly not all of Reformed theology. Rather it is specifically the dragon of antinomianism. Convinced of the sovereign grace of God by which we are brought to redemption in all of its benefits, Wesley nevertheless rejected the Reformed articulation of the doctrine of sovereign grace inasmuch, and only inasmuch, as it might produce a spiritual torpor and the loss of discipline. Like Arminius before him, Wesley was gladdened to speak of the assurance of one's present salvation, but refused to speak of the assurance of final salvation. There lurked within the human heart, even among the sanctified, and even if the sanctified is an apostle, and even if that apostle has written much of the New Testament, the possibility of becoming a "castaway."

To be sure, there is the assurance of plenteous grace from the first faint stirrings of the human for salvation to the entry into glorification. But it is just that and nothing else. It is not natural ability. It is not free will but free grace. A positive expression of this brush with Calvinism appears in the Minutes of the 1745 Conference and makes explicit Wesley's commitment to free grace rather than free will.

**"Q. 23. Wherein may we come to the very edge of Calvinism?**

**"A. In ascribing all good to the free grace of God. (2) In denying all natural free will, and all power antecedent to grace. And (3) in excluding all merit from man; even for what he has or does by the grace of God."**<sup>7</sup>

It is plenteous grace, prevenient, saving, sanctifying, ripening, glorifying grace that is the summation and sufficient explanation of salvation. Chiles writes, citing Wesley, "'God hath joined from the beginning, pardon, holiness and heaven'-all is of grace from end to end."<sup>8</sup> In his biography of John Wesley, Richard Watson distinguishes Wesley's position as not so robust an Arminianism as appears in other writers inasmuch as "the theology of the Wesleys . . . derives life and vigor from the stronger views of the grace of God which were taught them by Moravian and Calvinistic brethren."<sup>9</sup>

Wesleyan commentators, to be taken seriously, must make the attempt to articulate the relationship between the grace of God and the will of humans in Wesley's thought. The problem is a logical one involving a question of precedence that Wesley himself never articulates in the way many of his students, both friends and adversaries, have. In theological shorthand, it is the issue signified with the words "monergism" and "synergism." Fidelity to the theology of the Reformation, both Luther's and Calvin's, calls for a monergistic soteriology. But Wesley is not satisfied either with *Luther's simul iustus et peccator* nor with Reformed theology's final perseverance of the saints as solutions to the issues raised by the Biblical teaching of human responsibility.

With Calvin and Luther, Wesley joins his voice to declare that salvation is all of grace, but he sings from an Arminian hymnal. So for Wesley, the grace of God has a radical effect upon the volitional powers of all human beings which enables us and empowers, but does not coerce, an affirming response of the human will to the proffering of grace throughout life.

Wesley thus threads the needle of divine grace. It can penetrate the will no matter how hardened. It can prick the very nerves of our intentionality.

It can embroider patterns of selfless love and compassion. But whether it can or can't, divine grace, unlike sin, will not bind the human will. Thus, the human will can manifest the presence of grace through discipline and the responsible outworking of the human life. But it is not bound to do so.

Grace that does not coerce nevertheless enables. Thus, Wesley avoids antinomianism in his theology of grace. The trick that remains is to describe how an "uncoerced will" differs from a "free will" so that Wesley can also avoid the "synergism" which would mark him off from the reformation theology which he valued. There is a lurking suspicion that the phrase, "free grace instead of free will" may have more value for rhetoric than for theology.

The lurking suspicion finds grounds in the American context of Wesleyan theology. Let me leap quickly to the sort of statement that gives credence to the notion that Wesleyanism is synergistic and to that degree a departure from the theology of the reformation. John Miley writing in the second volume of his *Systematic Theology* says bluntly ". . . for the question of moral freedom, it is indifferent whether this capacity be native or gracious."<sup>10</sup>

The contrast is startling! For Wesley, salvation is all of grace. There is nothing good within us that can be attributed to anything but grace. For Wesley's theological grandchildren, however, the capacity for moral freedom could be either native or gracious. It is an indifferent matter!

One needs to press the point still further and insist with Chiles and Langford and others that for American Wesleyanism by the time of Miley, the issue had passed, unconsciously perhaps, beyond the status of indifference, to a positive proclamation of the free will of human beings. In other words, Wesley's insistence upon free grace in eighteenth century England has emerged as a doctrine of free will in twentieth century American Wesleyanism.

My intention at this point is not to debate whether this is good or bad, whether Wesley indeed had a sufficient theological answer to the intersecting of Divine grace and human responsibility. Rather, I want to remind us that the change was not the result of a continuing dialogue held with only Wesleyan theologians present.

There appear to have been two major American experiences that were not specifically Wesleyan that shaped American theological thinking in general about the matter of free will. The first was an intramural debate among New England Calvinists about the role of the human will in salvation. The Wesleyan response to this debate would invoke humanistic and philosophical support for the doctrine of human free will. The second was the frontier camp meeting movement. The Wesleyan response to this was to follow in the wider pattern of American theology and presuppose its doctrine of human free will upon pragmatic grounds.

The debate among American Calvinists was underway already in the eighteenth century. The rigidity of Jonathan Edwards was too harsh for sensitivities sharpened by the evaluations of human ability provided by the Enlightenment and by the rise of democratic Christianity in America. But attempts to soften the fallenness of man were met with the force of tradition that reveres origins mainly because it had no real part in founding them.

The softening of American Calvinism sprang from New England Congregationalism which contended for a conditional covenant that incorporated the human fulfilling of moral obligations in the work of salvation. Jonathan Edwards opposed this revision of strict Calvinism as did his student, Samuel Hopkins. Total human depravity and absolute divine sovereignty were reinstated as “consistent Calvinism” in the teaching of Hopkins.<sup>11</sup> Nathaniel William Taylor, among the Calvinists, argued against Hopkins in his book *Man, a Free Agent Without the Aide of Divine Grace*. Taylor held that in order for an act to be sinful, it must be volitional. The will to sin stands apart from divine grace and is an expression of the freedom of the human will. Grace operates by the permission of God through the Holy Spirit’s bringing of the sinful will to accept the redemption which is in Christ. Taylor contended that in this way, the work of the Holy Spirit is concluded in redemption without having “violated the great laws of moral action or contravened the freedom of the subject.”<sup>12</sup>

Methodist theologians Nathan Bangs and Wilbur Fisk were drawn into the debate. The crucial issue was, obviously, relating human responsibility to Divine sovereignty. It remains to be shown that the positions of either Bangs or Fisk are functionally different from the Calvinist Taylor’s. But Fisk’s work is especially noteworthy for another reason. Fisk’s attempt to analogize free will on human models moved the discussion onto philosophical grounds. The debate would never again be only an exegetical controversy focused upon the Epistle to the Romans or a theological disputation with St. Augustine as the referee. Wesleyanism would from henceforth depend for strength upon the support for free will (no grace necessary) that philosophy could provide.

The other source of “free will” theology was the camp meeting movement. Here the reaction to Calvinism was driven by pragmatic considerations of frontier religion. “The idea of personal predestination could hardly survive amidst the evangelists’ earnest and universal entreaties to ‘come to Jesus.’”<sup>13</sup> The emergence of Arminian themes on the frontier was of sufficient strength to generate alarm in the bastions of an older orthodoxy. Timothy Smith notes that two quarterly journals, *The Boston Review* and *The American Theological Review* were established with the design of countering the appearance of an informed Arminianism among the clergy. What straightforward theological debate could not accomplish, the former journal attempted to do in an exercise of guilt by association by trotting out the accusation that Unitarianism was the spawn of Arminianism.<sup>14</sup>

The efforts to counter Arminianism were at least too little and too late. “By the time of the Civil War, all but the Scotch Presbyterian, Antimission Baptist, and German Reformed denominations in the Calvinist fold had moved decidedly toward free will.”<sup>15</sup>

The reason for the move was a growing tendency to rest theology in America upon practical and experiential utility. The raw edge of frontier life requires such religion and the camp meeting succeeded precisely because it provided it. The freedom of the will was neither a purely Biblical nor philosophical tenet. It was an uncritiqued presupposition necessary to the preaching of a universal atonement which was the heartbeat and soul of camp meeting preaching and theology.

Wesleyanism, on the American frontier, was informed by its theology. With regard to the free will of human beings, American Wesleyanism was a camp meeting convert.

### **The Wesleyan Theme of Christian Perfection**

In 1885, the General Holiness Assembly meeting in Chicago announced:

We are now prepared to give a formal definition of sanctification or Scriptural holiness, which would probably be accepted by the three hundred teachers and preachers in the National Holiness of America . . . : Entire Sanctification is a second definite work of grace wrought by the Baptism with the Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer subsequent to regeneration received instantaneously by faith, by which the heart is cleansed from all corruption and filled with the perfect love of God.<sup>16</sup>

John L. Peters remarks that “this definition had something of the force of an “apostles’ Creed” within the holiness movement.”<sup>17</sup> The statement is of interest to this paper because of two elements in the definition: 1) “wrought by the Holy Spirit”; and 2) “perfect love.”

The work of this Theological Society has focused intensely on the implications of the first element since Herbert McGonigle presented his paper on “Pneumatological Nomenclature in Early Methodism” in the 1972 annual meeting.<sup>18</sup> The burden of the paper was to challenge the assumption that Wesley would have used the language of the second chapter of Acts to describe his teaching of Christian perfection. McGonigle asserts that Wesley seldom uses the term “baptism of the Holy Ghost” to describe the experience of Christian perfection. He argues that for Wesley, Christian perfection is christologically rather than pneumatologically centered.<sup>19</sup>

Such a forthright challenge to an orthodoxy dating from at least 1885 has had the predictable results. Wesleyan, holiness scholarship has been forced to examine the challenged assumption. Rather interesting results have appeared. The work of Donald Dayton in several papers<sup>20</sup> and of Rob Staples in a paper made available by request has exposed the grafting that had gone on in the interim between the work of the Wesleys and the 1885 General Holiness Assembly.

Staples insists that “pentecostal” language was not used by Methodist theologians of the first half of the nineteenth century even when they were speaking of entire sanctification. That language Staples attributes to the influence of Oberlin perfectionism and the focal person is Charles G. Finney.

In a *Wesleyan Theological Journal* article entitled “Asa Mahan and the Development of American Holiness Theology” Donald Dayton says that Mahan began to use pentecostal language “during the decade of the 1850s or in the early 1860s.”<sup>21</sup> Dayton arrives at this conclusion in part by comparing Mahan’s *The Scripture Doctrine of Christian Perfection* published in 1839 with *The Baptism of the Holy Ghost* published in 1870. The shift is clear and apparently consciously wrought inasmuch as Mahan urges upon Phoebe Palmer the publication of the book as a book in which

“the doctrine of entire sanctification is presented in a form old and yet new.”<sup>22</sup>

Dayton presses to discover the origins of this language and finds two lesser lights of Oberlin perfectionism, Henry Cowles who employed the language in preaching about 1840, and John Morgan whose essay “The Gift of the Holy Spirit” was published in the first volume of the Oberlin Quarterly Review in August of 1845.

In a paper more recent than Dayton’s by about four years, Timothy Smith returns to Charles G. Finney as the source of Pentecostal language in the American Wesleyan tradition. Smith documents Finney’s use of such language in publications as early as 1839.<sup>23</sup> He credits George O. Peck, editor of the Methodist weekly, *Christian Advocate*, who was influenced by Finney’s publications, with being “the first Methodist since John Fletcher to equate the experience of entire sanctification with the baptism of the Holy Ghost.”<sup>24</sup> In the same paper, Smith makes it clear that

“by 1855 reports of Methodist camp meetings and revivals in a variety of periodicals frequently referred to persons being “baptized” or “filled with the Spirit,” and used the terms interchangeably with “heart purity,” “perfect love” or “entire sanctification.”<sup>25</sup>

Whether Finney or Mahan is to be assigned priority is not so important to this paper as the fact which both Dayton and Smith make abundantly clear. “Pentecostal language” derives not from self-conscious Methodist theologians, but rather from a specific center of nineteenth century American Christianity that is Congregational if it is anything, and that of an unorthodox sort.

The second element in the definition of sanctification offered by the 1885 General Holiness Assembly of interest to this paper is the term “perfect love.” The term is right. If Wesley employs with any consistency any one expression for his teaching of Christian perfection, it was the perfection of the affections of the heart so that one could “love God with all one’s heart, soul, mind and strength” and could “love one’s neighbor as oneself.” There is for Wesley no compulsion to move beyond the simple but descriptive words of the gospel. The perfection which he defends is an evangelical perfection visible in Christ and available to his followers.

Somewhere, between Wesley and his present followers who have an interest in his teaching of Christian perfection, there has been a significant exchange of the simple, Biblical language that Wesley used, for more complex and certainly more philosophical models and terms. Christian perfection is described as the perfection of the will or it is preached as a “teleological” perfection in which the believer realizes God’s intention for both the creation and the redemption of that particular believer. In both volitional and teleological explanations of Christian perfection, there is a subtle shift from an understanding of Christian perfection that is social at its root love for God and neighbor-to an uncharacteristic individualism that inquires diligently after the spiritual phenomenology of the individual.

The shift from the straightforward evangelical perfection of Wesley’s theology to the Christian perfection of American Wesleyanism has been examined by others, John L. Peters, for example. One of the elements in

that shift derives from the disproportionate influence of the philosophy known as personalism upon Methodism in general and upon the holiness movement in particular.<sup>26</sup>

Personalism provided articulation for a perfection understood as being relative to possibility. Thus a philosophical articulation was available for understanding the perfection of the Christian, teleologically rather than absolutely. Personalism valued the acting person over the reflective person, the will over the intellect.<sup>27</sup> The focus on will as the center of the person was readily transformed into the will as the center of the Christian and the elemental core of Christian perfection.

Boston University and the University of Southern California served as centers for the educating of Methodist clergymen during the ascendancy of personalism. They were also the centers of that philosophy as it was taught by Borden Parker Bowne, Edgar Sheffield Brightman, Albert C. Knudson, F.C.S. Schiller, Ralph Tyler Flewelling, Josiah Royce and Peter Bertocci. Personalism was unabashed to apply the word “perfection” to humankind rather freely. Edward Thomas Ramsdell writing in a 1942 issue of *The Personalist* says:

Because personalism is committed to a synoptically empirical methodology with coherence as the criterion of truth, because it views the self as dynamic and telic, and because it makes the personal the ultimate standard of value in the universe, its ethical point of view must be fundamentally perfectionistic, that is, it must define the good in terms of the most coherent realization of the possibilities of the self. Persons as ends in themselves are potentialities to be realized.<sup>28</sup>

For Ramsdell, “The notion of the self as a complex of functions capable of normative development and of harmonious organization and control is the root of perfectionism.”<sup>29</sup>

To define the influence of Personalism upon the holiness movement is more difficult than upon Methodism in general. Hundreds of Methodist ministers streamed from Boston and USC during the personalist era in those schools. There are thus sufficient grounds to assume the influence upon Methodism.

More hidden are the statistics that would show how many educators in holiness institutions of higher learning had done at least some of their postgraduate work at either Boston or USC. I can think of several, none of whom was timid about virtually identifying Personalism and Christian faith. They wrote and spoke with the confidence that accrues to any blessed enough to have both their theology and their philosophy done right. About ten years ago, a faculty of religion in a holiness college was considering excising the course in Personalism from the philosophy curriculum. An objection was raised that probably Personalism fits the Christian faith better than any other system of philosophy. Personalists certainly thought so. On the doctrine of humankind, one personalist could confidently write:

A person, being an active agent of self-conscious, rational and ideal potentialities, possesses spirituality, freedom and immortality. This is essentially the Christian doctrine of man,

and Personalism is its most philosophically effective apologetic.<sup>30</sup>

The ready identification of Personalism with Christian truth suggests an academic unwariness that would allow the philosophical system to slip by with a disproportionate influence upon Wesleyan theology. I believe that American Wesleyanism does, in fact, exhibit that disproportionate influence in its understanding of the doctrine of Christian perfection. Whatever social implications Personalism legitimately possesses,<sup>31</sup> they were for the most part lost in the transition to understanding in what sense a living human being might be perfect. In place of a simpler and more social Wesleyan “evangelical perfection” of “loving God” and “loving neighbor” emerged a theological anthropology rooted in the “synoptic approach” to understanding persons and the “coherence criterion”<sup>32</sup> for the evaluation of perfection. In other words, the perfection of intentions, or the perfection of potential became alternative modes of speaking of Christian perfection and there is no social dimension essential to either of these.

Neither of the elements extracted from the definition of sanctification provided by the General Holiness Assembly of 1885 continues in the theological context of American Wesleyanism without modification by sources external to the Wesleyan tradition. The baptism of the Holy Ghost is introduced to American Wesleyans and tied to the doctrine of sanctification by Asa Mahan and Oberlin theology. Wesley’s perfection theology assumes the categories and definitions of Personalism with some loss of the social dimension of the holy life. The result of external influence upon both of these elements within John Wesley’s own theology is a doctrine of Christian perfection or entire sanctification that is different from the original.

### **American Wesleyanism in Transition**

We have arrived at a junction. The intention in what has gone before is not, at least on the surface, to determine whether external influence upon American Wesleyanism is either a theological good or evil. The intent to this point is simply to demonstrate the fact of that influence with reference to two or three identifiers of that tradition. But you do not listen to this paper nor do I read it without making value judgments concerning the changes detailed. And therein lies the direction for the rest of this paper.

In surveying the literature that this Wesleyan Theological Society has produced in the twenty years of its existence, there appears to be an invitation for Wesleyan hallmarks to find new contexts. As in the cases already cited (grace and Christian perfection), exterior influences are pressing the Wesleyan tradition very hard. Once again in the theological context of our own time claims are laid to teaching what the Wesleys would have taught were they alive and alert to the issues.

I have in mind two matters in particular. Theology in the tradition of the Wesleys must yield strong authority to the Holy Bible and it must exhibit a strong sense of social responsibility. Both of these are matters of intense debate within the Wesleyan camp and the debate is clearly reflected within the literature of this very Society.



## The Wesleyan Theme of the Authority of Scripture

In a tradition broad enough to include through the past several decades a Claremont School of Theology and an Asbury Seminary, one must conclude that the authority of the Scripture is an issue that is either of no importance or else it is unsettled. There could be no truly Wesleyan theology that fails to take the authority of Scripture seriously, so it must be that the matter is yet unsettled for Wesleyans in the American theological context.

The question of the authority of Scripture has been set in American theology as a debate between fundamentalists and liberals. A “liberal” in this context is one who exhibits historical and scientific skepticism in the process of exegesis. Guided by post enlightenment and post Reformation thinking the “liberal” is willing to subject the Scriptures to modern canons of human knowledge. Fundamentalism is a response to such exegesis. The “Fundamentalist” views the work of the liberal exegete convinced that such exegesis is the natural product of a naturalistic mindset. Theological litmus tests have been devised to detect the side one takes. These might include the willingness to use the term “inerrancy,” one’s attitude toward higher critical methods and even exceedingly specific questions such as the dating of the book of Daniel or the number of Isaiahs.

The essence of the contest in terms of Wesleyan theology is to claim Wesley in a clear way for one or the other of these two camps. This is a dangerous undertaking for the honest theological mind because of the march of intellectual history and the inevitability of conceptual anachronisms. Furthermore, this is probably, at least at present, an impossible task inasmuch as the camps themselves lack clear definition. George Lyons cited Raymond E. Brown on this difficulty. “There is an undefined point on the higher critical scale varying from one evangelical community to another beyond which, by virtue of some mystical consensus, critical inquiry may not go.”<sup>33</sup> Lyons adds, “apparently it is assumed that appeals to inspiration and/or inerrancy can settle historical and literary questions. But can they?”<sup>34</sup> That may be no grave question for the champions of one position or the other just so long as Wesley can be kept from appearing to belong to the other camp.

That the contest has taken place on the hallowed grounds of this annual meeting is attested by the early appearance of an article which supplies arguments against those who undercut Biblical inerrancy.<sup>35</sup> There is then the article by Larry Shelton in which he denies that Wesley would have supported a doctrine of Biblical inerrancy in any of its fundamentalistic editions,<sup>36</sup> followed by Daryl McCarthy’s article, “Early Wesleyan Views of Scripture” in which he concludes of Wesley, Clarke and Watson, “All three are especially clear in their affirmation of the inerrancy of Scripture.”<sup>37</sup> Paul Bassett concludes that American Wesleyanism has allowed “its emotional ties with the *aims* of Fundamentalism to saddle it with a Fundamentalist doctrine of the Scripture that is quite out of place in Wesleyanism.”<sup>38</sup> This conclusion is cited with approval by both Larry Shelton<sup>39</sup> and by Rob Staples.<sup>40</sup>

There is clearly a division within American Wesleyanism about how the authority of Scripture is to be understood. The United Methodist Church

and several holiness churches have demonstrated an ability and a degree of willingness to let the division continue within their own bosom. American Wesleyanism in its broader context must make a similar decision. To press for a resolution of the argument invites the institutionalizing of the division in such a way that both sides will claim the mantle of Wesley, and the genuine authority of Scripture to create community with diversity and development not only possible but valued will be lost in the theological niceties of whether Jonah was a real man.

### **The Wesleyan Theme of Social Responsibility**

The other question that has gained immense momentum as an item on the Wesleyan agenda since the Oxford Conference of the Summer of 1982 has to do with Liberation Theology. The pertinence of this issue for the Wesleyan theological mind is crystal clear. In response to the individualistic and the mystic, Wesley says, "I know of no holiness but social holiness." From the training ground of the Methodist movement, the Holy Club at Oxford, came the conviction that Christianity without commitment to meeting the needs of our communities and the people in them is flawed. A penny per week for the relief of the poor, a *Primitive Physik*, a credit union to spare the husband and father time in a debtor's prison are pungent reminders of the social sensitivity of the Wesleys and the early Methodists. "The General Next to God" William Booth and the founder of British Christian Socialism, Frederick Denison Maurice, took a great deal of the inspiration for their tasks from Mr. Wesley.

The question that awaits the response of the American Wesleyan is: what form shall we give in our time to this heritage of social sensitivity? The answer is complex. Al Truesdale raised for this body a year ago, the pressing need in Wesleyanism for an understanding of systemic evil.<sup>41</sup> There is a need to break out of revivalistic and Dickensian solutions to the massive social problems of our time. Wesleyan tradition thrusts the needs of our society upon us as objects for genuine Christian concern. Whether it can supply any real solutions without an engrafting of liberation theology is the issue for debate.

In his presidential address of 1976, Rob Staples included liberation theology in his list of theological novelties that needed to be ignored in order to get to the business at hand on the frontiers of the Wesleyan tradition.<sup>42</sup> It is clear now, if it was not even then, that liberation theology however novel, is not therefore transient as well. The permanence of the movement has not been lost on Wesleyans and investigations with the intention of discovering common ground are well under way.

Although the debate about liberation theology is a newer issue for the Wesleyan Theological Society than the question of Biblical authority, it appears to be growing in our interests. In the Spring of 1980, Harold B. Kuhn published in the Wesleyan Theological Journal a study of terms loaded by liberationists. In his conclusions, however, he has passed well beyond semantic distinctions and addressed issues of substance in a way that finds value in liberationist interests along with a marked immaturity of thought. This article may have signaled the beginning of a serious encounter with liberation theology by the Wesleyan Theological Society.

Such an encounter must be a guarded one. There is probably more at stake for traditional Wesleyanism in this encounter than there is in the debate over Biblical authority. A measure of the seriousness of this encounter is John Luik's insistence that such a dialogue must be undertaken with "a mutual commitment to clear and careful analysis, to critique to question and answer."<sup>44</sup> The desire to meet the needs created by the systemic evil of our world is not enough to sanctify either a primitive Wesleyanism or a contemporary liberation theology. Luik's approach is to focus upon the Marxist underpinnings of liberation theology and then to examine piece by piece, if necessary, those elements of Wesleyanism and liberation theology that may be at least perceived as parallel. His investigation is into their common interests in anthropology, and his conclusion is not hopeful.

. . . The prospects for a dialogue which moves beyond a clearer understanding of the alternative belief system and a more creative interpretation of one's own tradition toward conceptual convergence is unlikely. It is unlikely because the most fundamental ontological claims of each position are simply nonnegotiable. . . . If this is correct, then it is more than simply Marxist or Wesleyan ontology, which is incompatible; it is the entire range of substantive claims of each theory. And, as it is exceedingly unlikely that either system will alter its ontology, the prospects for a dialogue culminating in fundamental compatibility are exceedingly slight.<sup>45</sup>

Luik's paper models the philosophical intensity to which American Wesleyanism must commit itself in the determination of its resources for meeting the challenge of institutionalized sin and systemic evil. Such resources may indeed be at hand. While there are the "magical" solutions to human evil on an individual level in Wesleyanism as embodied in doctrines of instantaneous change in conversion and entire sanctification, there has been a steadfast resistance to millennial schemes which suggest the same "magical" and instantaneous solution on a social rather than an individual level. This suggests at least an instinctive intention to face squarely the problems of society and to work as the hands of God in the meeting of them. Whether we can do this in league with, or at least informed by a liberation theology has yet to be determined.

## **Conclusion**

Two focal points create the theological context for American Wesleyanism. The first is the heritage of self-conscious Wesleyans tracing back to Wesley himself. The other is the general theological context of American Christianity.

Time makes it clear now that the general theological context of American Christianity has at certain points changed and distorted the original intent of Wesley. From free grace to free will appears to be one of those points and Christian perfection suggests the other. One wonders if self-conscious Wesleyans watched as such shifts as I have described earlier were made and simply remained silent, or if there was just no collection of voices to raise the sensitivity to the changes being made.

We have, in this, and other learned societies with Wesleyan interests at heart just such a collection of voices. Our literature manifests that the voices are not united. The pain of grafting the growth of a new millennium upon the stock of an older one is tangible. The tradition changes in ways infinitely more significant than what hymns one sings for revival. What we will do with the Scriptures and what we will do with our increased awareness of institutional evil leaves us with no choice but to risk the tradition in the quest for relevant change. Both Wesley and our American Christian experience require such of us.

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## Notes

1 Robert E. Chiles, *Theological Transition in American Methodism: 1790-1935* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956) p. 14.

2 Op. cit. Page numbers for these citations are irrelevant since these three topics are the titles of the three major chapters of Chiles' book.

3 Thomas A. Langford, *Practical Divinity: Theology in the Wesleyan Tradition*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983).

4 John L. Peters, *Christian Perfection and American Methodism*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956).

5 All of the works so far cited attest to substantial changes in American Wesleyanism. They will be useful in the examination of some of the changes this paper intends to address. What I wish to add to their work is simply an explicit recognition of the non Wesleyan origins of certain theological assumptions and definitions that pass uncritically as Wesleyan.

6 Cited in Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism*, (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1972) p. 95.

7 Cited in Chiles, p. 144.

8 Op cit., p. 157.

9 *The Life of the Reverend John Wesley, A.M.* (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1831, 1918) p. 185.

10 Cited in Irwin W. Reist, "John Wesley's View of Man: A Study in Free Grace Versus Free Will," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 7, 1 (Spring, 1972), 34.

11 Samuel Hopkins, *The System of Doctrines*, (Boston: Thomas and Andrews, 1793).

12 Both Langford, (p.84 and p.179n) and Timothy Smith ("The Doctrine of the Sanctifying Spirit: Charles G. Finney's Synthesis of Wesleyan and Covenant Theology," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 13, Spring, 1978, p. 94), attribute this statement to Taylor. Smith provides the helpful note that in fact, the articles, published in several numbers of the *Christian Spectator* for 1835, were unsigned. Taylor is thus presumed to be the author. For a more detailed recounting of the debate among the Calvinists and the effect of the debate upon the Wesleyans of the time see. Langford, pp. 83-85; and

Chiles, p. 44. Timothy Smith suggests the complexity of the debate: “By grafting onto covenant theology the doctrine of the moral nature of divine government, which required the consent of the human will to all that God provided or demanded; by locating depravity not in our natures, as Jonathan Edwards had, but in our dispositions, our selfish wills; and by adopting Samuel Hopkin’s idea that disinterested benevolence, or unselfish love toward God and man, was the sum of the Christian’s duty, Taylor and (Lyman) Beecher transformed Calvinist dogma into a practical Arminianism” (“The Doctrine of the Sanctifying Spirit: Charles G. Finney’s Synthesis of Wesleyan and Covenant Theology” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 13, Spring 1978, p. 93).

13 Timothy Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), p. 89.

14 Smith, p. so.

15 Smith, p. 92.

16 Cited in Peters, p. 162.

17 Ibid

18 Published in the *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 8 (Spring, 1973).

19 Ibid

20 See “Asa Mahan and the Development of American Holiness Theology,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 9 (Spring 1974); “The Doctrine of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit: Its Emergence and Significance,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* XIII (Spring 1978); “The Theological Roots of Pentecostalism,” a paper delivered in the Free Church Studies Symposium at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Washington, D.C., October 26, 1974.

21 p. 62.

22 p. 63.

23 “The Doctrine of the Sanctifying Spirit: Charles G. Finney’s Synthesis of Wesleyan and Covenant Theology,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 13, Spring, 1978, pp. 92-113.

24 Ibid, p. 106.

25 Ibid

26 For a definition of personalism, see Ralph Tyler Flewelling, “Studies in American Personalism the Personalist Background,” *The Personalist*, 31, No. 3, Summer, July 1950, p. 232. Personalism “holds that all reality is, in some sense, personal; that there are only persons and that which they create; that personality is self-conscious and self directive, both in finite individuals and in a Supreme Creative Intelligence, both immanent and transcendent, the World ground and source of all reality.” In the same article (p. 231) Flewelling supplies the following bewildering description: “The personalistic system has at times been designated as Voluntarism, the Philosophy of Freedom, of effort, of probability, of contingency, of

continuity, of Ideas Forces, of Change, Spiritual Realism, Philosophy Critique, Transcendental Empiricism, Personal Idealism, Humanism, Vitalism, Activism, Personal Realism, Phenomenology, Personalism, and, more recently Existentialism. Personalism seems to many the most appropriate name for the over-all type.”

27 Bishop McConnell wrote in *The Just Weight and Other Chapel Addresses* (New York: Abingdon, 1925, p. 20): “One trouble with philosophy is that while the mind thinks the hands are folded.” (cited in Carroll D. W. Hildebrande, “Bishop McConnell Personalist,” *The Personalist*, 35, No. 4, Autumn, 1954, pp. 380-388.

28 “The Perfection of Personalistic Ethics,” *The Personalist*, 23, No. 1, Winter, 1942, p. 44.

29 Ibid, p. 45.

30 Hildebrand, op. cit., p. 386.

31 Flewelling, op. cit “Freedom, run wild and socially irresponsible is only individualism and license; brought into captivity to the will of the Divine and the good of society, it is personalism.” pp. 230-231.

32 Ramsdell, op. cit., p. 44.

33 *The Critical Meaning of the Bible*, (New York: The Paulist Press, 1981) p. 25. Cited in “Hermeneutical Bases for Theology: Higher Criticism and the Wesleyan Interpreter,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 18, 1 (Spring, 1983) pp. 6849).

34 Op. cit., p. 69.

35 W. Ralph Thompson extends the issue beyond the bounds of Wesleyan authenticity to include the entire Christian faith. “To renounce the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy is to strip Scriptures of their status as an objective standard of divine truth. . . . Although to accept the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy, at this point at least, is to do so in the face of serious critical problems, the alternative to doing so is in effect to destroy Christianity itself.” “Facing Objections Raised Against Biblical Inerrancy,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 3, 1 (Spring, 1968) pp. 21-37.

36 “John Wesley’s Approach to Scripture in Historical Perspective,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 16, 1, Spring 1981, “. . . efforts to superimpose on various proof texts the framework of twentieth century fundamentalist epistemology must not be considered legitimate examinations of his positions on the Bible” p. 36.

37 *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 16, 2, Fall, 1981, p. 103.

38 “Conservative Wesleyan Theology and the Challenge of Secular Humanism,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, (Spring, 1973) pp. 74-75. See also “The Fundamentalist Leavening of the Holiness Movement, 1914-1940,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 13, 1 (Spring, 1978) pp. 65-91.

39 Op. cit., p. 38.

40 “The Present Frontiers of Wesleyan Theology,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 12. Spring 1977, p. 12.

41 "Christian Holiness and the Problem of Systemic Evil," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 19, 1, Spring 1984, pp. 39-59.

42 Staples, Op. cit, p. 6.

43 "Liberation Theology: A Semantic Approach," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 15, 1, (Spring, 1980) pp. 34-45.

44 "Marxist and Wesleyan Anthropology and the Prospects for a Marxist Wesleyan Dialogue," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 18, 2, Fall, 1983, p. 55.

45 Ibid, pp. 65-66.

# **THE DEVELOPMENT OF NINETEENTH CENTURY HOLINESS THEOLOGY**

Melvin E. Dieter

## **The Historical Milieu**

A few years after he was elected bishop in 1844, Leonidas L. Hamline wrote to a friend that he was more convinced than ever that there was an inevitable conflict on the doctrine of holiness impending in the Methodist Episcopal Church. As a warm friend of the growing holiness revival in the church, he looked forward to the struggle with anticipation. He observed, that when foes of holiness were still, it meant that friends of holiness were idle.<sup>1</sup> About ten years prior to the bishop's remarks those who had strong concerns for the cause of holiness in the church had begun to stir themselves in special efforts for a more vigorous promotion of Christian perfection or entire sanctification. Immediately, those who were not in sympathy with either the teachings or the methods of new movement began to voice their fears concerning it. The conflict which Hamline anticipated was ready to break into the open about the time of his observations given above. Controversy was to be one of the primary contextual elements within which the theology of the Holiness revival was to develop throughout the century.

Early opposition to the new holiness promotion in the church rose out of the fear that any formal organization on behalf of a doctrine so central to Methodism, smacked of a potential for schism.<sup>2</sup> (Perhaps the fact that one of these warnings came from a man who later was to become bishop constituted an early indication of his future exaltation, for in those times a good nose for the least tendency toward organizational irregularity was a gift which often seemed to commend one to the office.) In spite of Jesse Peck's words of caution in 1852, organizations and agencies for holiness promotion proliferated both within and without Methodism. It is true that three decades later the separation of the "come-outers," or more radical elements of the movement seemed to confirm the divisive propensities which some saw in the revival; but the movement as a whole did not leave Methodism in any great numbers to form new holiness churches until the end of the nineteenth century. Significant numbers of holiness pastors and lay persons



chose to remain in Methodism. These holiness Methodists continued to relate to the newly formed Holiness churches through the numerous associations and camp meetings which became the coordinating centers of the movement. Such centers still bring both groups together today.

The institutional tensions created within the tightly disciplined Methodist ranks of the nineteenth century by the activities of the holiness adherents may, in themselves, provide an adequate reason for the church's rejection of not only the more radical elements of the revival, but even many of its moderates. Aggressive holiness bands, circles and associations with their local, county, state, and national organizations, replete with presses and periodicals sprang up everywhere. As in most such divisions within the American churches, however, there was also the charge of doctrinal deviation. The fact that the chief concern of the special efforts was the promotion of Christian perfection, the central and special doctrine of the Wesleyan movement merely intensified the doctrinal confrontations which accompanied the revival throughout the century.

The task in this brief review is to try to identify points of theological transition in the developing teaching of the holiness revivalists and the component elements which may have fed into such changes. From time to time, papers presented to this society have spoken to those questions.<sup>3</sup> The nature and extent of any perceived modifications or deviations are now being reviewed more intensely because of the general revival of Wesley studies within the on-going Methodist Holiness Movement, within Methodism in general, and within the ecumenical Christian community. With due deference to Peter Berger, we can say that there is a rumor going the rounds of the theological world that sanctification and Christian perfection may still be vital components in any theology which can support a truly Christian witness to God's redemptive involvement in His hurting world.

### **The Palmer Theology**

The starting datum for our discussion of a holiness theology is the scholarly consensus that the doctrines of Christian perfection which the Methodist Church espoused during its formative decades in the new American nation were essentially those passed on to it by the standard works of Wesley, Fletcher, Clarke, and Watson along with the always popular biographies of early worthies such as Bramwell, Carvosso and Rogers.<sup>4</sup> Holiness advocates consistently and persistently appealed to these as their authority base along with their final appeal to Scripture. Phoebe Palmer's introduction of her "altar terminology" and "shorter way" into the Methodist understanding and promotion of the doctrine marks the point at which new directions begin to emerge from this standard milieu of Wesleyan perfectionism. Palmer and her sister, Sarah Lankford, were prominent lay persons in the burgeoning center of Methodism in the equally burgeoning city of pre-Civil-War New York. They helped to launch early Methodist overseas missions with their enthusiastic financial and moral support. Phoebe was one of the leading lights in establishing the Five Points Mission on New York City's east side. Contemporary interest in her life and ministry centers on the pioneer role she played in modeling and defending the right of women to a place of public ministry in the church.

But she and her physician husband, Walter were best known for the Tuesday Meetings for the Promotion of Holiness which began to meet in their home in 1835 as a women's class meeting. The meetings quickly became the center for holiness promotion within Methodism and beyond.<sup>5</sup> Soon after the meetings, then under the direction of her sister, had moved to their home, she herself professed to enter into the experience of entire sanctification as the Wesleyan doctrine came to be known in the holiness movement.<sup>6</sup>

Out of that experience and a study of the Bible, she put together a series of Old and New Testament passages to create a new *scala sancta* by which the Christian believer could be cleansed from all the remains of inbred sin and enter into the Canaan land of perfect love. It represented a blend of the accepted Wesleyan standards mentioned above in interaction with other forces at work creating the currents of revivalism and reform which had been surging through the national experience of the day.

Christ, she said, is the Christian's altar. Exodus 37 told her that whatsoever toucheth the altar shall be holy; therefore, every Christian believer who is willing in faith to present himself or herself, without any reservation whatsoever, as a "living sacrifice" (Rom. 12:1, 2) upon the altar provided by the finished work of Christ is entirely sanctified and cleansed from all sin.<sup>7</sup> The clear promises of Scripture are the voice of God because the Spirit is speaking them to us. Action upon a divine promise in faith constitutes the assurance that the promise is fulfilled in us.<sup>8</sup> In this, she seemed to be blending the act of faith and the assurance of faith into one. Her more theologically disciplined friends warned her of this tendency.<sup>9</sup> She did believe, however, that the testimony of the inner witness of the Spirit which Wesley strongly emphasized would accompany the witness of God's faithfulness quickly if not immediately to those who cast themselves completely upon Christ for full salvation. The Bible also taught her that without holiness no one will see God and that our sanctification is His will for us; furthermore, "now" is always God's time for acceptance of his gracious offers of salvation. Therefore, the failure to act on these words of promise issues in unbelief, and unbelief issues in sin and disobedience. She also insisted that when persons experience the blessing, it is their duty to confess it and zealously seek to bring others into the same experience.<sup>10</sup>

Time will not allow us to get into all of the complex questions which are raised here, but we can sense that something has changed theologically. Although each of Mrs. Palmer's assumptions and statements can be documented with almost identical statements in Wesley himself,<sup>11</sup> at the very least, there has been a shifting of the focus for understanding the tension between the Wesleyan polarities of growth and crisis in relation to coming to perfection in love. It is obvious in her message that the "moment" of revivalist appeal, the immediacy of response anticipated lest the hearer demonstrate unbelief and fall into condemnation by delay, the entire cleansing in the moment of total consecration . . . all tended to shift the point of balance away from that which Wesley had maintained and moved it closer to the crisis polarity and away from the gradualism and growth which formed the other pole of his dialectic. The experience of Christian perfection as the beginning of the life of growth in holiness rather than the culmination of its mature graces became the focal point of the Christian life. This

tended to revise the continuum of salvation within which Wesley had envisioned the experience. Phoebe Palmer had done for the crisis element of Wesley's perfectionism what William Warren Sweet said that Finney had done for the conversion experience; she had made perfection in love the beginning of days instead of a point somewhere at the culmination of struggle and growth.<sup>12</sup>

It appears that Wesley himself in the later decades of his ministry moved in his own position closer and closer to the crisis polarity of his crisis process teaching on the attainment of Christian perfection. His letters of spiritual counsel and to his preachers and others from the 1760's to his death indicate this. Consequently, Palmer's followers could make use of copious portions of Wesley's writings to affirm the essential Wesleyanism of their position.<sup>13</sup> Phoebe Palmer herself guarded her statements with some sense of balance. Nathan Bangs, who attended her meetings and frequently led them, pronounced her teachings essentially Wesleyan.<sup>14</sup> She knew Wesley and the other standard authors well and did not extend some of the implications or possibilities of her "altar" teaching to the extreme degree which some of later followers did who were immersed mainly in the revivalistic milieu. The latter commonly had considerably less acquaintance with the theological context within which certainly Wesley and even she understood the dynamics of the work of sanctification.

But the most important key to the theological transitions taking place here may lie in Palmer's claim that what was taught in the Tuesday Meetings was not in the final analysis the teaching of Wesley, Fletcher, Clarke, or Watson, but rather the teaching of the Bible. The intent and meaning of Scripture, on her points of concern at least, were clear and definite. Wesley would have had no problem with her appeal to Biblical authority, but there is no doubt that her readiness, within the context of the revivalistic preaching of her day, to proof text her understanding of the experience of entire sanctification and how to attain it by what she considered the plain answers of Scripture set a pattern of closure in complex issues which Wesley and maybe Fletcher would not have readily allowed. Wesley often hesitated to bring every difficult Biblical question to a point of final resolution; there was room for a tension within Scripture itself which could be lived with without allowing for any uncertainty as to the way of salvation or the gracious nature of God. One of the most forceful illustrations of the nuances of theological distinction which are present here is the response which Wesley made to questions on free will and the sovereignty of God in relation to individual salvation. He said that he would not say that persons cannot come to God if they will but neither would he say that persons could come to God whenever they will.<sup>15</sup> The consequence was that after all the Scripture which argued the question had been presented, one still should not be too ready to assume that all persons who read the Word of God or hear it preached will receive its truths in equal and similar fashion or see the same clear path of faithful response. Phoebe Palmer's "altar terminology" like the "Four Spiritual Laws" used in many sectors of evangelism today was often abused by the assumption of a kind of automatic operation of Scripture: To read or to hear the words is to know God's will. It was at this point of what constitutes "light," that the "shorter way" may have been relying on an epistemology which was different from that which Wesley relied upon.

The charges that there was something here that was un-Wesleyan may have arisen out of theological sensitivities at that point. If there is any truth in this, however, the questions raised did not prevent the rapid and widespread adoption of “Altar Terminology” within Methodism and throughout the broader holiness movement. Even today, one could hardly preach the virtues of the totally consecrated life without hearing the overtones of “laying all on the altar.” Phoebe Palmer had forged a simple syllogism which allowed higher life evangelists to present Christian perfection to the masses in the language of American revival. The altar motif became a permanent part of evangelical spirituality. These new revivalistic emphases on consecrated life contributed significantly to the dramatic outburst of revival in 1857-58; the Layman’s or Fulton Street Revival gathered up many of the perfectionist dynamics created by the Finney-Palmer holiness revival,<sup>16</sup> generating momentum for the post Civil War movement.

### **Post Civil War Developments**

The second period of development in holiness theology was basically a period of the solidification of the concepts and conflicts which had developed in the Palmer period. The publication of several comprehensive summaries of the standard teachings of the church on the doctrine of Christian perfection, e.g. George Peck’s *The Scripture Doctrine of Christian Perfection Stated and Defended* and Jesse Peck’s *The Central Idea of Christianity*<sup>17</sup> helped to set the stage of the theological debate and even intense controversy which surrounded the doctrine in the period. The details of the struggle are now more objectively known than they were by a previous generation thanks to the many scholars who have been probing nineteenth century religious history. The confrontations were often bitter as two increasingly divergent paradigms for understanding Christian perfection vied for the loyalties of Methodism. Wesley was used against himself as both sides in the conflict drew heavily upon one polarity or the other of his crisis growth dialectic of holiness. Holiness advocates in the church commonly took up crisis; their opponents emphasized process. Purity was put over against maturity; the “now” against the “not yet.” The holiness advocates relied on Wesley’s definition of sin as a known transgression of the law of God to defend their witness to perfection in love when at times they may not have left a perfect witness to it in their actions; the movement’s critics contrasted the sometimes deficient actions of those who claimed to be conscious of no disobedience in their hearts with the high standards of Christian maturity which Wesley at times used to confirm the truth of the experience.<sup>18</sup>

The theological tensions were exacerbated by the vigor of the holiness revival as it took up and revived the camp meeting as the chief instrument of holiness evangelism with the organization of the National Camp meeting Association for the Promotion of Christian Holiness at Vineland, New Jersey in 1867. The call for a higher quality of Christian experience swelled in the Methodist churches and spilled over, continuing to interact with Oberlin and Reformed perfectionism to develop a network of holiness meetings and associations which contributed significantly to the Methodization of American religion in the nineteenth century. It spread to England, the Continent and to mission stations around the world.

A multiplicity of factors (undoubtedly including some undue personal ambitions and injudicious actions) contributed to the critical though not total separation of church and movement which occurred by the turn of the century; but it was theological polarization and organizational tension which played the leading roles. In the course of the struggle, some denied the Wesleyan dialectic altogether by espousing some sort of Zinzendorffian theology which obviated any subsequent sanctification beyond the new birth.<sup>19</sup> Others who disagreed with the holiness movement's Wesleyanism marched on into the future intrigued by the new world of continental theology. A second generation of Methodist theologians moved into the churches' seminaries. For most of these, Wesley with his strong tinges of pietism and puritanism became *passé*.<sup>20</sup> As large numbers of holiness adherents left the churches, most of Methodism seemed to breathe a sigh of relief that the questions and the conflict had both been muted. A long period of relative silence in the churches of Wesley on their movement's central doctrine ensued.<sup>21</sup>

### **Pentecost and Holiness**

If main-line Methodist theology had taken a noticeable turn away from Wesley to something new by the end of the century, so also, some contend, had the theology of the holiness revival.<sup>22</sup> The first period of revival had put into place a theology of Wesleyan perfectionism which allowed its adherents to propagate their message with the rhetoric and methods of the revivalism of Finney. This new way of understanding and promoting the doctrine excited the intense debates and controversies concerning holiness within Methodism in the decades immediately following the Civil War. These, in turn, set the stage by the last quarter of the century for the next significant development in the theology of the revival. *That transition was to bring Pentecostal motifs and rhetoric to the defense and promotion of the holiness cause.*

It would have been most exceptional if the holiness movement where the emphasis on the present activity and power of the Holy Spirit had been promoted as vigorously as it had been at any time in the Church's history should not have begun to think that the revival had begun a new era of divine activity in the affairs of people and nations. The ideal of Pentecost and the certainty that the revival marked the beginning of a new "age of the Spirit" eventually became the dominant force in shaping the vision of the movement and its mission. This theological development was encouraged by strong religious and cultural forces such as the optimism and millennialism which were pervading the culture at the time.

We cannot give adequate attention to the influences of these wider movements upon the revival; rather, let us try to cut to what I believe is the heart of the theological questions involved. As early as 1857, a report on the Palmer's Tuesday Meetings picked up the Pentecostal and millennial theme. A participant saw in the meetings, "the germs, the dawns of millennial glory." They were "strikingly imitative of the pentecostal," and, "similar to the upper room at Jerusalem, where the early disciples assembled with Mary, the mother of Jesus . . . till God gave them power from on high, the tongue of fire, . . . Is this the baptism now called for . . . ere the world blossom as the rose," he asked in conclusion?<sup>23</sup> William Arthur's

*Tongue of Fire*, published just before the Civil War, urged upon the churches the necessity for recovering the power of the Holy Spirit as it had been revealed at Pentecost and in the Book of Acts.<sup>24</sup> The pentecostal theme continued to swell after the Civil War. L. R. Dunn, a Methodist holiness evangelist, wrote in 1871 that, “God is now wondrously moving among the nations . . .; a mighty upheaval is now going on; all men are looking on and wondering what will come out. O blessed, Holy Comforter, finish speedily Thy great work in the world.”<sup>25</sup> Holiness revivalists believed that in the renewal of the Pentecostal experience and gifts, the Church and world were experiencing the final stage of history before the consummation of all things in Christ. Terms such as “The Baptism of the Holy Spirit,” “The Gift of the Ghost,” and “The Promise of the Father” charged the religious atmosphere of American evangelicalism, both Calvinist and Wesleyan.

The Church of God (Anderson, Indiana) reformation movement which was born out of the crest of the first wave of post Civil War holiness evangelism in the late 1870’s believed that the Holiness revival was the instrument which God was using at the end of history to bring the true church to the purity and the unity which human organization and creeds had denied to it. “The Age of the Spirit,” had come in which the one invisible Church, hidden among the many sects of the time would finally be revealed as the one true visible “Church of God.” It had been organized by the Spirit and not by human devices.<sup>26</sup> Their understanding of the church as the dwelling place of the Spirit, their emphasis upon Spirit Baptism, upon the primacy of Spirit leadership and organization of the church, their insistence that men cannot ordain those who have been called by the Holy Spirit but rather, merely recognize the Spirit’s sealing of the individual, all are indications of an ethos which pervaded the revival.

The more traditional groups such as the Church of the Nazarene or the Pilgrim Holiness Church which came out of the revival a generation later failed to join them in their radical anti sectarianism. Nevertheless, they exhibited the same “age of the Spirit” motifs which formed the heart of the Church of God reformation movement. God within them, individually and in their fellowship collectively, through the sanctifying Spirit molded their concepts of the nature of the fellowship, the purity of the church, their concept of the ministry and the qualifications which is required, ministerial education, and the mission and place of the church in the world and in history.<sup>27</sup>

*Let me suggest then that the adoption of Pentecostal and Baptism of the Holy Ghost paradigms as the major vehicle for the expression of Holiness thought and preaching by the close of the century was no introduction of an unnatural or un-Wesleyan element into the holiness tradition; rather, it was a natural outgrowth of a weighted factor in Wesley’s own teaching on Christian perfection and the work and witness of the Holy Spirit in persons and in the world which demanded theological explication that the traditional structures of Reformed theology could not support. In this new understanding of the possibility of a different relationship with God and a new release of Christ’s life through an immediate and personal experience of the fullness of the Holy Spirit’s presence, Wesley moved beyond the benchmarks of Lutheran and Calvinistic theology thereby*

tending naturally and easily, if not necessarily toward more ready explication of the dynamics of Christian perfection in terms of Pentecost and Spirit baptism and fullness.

Donald Dayton and Timothy Smith, among others, have suggested some of the possible sources of the shift to Pentecostal themes toward the end of the century. These theses which suggest that some of the roots of this change may be found in Asa Mahan and Charles Finney are certainly valid.<sup>28</sup> They are commonly found in Phoebe Palmer herself.<sup>29</sup> But in the Methodist holiness movement at least, there seems to me to be no more obvious source for them than in early Wesleyanism itself-in Wesley and Fletcher. Although the stream of authentic Wesleyan continuity which allowed Pentecost and Spirit baptism to become so significant an element in holiness theology flowed from Fletcher's writings rather than Wesley's, I believe too much has been made of purported differences between the two at this point. There is no good evidence that Wesley withheld his imprimatur from the general scheme of Fletcher's pentecostal interpretation of Christian perfection. His only objection was that by using "Spirit baptism" language, as he did, Fletcher might create the impression that all Christians had not received the Spirit in the initial experience of justification.<sup>30</sup> But as to Fletcher's main themes of the significance of dispensations and Pentecostal motifs in relation to both the theological implications of Christian perfection and the means of entering into the experience of it, Wesley seemed to raise no other objection. Explicitly, in sermon and letter, and implicitly, in what he did and did not do as he edited some of Fletcher's writings on these themes, he accepted, or at the least, had no great concern about the implications of Fletcher's understanding or use of them.<sup>31</sup>

In this Wesleyan Theological Society, the Baptism of the Spirit issue and its relationship to the Holiness traditions is more than academic, for it is obviously bound up in the warp and woof of the historical identity of the movement and the denominations to which many in the Society belong. In recent years, some of the most serious dialogue we have engaged in has been occasioned not only by a growing theological maturity which allows us to look at ourselves with more openness and honesty, but by the realization that the question is no longer merely an in-house discussion. Nor is it an issue which involves only Methodist, Holiness, or some Wesleyan Pentecostal traditions. The theology of the Spirit is now a major concern of much of Christendom.<sup>32</sup> I am suggesting that our Wesleyan traditions may be torn as they are in trying to respond to these questions because Wesley himself in his doctrines of the present possibility of a Christian perfection in this life and the direct witness of the Holy Spirit in Christian experience, crossed a line which demanded a different understanding of the dispensations of grace from that commonly accepted in Protestant circles. It was this reality which nudged Fletcher and many others in the tradition into logical tension with the understanding and teachings of Luther and other reformers. It may be that the source of the differences in interpretation among students of Wesley as they try to explicate is his own teachings on the Holy Spirit. Their varying and sometimes contradictory views may arise, in part, because of Wesley's own attempts to defend and define his doctrines within categories that are more appropriate to Reformed teaching

than to the explication of the personal relationships with God and Christ in the Spirit inherent in his doctrine. Fletcher apparently sensed the problem and turned to his Pentecostal hermeneutic. Wesley did not hesitate to applaud the move.<sup>33</sup>

Without some understanding of this shift, I believe we will fail to appreciate what really is involved in the tensions on these questions that exist and have always existed in the movement itself as well as those “hair’s breadth” but crucial distinctions that exist between Wesleyan and Reformed theological development on these issues in spite of broad areas of general agreement on other evangelical doctrines. Whatever Biblical, or experiential or Reformed, or Anglican, or Catholic, or patristic and Eastern Orthodox sources may have informed Wesley’s doctrinal synthesis on Christian perfection and the Holy Spirit, it seems to have set up a built-in point of irritation if not contradiction with the Reformation understanding. If there is any verifiable historical evidence for this thesis, as I am convinced there is, it may help us judge more wisely why the dynamics of Pentecost and Spirit Baptism may not only be useful but perhaps desirable, for explicating the dynamics of a holiness or even a Wesleyan Methodist theology of Christian perfection.

I would like to set forth the proposition that Fletcher’s attraction for Pentecostal and Spirit baptism motifs was a natural, if not necessary, consequence of Wesley’s own complaint with the Reformed understanding of the possibility of perfection in love in this life. When Wesley allowed the possibility of a denouement point prior to death and glorification in which the individual may be made free from sin and free to love God with his whole heart, he broke with the fundamental Reformation understanding of history and eschatology.

He shifted the tension point between the eschatological “not yet” and the realizable “now,” which Karl Rahner, in discussing the same theme in his little book *On Prayer* calls the “moment of temporal eternity.”<sup>34</sup> In itself, this may be said to have begun to load Wesley’s holiness dialectic of growth and crisis with a radical change factor leaning toward the crisis polarity. It will be my contention that the factor lends some logic to his tendency, as his own ministry progressed, to emphasize the “now” and the “moment” in his continuum of salvation and sanctification. Furthermore, this leaning moved naturally toward the Spirit Baptism language of Fletcher which also emphasized the moments in the Acts accounts and the moment which was central to the shaping of the revivalistic perfectionism which we saw taking place in the immediate pre- and post Civil War period in the Methodist and other holiness movements. The discussion which follows will illustrate how difficult it is to fit the implications of Wesley’s affirmations into the traditional structures of time and history commonly utilized in Reformation thought.

### **The Age of the Spirit**

Jürgen Moltmann’s recent discussion of the relationship between trinitarian theology and the Kingdom of God may provide us with a theological vantage point to explore some of the implications of this theological shift. It may also help us to see the logical consequence which subsequent use of Pentecostal and “Age of the Spirit” themes represented. As interesting as Moltmann’s main thesis concerning the relationship between a truly trinitarian



theology and human freedom may be, that is not the point which touches our concerns most directly; it is his insights into the importance of the work of Joachim of Fiore and his concept of “the age of the Spirit” which hold special relevance to us.<sup>35</sup>

Moltmann notes the continuing importance of Joachim’s understanding of history; it lies in his integration of Augustine’s concept of history as consisting of seven ages corresponding with the pattern of the seven days of creation with the Cappadocians’ trinitarian understanding of history as successive dispensations of the age of the Father, the age of the Son, and the age of the Holy Spirit. Joachim’s eschatology combines the seventh or final period of history, the Sabbath rest period of Augustine, with the “Age of the Spirit” concept of the Cappadocians. Moltmann contends, contrary to the claims of Thomas Aquinas, that this succession of sovereignty in history does not signify the dissolution of the Trinity in history. The full Trinity was active in each of the ages, although one was sovereign.<sup>36</sup> Joachim’s idea of a last great revelation of the Spirit before the ushering in of the perfect Kingdom of God is, of course, much older than his development of it; it is rooted in Joel’s biblical promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit as well as in the Paraclete passages of the Gospel of John, and the whole of the Acts of the Apostles. Ever since the Montanists, prophetic reform movements in the church have drawn upon this textual syndrome at some point or other.

Joachim’s scheme is as follows:

The mysteries of the Holy Scripture point us to three orders (states or conditions) of the world: to the first, in which we were under Law; to the second in which we were under grace; to the third which we imminently expect, and in we shall be under a yet more abundant grace . . . The first condition is therefore that of perception, the second, that of partially perfected wisdom, the third of fullness of knowledge. The first condition is the bondage of slaves, the second is the bondage of sons, the third is liberty. The first in fear, the second in faith, the third in love. The first in the condition of thralls, the second of freeman, the third of friends. The first of boys, the second of men, the third of the aged. The first stands in the light of the stars, the second in the light of dawn, the third in the brightness of day. . . . The first condition is related to the Father, the second to the Son, the third to the Holy Spirit.<sup>37</sup>

The Kingdom of the Spirit is made up of people who have been reborn by the Spirit. They become people of the Spirit whose experience of the Spirit is immediate. The Spirit guides, the Spirit teaches, the Spirit appoints, everyone is taught by the Spirit.

Moltmann acknowledges that there is also a trinitarian pattern in the Reformed understanding of Christ’s kingly office: the *regnum naturae*, the *regnum gratiae*, and the *regnum gloriae*. There is a difference, however, between these three categories and the trinitarian pattern of Joachim. His three kingdoms or eras actually come before the final consummation of all

things; in fact, the kingdom of the Spirit is the final era of history and leads to the fourth kingdom. This fourth kingdom is the kingdom of glory, the consummation of history itself in the kingdom of the triune God.

Moltmann diagrams the difference between the Lutheran and Calvinistic understandings of history and Joachim's as follows:

**Joachim:**

The kingdom of the Father	the kingdom of the Son	the kingdom of the Spirit	the kingdom of glory
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**Orthodox Protestantism:**

<i>Regnum naturae</i>	<i>regnum gratiae</i>	<i>regnum gloriae</i> <sup>39</sup>
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If these three eras of Joachim are not taken as a merely modalistic pattern of history, but are seen, as Moltmann suggests, as a trinitarian interpretation by which the kingdom sovereignty of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit respectively mean “continually present strata and transitions in the kingdom’s history,”<sup>40</sup> then his understanding becomes a useful means of getting at some of the subtle theological differences which have caused evangelicals of the Reformed tradition and evangelicals of the Wesleyan tradition to come so close to each other on ecclesiological and eschatological questions without being able to define exactly what the differences are which seem to preclude completely comfortable corresponding responses to such issues. The differences reflect a different understanding of pneumatology in its intimate relationship with both of the above doctrines.

How each tradition might respond to the concept and nature of an “age of the Spirit” affords us a good example of the difficulty and the light which an interpretation of Joachim such as Moltmann’s may shed on the problem. *If one follows the motif of the three periods of Christ’s reign rooted in the Reformed tradition, there is actually little room for an understanding of such a dynamic operation of the Spirit in history.* There is less likelihood that the very concept of an “Age of the Spirit” can be developed as it was either by Joachim or by the Holiness and Pentecostal traditions. The theological framework simply is not there. There is no place for a trinitarian concept of such a period of Spirit sovereignty and activity which constitutes part of the history of the kingdom within time.

Reformed theology has portrayed magnificently the liberating Christ and the grace of the redemption to life which he brought through His cross; the kingdom of the servant Redeemer is the grand theme of the kingdom of grace. But the themes which arise out of Pentecostal and post Pentecostal milieus or “the age of the Spirit” are not commonly a part of Lutheran or Reformed understanding of history and time. Luther himself may have realized this lack when he complained that there was too much of the preaching of the cross and not enough of the preaching of Pentecost in the messages of his preachers.<sup>41</sup> Lutheran and Reformed theologies also follow a trinitarian pattern in that the kingdom of the Father opens up all of creation to the future; so, too, the kingdom of the Son opens up the future to men and women by freeing them to be servants of God and no longer slaves to themselves and the world. The Son makes us free for freedom. The

activity of the Spirit, however, is either subsumed in the age of grace and of the Son or in the final Kingdom and consummation of all things in the age to come.

What, then, is the nature of the Kingdom of the Spirit if it is in time and not in glory or subsumed in either or both the age of grace and of glory? Moltmann contends that,

The kingdom of the Spirit is experienced in the gift conferred on the people liberated by the Soothe gift of the Holy Spirit's energies. That is the reason why the kingdom of the Spirit is as closely linked with the kingdom of the Son, as the kingdom of the Son is with the kingdom of the Father. In the experience of the Spirit, we lay hold of the freedom for which the Son has made us free. Through the mediation of Christ, we experience a kind of 'direct presence of God': God in use in God. The mystics were right to call this 'the birth of God in the soul.' Through faith and by listening to his conscience, a person becomes God's friend. In the powers of the Spirit, the energies of the new creation are experienced, too. In the Spirit, that new community comes into being which is without privileges and subjection, the community of the free. In the Spirit, the new creation in the kingdom of glory is anticipated. As the beginning and 'earnest' or pledge of glory, the kingdom of the Spirit is directed towards the kingdom of glory; it is not itself already that kingdom's fulfillment.<sup>42</sup>

It would be difficult for any historian of the nineteenth century Wesleyan Holiness Movement or of the later Pentecostal movement to fail to discern the parallel development of the movement's understanding of their eschatology and the nature of salvation history with that of Joachim. The intonations and intimations of this summary would have set well with many holiness leaders. They believed that if the churches continued to ignore the implications of the Pentecost event and the signs of a new spiritual age, the reformation of the church would remain incomplete and its mission unfulfilled.

The tendency of these movements to finally relate the movements of the Spirit in which they felt they were participating with the consummation of history shaped every aspect of their thinking, especially their concept of the church and its mission. It is not surprising then that John Fletcher, the intimate of Wesley and the first systematic theologian of the Wesleyan movement, should turn to a trinitarian dispensationalism similar to that of the Cappadocians and Joachim to develop his hermeneutic of Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection centered as it was on the Pentecost event and the age of the Spirit. Nor is it surprising that John Fletcher's identification of the experience of entire sanctification as Wesley taught it with the "baptism of the Holy Ghost" should have become the dominant motif for understanding and proclaiming the doctrine at the time that the Holiness churches were seeking to formulate an understanding of the nature and mission of the church. Fletcher defines the 'Pentecostal Church' as "the 'kingdom' of believer made perfect in love."<sup>43</sup> The millennial ethos which was woven and interwoven in all aspects of American culture and politics in

the nineteenth century merely encouraged this emphasis upon the “age of the Spirit” which was to usher it in.

The songs and hymns of a spiritual movement often offer the deepest insight into its mood and theology. One of the many songs which catch up the movement’s eschatological vision of the church is Francis Bottome’s Pentecostal hymn, “The Comforter Has Come.” It swells all the notes of victory and triumphalism which marked the ethos of the revival:

O, spread the tidings round, wherever man is found,  
Wherever human hearts and human woes abound;  
Let every Christian tongue proclaim the joyful sound:  
The Comforter has come!

The long, long night is past, the morning breaks at last;  
And hushed the dreadful wail and fury of the blast,  
And o’er the golden hills the day advances fast!  
The Comforter has come!

Refrain:

The Comforter has come! The Comforter has come!  
The Holy Ghost from heav’n, the Father’s promise giv’n.  
O’ spread the tidings round, wherever man is found,  
The Comforter has come.<sup>44</sup>

A new pneumatology was developing based on a different concept of history than that accepted by the traditional Protestantism. The limits of this paper will not allow me to outline the difficulties, complexities and even risks of calling for a new or at least fuller development of the pneumatological questions raised by the classical theology of Wesleyan Methodism and the Holiness movement. The task is to formulate a theology of Pentecost and of the Spirit which is grounded in salvation history and therefore keeps close to the theology of the cross which is central to the evangelical Biblical faith of the Reformers and to Wesleyan evangelical Biblical faith as well. Constant awareness of the Wesleyan quadrilateral with special concern for the overarching authority of the Scriptures must accompany the process at every point or the extremism and even fanaticism which has frequently be risen in the past will be repeated. The theology must be thoroughly trinitarian and yet reflect adequately the experience of God the Spirit in the church and individual Christian life as well as in the broader creation and culture.

The Church began to address the theological task of explicating the meaning of Pentecost and the person and work of the Spirit long before Wesley and Fletcher opened up the questions this paper has addressed within our own tradition. Origen was one of the first to clearly phrase the question when he noted that “it is always the days [plural] of Pentecost.” After Pentecost, a *theologia crucis* as traditionally understood in Reformation thought must be balanced by a *Theologia spiritus*.<sup>45</sup> As McDonnell notes such a study would not create a narrow focus on the activity of the Holy Spirit but rather who He is; this in turn would lead into new understandings of ecclesiology and history on the one hand and of Christology and the Trinity on the other. The doctrine of the Spirit stands centrally between these two.<sup>46</sup>

If some Biblically and theologically viable understanding of the person and work of the Holy Spirit more consistent with these Wesleyan distinctives cannot be developed than the understanding which can be explicated with the traditional pneumatology then the tendency, which was already evident in the nineteenth century debates, to move back to a Reformation position will become the only option. If some of the concerns of this paper are valid, it may well be that in the process of correcting what we think are aberrations in the nineteenth century, we find we have also wiped out those major doctrines of the Spirit which Wesley believed had become Methodism's special responsibility to nurture within the broader Christian tradition.

To hastily seek to resolve the issues solely on the basis of narrow, and even often valid, exegetical concerns or to dismiss it as un-Wesleyan may be to miss the central dynamic of both the Holiness and the Wesleyan revivals. The failure of the Holiness churches to adequately address this task out of the rich resources of the Wesleyan quadrilateral will only weaken their influence upon evangelicalism as a whole. They will melt more and more into the prevailing evangelicalism, shaped almost totally by a Wesleyan Reformed tradition cast in its prevailing American modes. They will have yielded much of the creative input they have contributed to evangelical religion since the revival blossomed after the Civil War.

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### Notes

1 *Beauty of Holiness* VIII (May, 1867), 154.

2 *Guide to Holiness* XXI (April, 1852), 113.

3 *The Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 13, Spring, 1978; 14, Spring 1979; and 14, Fall 1979, address this issue.

4 See John L. Peters, *Christian Perfection and American Methodism* (New York: Abingdon, 1956), Chap. IV.

5 Richard Wheatley, *The Life and Letters of Mrs. Phoebe Palmer* (New York: Walter C. Palmer, Jr., 1876), is the main source for Phoebe Palmer's life. To this date, the corpus of Palmer correspondence and papers has not been discovered if it still exists.

6 Wheatley, *Palmer*, pp. 36ff.

7 For typical summaries of her "altar typology," see Phoebe Palmer, *The Way of Holiness* (New York: Palmer and Hughes, 1867), pp. 52ff; the same, "The Act of Faith by which the Blessing Is Obtained" in J. Boynton, *Sanctification Practical; a Book for the Times* (New York: Foster and Palmer, Jr. 1867) pp. 115-130; "We Have an Altar," *Guide to Holiness* XXIII, May 1853, 158, 159.

8 Phoebe Palmer's "Letter" to Mrs. L. L. Hamline quoted in Wheatley, *Palmer*, p. 516. See also, *Palmer Faith and Its Effects, or Fragments From My Portfolio* (New York: Published for the Author at 200 Mulberry St., 1854), p. 190.

9 See Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform, American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980 [originally published 1957]) pp. 126, 127; Abel Stevens, *Life and Times of Nathan Bangs, D.D.* (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1863), pp. 396-402; Melvin Easterday Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century* (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1980), pp. 28-32.

10 Melvin E. Dieter, *Holiness Revival*, pp. 35-37.

11 Phoebe Palmer, *Incidental Illustrations of the Economy of Salvation* (Boston: Henry V. Degen, 1855), pp. 36-42; John Wesley, "The Scripture Way of Salvation," *Works of John Wesley* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, n.d.) VI, 53.

12 William Warren Sweet, *The American Churches: An Interpretation* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1947), p. 126; Charles Jones, *Perfectionist Persuasion: The Holiness Movement and American Methodism, 1867-1936* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1974) p. 5; Peters, *Christian Perfection*, pp. 112, 133.

13 *Christian Perfection as Taught by John Wesley* (Boston: McDonald and Gill, Publishers, 1885), compiled by J. A. Wood with "Introduction" by Bishop W. A. Mallalieu, gathers together most of the Wesley proof-texts and passages.

14 Abel Stevens, *Life of Nathan Bangs*, p. 351; E. S. Jones, *Sermons on the Death of Nathan Bangs* (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1862) p. 27; Bishops Simpson, Mallalieu, and Newman testified to the essential soundness of her theology. See: Wheatley, c.v; George Hughes, *Fragrant Memories of the Tuesday Meetings and Guide to Holiness* (New York: Palmer and Hughes, 1886) p. iv; and John A. Roche, *The Life of Mrs. Sarah A. Lankford Palmer, Who for Sixty Years Was the Able Teacher of Entire Holiness* (New York: George Hughes and Co., 1898), p. 11.

15 As quoted by Peters, *Christian Perfection*, p. 113.

16 Smith, *Revivalism*, Chap. IV; Dieter, *Holiness Revival*, pp. 57, 58.

17 (New York: G. Lane and P. P. Sanford, 1842), (Boston: H. V. Degen, 1856).

18 Randolf Foster's discussion in Chapters X and XI of his *Christian Purity, or The Heritage of Faith* (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1869) illustrates these points.

19 J. T. Crane, *Holiness, the Birthright of All God 's Children* (New York: Nelson and Phillips, 1875).

20 Robert E. Chiles, *Theological Transition in American Methodism, 1790-1935* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1965), pp. 65, 66.

21 Charles Ferguson, *Organizing to Beat the Devil* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1971), pp. 283-85.

22 Donald W. Dayton, "Asa Mahan and the Development of American Holiness Theology" *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 9, 1974, 60-69; "The Doctrine of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit: Its Emergence and

Significance” *Ibid.*, 13, Spring 1978; 114-126; Alex R. G. Deasley, “Entire Sanctification and the Baptism with the Holy Spirit: Perspectives on the Biblical View of the Relationship,” *ibid.*, 14, Spring 1979, 27-30; John A. Knight, “John Fletcher’s Influence on the Development of Wesleyan Theology in America,” *Ibid.*, 13, 1978, 13-33; Herbert McGonigle, “Pneumatological Nomenclature in Early Methodism,” *ibid.*, 8, 1973, 61-72.

23 “Meetings for Holiness-Sectarianism,” *Beauty of Holiness VIII* (December, 1857), 364-5.

24 William Arthur, *The Tongue of Fire: or The True Power of Christianity* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1856).

25 Lewis Romaine Dunn, *The Mission of the Spirit (or The Office and Work of the Comforter in Human Redemption)*, (Carlton and Lanahan, 1871) p. 299.

26 John W. V. Smith, *The Quest for Holiness and Unity, a Centennial History of the Church of God* (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, Inc., 1980), p.96.

27 Seth Cook Rees’s *The Ideal Pentecostal Church* (Cincinnati, OH: God’s Revivalist Office, 1898) is one of the most systematic outlines of how these concepts were regarded in the movement. Rees was one of the founders of the Pilgrim Holiness Church.

28 See n. 22 above; Timothy L. Smith, “The Doctrine of the Sanctifying Spirit: Charles G. Finney’s Synthesis of Wesleyan and Covenant Theology,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 13, Spring 1978, 92-113.

29 Her Incidental Illustrations was written a year before Arthur’s *Tongue of Fire*. See pp. 76-77 of the former.

30 “Letter of John Wesley to Joseph Benson, London, December 8, 1770, *The Works of John Wesley* (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press, 1979), XII, 416. For a thorough discussion of this point, see Laurence Wood, *Pentecostal Grace* (Wilmore, KY: Francis Asbury Publishing Company, 1980), pp. 201-203, 209-228.

31 “Sermon on the Death of Mr. Fletcher,” *Wesley’s Works*, VII, 436.

32 Cf. Killian McDonnell, “The Determinative Doctrine of the Holy Spirit,” *Theology Today*, 39, July 1982, 142-161.

33 “John Wesley to Elizabeth Ritchie, January 17, 1775, Wesley, *Works XIII*, 55: “Mr. Fletcher has given us a wonderful view of the different dispensations which we are under. I believe the difficult subject has never been placed in so clear a light before. It seems that God has raised him up for this very thing—. . . By confining yourself to those who write clearly, your understanding will be opened and strengthened. . . .”

34 (New York: Paulist Press, 1968), pp. 76-77.

35 *The Trinity and the Kingdom, the Doctrine of God* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1981), pp. 202-213.

36 Moltmann, p. 203.

37 *Concordia Noui Ac Veteris Testamenti Venice* 1519, Lib. V, 84, 112. Translation by E. Benz *Eranos-Jahrbuch* 1956, pp. 314f, as quoted in Moltmann, *Trinity and Kingdom*, p. 204; *ibid.*, p. 211.

38 Moltmann, p. 207.

39 Moltmann, p. 208.

40 Moltmann, p. 208.

41 Luther's Works, Vol. 41, *Church and Ministry*, (Phila.: Fortress Press, 1966), III, 114.

42 Moltmann, p. 211.

43 T. Crichton Mitchell, ed., *The Wesley Century*, Vol. 2 of Great Holiness Classics, (Kansas City, MO.: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1984), pp. 387-394: Wood, *Pentecostal Grace*, p. 187.

44 Clarence B. Strousse, ed., *Hosannas to the King and Praise Service Hymns* (Phila.: Pepper Publishing Co., 1901), p. 126.

45 Walter Brocher and Heinrich Buhr, *Zur Theologie des Geistes* (Pfullingen: Gunter Neshe Verlag, 1960), p. 5, as quoted in McDonnell, "Doctrine of the Holy Spirit," p. 146.

46 McDonnell, p. 159.



## **TOWARD A WESLEYAN UNDERSTANDING OF CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE**

Jerry L. Mercer

It is with a sense of honor and pleasure that I present at this distinguished conference a paper on some aspects of John Wesley's thoughts on Christian experience.<sup>1</sup> I say "some aspects," because it is obvious that no presentation the length of mine can be, in any sense, much more than an initial probe and query. I enjoy wrestling with Wesley's theology, finding his insights increasingly important for spiritual growth.

Although it is clear to me that Wesley's contributions to the history of Christian thought were indeed significant,<sup>2</sup> that opinion is not widely shared. His influence continues, though much more so in educational programs and books than in the churches named for him. He is, however, gradually becoming recognized as one of a number of very important links in the chain of faith stretching from the early church to the present. And if conferences like this can help us continue to struggle with issues that sent him traveling over vast stretches of country, energized his need to organize and write, and kept him simplistically hopeful of producing a better person and a better world, then we will have been true to a vision of spiritual life which is larger than anything most of us individually have yet known. The topic assigned me on Wesley's view of Christian experience is as important for me as for those who originally heard Wesley with awe and wonder. Like them, I want to live meaningfully, and because I do, Wesley urges me to know God. In this light, one must appreciate Wesley's constant desire to speak primarily to those people who were in dead earnest about the state of their soul. This is in itself a pleasant departure from so much popular Christianity seen on television in our time. At least this much is sure, Wesley did not speak tongue-in-cheek, but with the intent to address the deeper needs of those who had been awakened to quest after the living God.

### **Wesley As A Man Alive**

All of us here are more than familiar with the dramatic change in Wesley's life associated with the journal entry for May 24, 1738. Although

precisely what happened may be debated,<sup>3</sup> it is beyond doubt that he bore witness to what he considered a real change<sup>4</sup> in his relationship with God.<sup>5</sup> In a flood of insight, Wesley was transformed from a man hoping for salvation to one who knew it with some degree of finality. Shortly after his experience, the awakening began in earnest.<sup>6</sup> It seemed as though the energy of the apostolic church had been released once more in a new and forceful way. It was another of many points of departure noted by church historians when the wind of the Spirit came in a new guise for a new day. We could hope for nothing better in the church today.

Wesley proclaimed to all that one could actually sense the presence of the God of the universe and thus be intuitively certain of God's acceptance. In addition, this new flush of God's love would lead the Christian to know Him more deeply and love Him more intimately. This message was new to Wesley and to many who heard him, especially those church persons who appeared more tuned in to speculation and reason than revelation,<sup>7</sup> and who, for whatever combination of reasons, were innately suspicious of emotional responses and the confrontive boldness of those whom God had so radically changed. Whenever this is true for our times, it is but a reflection of what Wesley faced.

Wesley must have been somewhat startled to discover himself the center of a growing controversy over the validity of what he claimed happened to him and what was happening to increasing numbers of those who heard him.<sup>8</sup> Charges from his critics flew thick and fast—and would continue to do so in varying degrees of intensity for the remainder of his ministry.<sup>9</sup>

The heap of invective leveled at Wesley's views and the experiences of his followers was long, merciless and oddly humorous. Wesley tried to defend himself and his flock against accusations that he was but a Presbyterian or an enthusiast and his followers mere fanatical devotees. He tried to show distance between himself and the mystics and Quietists.<sup>10</sup> Like Taylor, whose works *The Art of Holy Living and Holy Dying* had been influential in his life, Wesley tried to counter claims that he was "popish"; that is, either a Roman Catholic in disguise or at least a sympathiser.<sup>11</sup>

The anti-Methodists debunked Wesley's emphasis on the direct experience of God as enthusiasm, demeaned the Methodist view of Holy Communion as magic, and considered blatant foolishness the keeping of spiritual journals and the practice of "pricking the scriptures" for guidance. Wesley's views on Christian perfection were continually misunderstood—as they still are. The "love feast" was satirized as outright debauchery. Wesley tried to counter with several "appeals" to Scripture, tradition and reason, but seemingly to little avail. He consistently claimed all his life that he was faithful both to the order and doctrinal genius of the Church of England. Like it or not, Wesley found himself almost as much an apologist as an evangelist.

The charges of enthusiasm must have been particularly irksome to Wesley,<sup>12</sup> for in fact, Wesley did not trust emotions—his or anyone else's for that matter. One example of this is found in a Journal entry in 1740.<sup>13</sup> It seems that one day John and his brother Charles were out for a walk, taking in the beautiful countryside, singing hymns, and in general enjoying each other. Without explanation or obvious reason, Charles began to laugh,

lightly at first and then uncontrollably. John watched this strange behavior, somewhat amazed. Then he, too, began to laugh, either with or at Charles, and soon both brothers were in a high state of hilarity. Much later, John was disturbed at this lack of control and determined the cause of this emotional outburst to be a “preternatural” spirit—a spirit of mischief. Wesley’s puritan mindset would not allow him to release his emotions in ways which he thought better suited to pubs and theaters.

The root of these feelings probably lies somewhere in the Wesley family background.<sup>14</sup> It seems that in his home, children were treated as little adults—a practice Wesley continued at Kingswood School. Academic study was emphasized and play minimized—or not allowed. Certainly in his formative years of theological study, Wesley noted the Puritan preference for biography and history as opposed to novels and the arts. Of course, Wesley’s early resolve to be a serious person was considerably strengthened by authors like á Kempis’s and Scupoli.<sup>16</sup> Although it probably would not have helped much, I do wish he had read from St. Francis<sup>17</sup> and Brother Lawrence instead!

Yet for all his stern paternalism and rule setting, John Wesley unleashed a sense of inward happiness which effectively freed many people from the drudgery and burdens of eighteenth century common life. The tears shed by mine workers and the joy shared by hundreds at Eucharist services in Methodist preaching houses indicates that what may appear as dull sermons and drab liturgies were actually new life for people emotionally and spiritually starved for happiness. Revival cannot be stopped when suddenly the mundane is clothed with splendor.

### **“Plain Old Christianity”**

Wesley provides us with overviews of the salvation process in certain sermons;<sup>18</sup> specifically, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” “Satan’s Devices,” and “Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourses I-III.” The lines are familiar to all of us:<sup>19</sup> the natural mind in revolt against God; conviction of sins and repentance on the ground of “preventing grace”; the new birth (including baptism<sup>20</sup>) as initiation into the holy life; progress in grace leading to a second repentance; the granting of a pure heart;<sup>21</sup> ever deeper dimensions of the witness of the Spirit; and all the while constant prayer to God and sacrificial interaction with the world.<sup>22</sup>

This whole process is graced with God’s love, actualized by faithful obedience, and demonstrated by good works. This “way”<sup>23</sup> to God is informed and enhanced by the holy community (church, societies, etc.) and intensified by the “means of grace.” The whole of it is measured by the single intention to please God. As such, it is quite beyond the scope of ordinary reason, however refined, and quite at odds with any kind of works righteousness. An admixture of faith, love and self-denial, this life in Christ produces unbelievable joy! This is the “plain old Christianity” taught in the “oracles of God.” Such experiences in faith are not the result of enthusiasm, since the emotions are shaped by the teachings of Scripture and awakened reason.

For Wesley, the goal of Christian experience is happiness<sup>24</sup> —happiness manifested as inward joy, peace of mind, contentment with life, love of all

people, and hope of eternal life. “Knowing that happiness is our common aim,” he writes, “and that an intimate instinct continually urges us to the pursuit of it, [Christ] in the kindest manner applies to that instinct and directs it to its proper object.”<sup>25</sup> Wesley sees Christian experience as the refinement, enlargement and focusing of our natural inclination for happiness (including the search for meaning in life). Our basic problem seems simply that we aim too low at what is a very high target! Our misguided selfishness limits our abilities to realize that only God—as He is in Himself, rather than as we imagine Him—is capable of quenching our thirst for contentment.

A person who *really knows* the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is, in the best sense of the term, “blessed”; that is, happy.<sup>26</sup> In his apologetic tract, “The Character of a Methodist,” written in 1739, Wesley tries to show his critics something of the harmless nature of the people called Methodists:

A Methodist is one who loves the Lord his God with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his mind, and with all his strength. God is the joy of his heart and the desire of his soul, which is continually crying: ‘Whom have I in heaven but Thee and there is none upon earth whom I desire beside Thee.’ My God and my all! ‘Thou art the strength of my heart, and my portion forever.’ He is therefore happy in God; yea, always happy, as having in Him a well of water springing up unto everlasting life and overflowing his soul with peace and joy. Perfect love now having cast out fear. he rejoices evermore. Yea, his joy is full, and all his bones cry out: ‘Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy, hath begotten me again unto a living hope of an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, reserved in heaven for me.’<sup>27</sup>

There is a sense in which this inward all consuming joy is self activated. It throws open the doors of love, since it is the God of love who brings this new reality to us. We become responsive to His inner prompting. Our aspirations are now to please God, not manipulate Him; to prefer self-sacrifice to self glory; to value meekness more than power; to be controlled rather than to control. In all of this, our heart loses its duplicity and gains simplicity; that is, as Wesley says, “[The Christian’s] one invariable rule is this: ‘Whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God, even the Father, through Him.’”<sup>28</sup> This is the “single eye.” This is “holiness” in its highest sense; that is, nothing more or less than “pure love filling the heart, and governing all the words and actions.”<sup>29</sup>

Thomas Merton, the late prominent Catholic writer, says the saint “reproduces in his own individual way, something of the balance and perfection and order . . . in the Human nature of Jesus.”<sup>30</sup> Thus, the saint enjoys “at the same time and without conflict the Clear Vision of God and the most common and simple and intimate of our human emotions.”<sup>31</sup> I believe Wesley would applaud Merton for holding in creative tension awareness of God and the human tendency to make mistakes. When one holds in love the “Clear Vision” of God before oneself, then, in Wesley’s terms, not

living in “willful sin” is possible.<sup>32</sup> As I understand it, willful sin is the deliberate blurring of the vision of God in order to yield to the temptations of self love or self hatred.

But what is this “Clear Vision” of God for Merton? He does not tell us in so many words. He rather suggests that it is living in God rather than only living *for* God. It is genuine spiritual existence. As such,

It is the silence of our whole being in compunction and adoration before God, in the habitual realization that He is everything and we are nothing, that He is the Center to which all things tend, and to Whom all our actions must be directed. That our life and strength proceed from Him, that both in life and in death we depend entirely on Him . . . that it is absurd to live as though without Him, for ourselves, by ourselves; that all our plans and spiritual ambitions are useless unless they come from Him and end in Him and that, in the end, the only thing that matters is His glory.<sup>33</sup>

Merton’s spiritual concern is almost identical to Wesley’s. In Wesley’s advice on prayer, we see this living, intimate relationship with God, established by faith and maintained by love. A Christian, Wesley says,

. . . ‘prays without ceasing’; at all times the language of his heart is this: ‘Unto Thee is my mouth though without a voice; and my silence speaketh unto Thee.’ His heart is lifted up to God at all times and in all places. In this he is never hindered, much less interrupted, by any person or thing. In retirement or company, in leisure, business, or conversation, his heart is ever with the Lord. Whether he lie down or rise up, God is in all his thoughts; he walks with God continually, having the loving eye of his soul fixed on Him, and everywhere ‘seeing Him that is invisible.’<sup>34</sup>

Admittedly, even for Wesley, this picture of a praying Christian is ideal. That does not mean that the ideal is above us, only out in front of us, attracting us by its essential union with God.

So these are some highlights of authentic happiness on a personal level. But Gospel happiness is not realized in one’s isolation from others, rather in one’s caring interaction with them. Here Wesley strikes a note for human solidarity within the context of Divine grace. Simply put, “works of piety” are not enough; they must be balanced with “works of mercy.” Therefore, Christians are not only to love God, but also their neighbor, which includes “every child of man, every human creature, “ whether known or not, whether friend or enemy. We are to love others as ourselves, “with the same invariable thirst after his happiness in every kind, the same unwearied care to screen him from whatever might grieve or hurt either his soul or body.”<sup>35</sup> This is the kernel of Wesley’s argument with hermits—that their love of solitude stunts, not enlarges, their perspectives on loving God.<sup>36</sup>

### **Aspiration for the Holy**

One way of defining the contemporary relevance of Wesley’s views on Christian experience is as “aspiration for the Holy within the context of the holy community.” Here the word “aspiration” means the totality of the Christian quest for God. It emphasizes process while allowing for peak

moments of spiritual insight and inner cleansing. The reference to God as “the Holy” is meant in personal terms. The notion of “the Holy” catches up Biblical motifs of love, justice, majesty, Divine suffering, wrath, and even happiness, while highlighting the mysterious attractiveness of Him who is high and lifted up. “The holy community” refers to that supporting environment created by persons who are truly aspiring for the Holy.

In an attempt to make this as clear as possible I want to suggest six affirmations which I think reflect a Wesleyan orientation on Christian experience:

1. A real change occurs in the life of anyone who commits himself or herself to Jesus Christ. One’s intention to be “altogether” a Christian may be tested in the following ways:

A. There is a certain correspondence of life with testimony. This means that a Christian exhibits (1) a sincere desire to renounce evil, (2) a zeal for doing good, and (3) the development of a social conscience coupled with good works.

B. Personal experience is subject to the prayerful scrutiny of those who themselves are aspiring for God. This means the Christian’s spiritual formation is in some sense guided and validated by (1) a group (society, band, etc.), (2) and individual (spiritual director), or (3) both of these.

C. There may be the grace of the confirming Spirit. This is (1) God’s own witness to the Christian’s heart and (2) the responding inner witness exhibited by (a) the desire to love God (examination of conscience) and (b) a love of the means of grace.

2. Our aspirations for God are encouraged by a sense of acceptance and perhaps by the inner confirmation of the Spirit. Our aspirations are discouraged by our awareness of certain tensions, maladjustive behavior and/or urgings to evil. Taking a cue from Bonhoeffer, I refer to authentic faith as “simple, unreflecting obedience to the will of Christ.”<sup>37</sup> This idea of simplicity in obedience is a common one in the “fathers” of the Church. Professor John Cobb, Jr.’s working idea of sainthood as identification with God so as not to deliberate over moral choices provides a contemporary way to approach this dynamic.<sup>38</sup> Also helpful is the notion of Christian freedom as not having to feel the necessity to constantly justify our attitudes and behavior. “Freedom” here refers to freedom from sin, so as to be free in immediate response to Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

3. Our aspiration for God as the Holy One is enhanced when evil, which hinders our freedom to be in reality what we profess to be in faith, is cleansed by the dominating nature of God’s love. The interplay between repressed spiritual discord and the teaching function of the Holy Spirit may require a lifetime to work out, if we are to arrive at sainthood; that is, conformity of the human will to the Divine will. It is not beyond the range of Divine working, however, for that conformity to be accomplished in a short time. The important point here is that spiritual freedom can be actualized in the present moment.

4. Normally meaningful spiritual experiences are most easily realized within the context of mutual love and support as found in that part of the Christian community dedicated to “aspiration for the Holy.” The temple-

synagogue model may shed some light on this idea. Christians gather in mass in the “temple” (the church building) to worship God. They gather in the “synagogue” (the small group) to grow in the Spirit, particularly in terms of sharing love, spiritual guidance and the raising of social conscience.

5. The love of God, which makes us free to seek Him, operates not only in the realm of individual experience, but also in the structures of society. Wesley’s optimism regarding the possibilities of social change as one way to make the Kingdom of God visible is akin to that of Rauschenbusch. Indeed, it is impossible to apply brakes anywhere when one assumes that if God’s love is not stopped, it will dominate everything. Love for Christ’s sake, coupled with strict self-denial, provides the impetus for genuine love of one’s neighbor.

6. Finally, eschatological hope produces a high quality happiness which makes it possible for human beings to rejoice in tribulation as well as in blessing. Indeed, when one sees God’s love as not just being “out there,” but as coming to meet us, the future shapes our present faith. Thus, God is the One who moves toward us, making up for our deficiencies; that is, as long as our intentions are honorable. This underscores the insight that the salvation process is always gifted by God and is never, in any sense, the result of works righteousness.

### **Conclusion**

John Wesley—the difficulties of studying such a remote figure are immense. In the first place, it is impossible for one to wholly set aside his or her prejudices and presuppositions. Secondly, sometimes one has vested interests in a particular understanding of a person like Wesley, and that can work against a full-orbed appreciation of his work. Thirdly, we must be careful to remember Wesley was only a man—occasionally autocratic, more often eccentric, and almost always authoritarian. Fourthly, as Professor Outler has shown, there were a host of influences which shaped Wesley’s thought, each of which deserves to be studied in its own right.

I honestly think that if Wesley were here this morning, he would applaud our serious concern for authentic Christian experience. In fact, he would probably invite us to join him in evangelical witness. Yes, I think he would want us to join him since he would not join us. That was the way Wesley operated.

In closing, I want to read my favorite portion of verse from Wesley—which Wesley, however, I do not know! These are meaningful words—words which, if lived out, would insure the Church’s faithful obedience to aspiring for the Holy:

Lord, arm me with Thy Spirit’s might.  
Since I am call’d by Thy great name:  
In Thee my wand’ring thoughts unite,  
Of all my works be Thou the aim:  
Thy love attend me all my days,  
And my sole business be Thy praise.<sup>39</sup>

Amen

## Notes

1 On Wesley's view of "experience," cf. JW,29: "Wesley followed Locke in the denial of "innate ideas" and appears never to have taken seriously the traditional "arguments" for the existence of God. In their place, he put an alternate notion of the self-evidence of God's reality as strictly implied in the faithful man's awareness of God's gracious presence toward him. This awareness of God's gracious "presence" is what Wesley meant by "experience," and it was for him, as real and unmistakable a perception as any sensory awareness might be. This doctrine has often been construed as a subjective theory of religious knowledge, a corollary of his view of revelation."; on "experience," cf. "The Witness of the Spirit: Discourse II," JW, 213-219; on Wesley's sometime lack of caution distinguishing between inner impressions and the leading of the Spirit, cf. S, 11; also S, 56-57, on how Wesley added experience to the Anglican notions of Scripture, tradition and reason as guidelines for Christian faith. "It was this [strong element of mystical piety] that sustained his lifelong interest in the patristic ideal of divine-human 'participation' . . ." 56. Cannon suggests that it was Wesley's experience of God at Aldersgate which changed his view of salvation from works leading to faith to faith leading to works. TJW, 80-81. On the Wesley quadrilateral, cf. JWTT, 32ff; also 106 ff. on the witness of the Spirit.

Experience is used by me in a sense larger than the idea of the witness of the Spirit. Rather, I mean the ordinary understanding of something that happens to or within one, about which we can think and discuss; a living experience—"heart religion."

2 Cf. Outler's introductions to JW and S; also his essay in PWCT, 1 ff., as well as Schmidt's essay in PWCT, 67ff.

3 Aldersgate was very important in Wesley's experience. Cf. Journal entries for May 24, 25 and 26, WJW, I, 98-104. Note Outler's caution about putting too much emphasis on Aldersgate as an isolated experience, S, 38.

4 On the idea of "real change" as opposed to "relative change," see Wesley's controversy with the Lutherans and Calvinists. Of importance here is Wesley's view of original sin and the impact of this doctrine on the problem of natural virtue. Cf. S, 63f. For an interesting discussion of real change, cf. WS, 83f. The Reformers emphasized a relative change in the Christian's standing before God, whereas Wesley believed in real change. Cf. Wesley's sermon on "The Wedding Garment."

5 On Wesley's theory of religious knowledge: Outler says Wesley was an "avowed empiricist" and "unembarrassed intuitionist." S, 59. As concerns empiricism, Wesley was impressed and distressed with John Locke. Wesley read "An Essay Concerning Human Understanding" by Locke. WJW, XIII, 455-64. He agreed with Locke that there is no such thing as "innate principles" (ideas); rather, all ideas are acquired. This is to say that all ideas come from experience; both internal and external sensation (reflection). On the other hand, Wesley raises many questions with aspects of Locke's thought. Nevertheless, he concludes it is a very useful work, especially for Young scholars: that is. if they have a tutor! Cf. TJW, 156-60, on "Wesley's



Approach to a Knowledge of God.” Cannon concludes his brief analysis by saying that “the Bible is for Wesley the way to religious knowledge. . . . To be sure, reason is an essential tool for [proper] interpretation . . . and Wesley writes that he builds all his religious opinions on Scripture as he interprets it through the means of common sense.” *Ibid.*, 160.

Wesley’s concern for knowing God through intuition relates to vivid inner experiences of God as in prayer, the witness of the Spirit and union with God (expressed by Outler as “the patristic ideal of divine-human ‘participation’”), cf. S, 56. Outler also states the Wesley inherited a “Christian Platonism,” particularly from the “Fathers.” *Ibid.*, 59. In a footnote on “The Witness of the Spirit: Discourse I,” Outler says: “What is here presupposed is Wesley’s whole theory of religious knowledge with its notion of a ‘spiritual *sensorium*’ analogous to our physical senses and responsive to prior initiatives of the Holy Spirit. Typically, it is passive until acted upon by spiritual stimuli—e.g., divine light arouses our latent capacities for ‘sight’ and insight; revelation prompts us to insight and knowledge—always, however, as ‘re-actions’ to initiatives beyond ourselves. Thus, no matter how intensely subjective our feelings may be in religious experiences, their source is prevenient, and in that sense, objective.

This, then, is Wesley’s version of the intuitionist views of Christian Platonism as he had known that tradition from the Alexandrines, Bonaventura, the Cambridge Platonists, Malebranche, and, especially John Norris of Bemerton. It allowed him, without internal contradiction, to follow St. Thomas and John Locke in his theories of empirical knowledge . . . and yet also to distinguish all such knowledge from our spiritual knowledge of God and ‘of the deep things of God.’ “This distinction, and its epistemological import, are pervasive throughout the Wesley corpus . . . (extensive notations).” S, 276, n. 46.

6 Outler says Wesley’s “baseline tradition was Erasmian,” particularly through people like Cranmer and Harpsfield. S, 56. Certainly Erasmus was a worthy model, attempting, as he did, to cut a path of toleration between the warring Lutherans and Roman Catholics. Cf. TR, 425-37. Durant writes: “He was too sensitive to be a man of action. . . . He was a master of moderation, deprecating intemperance and extravagance. He fled from action into thought, from rash certainties into cautious doubt. He knew too much to see truth or error all on one side. He saw both sides, tried to bring them together, and was crushed in between.” *Ibid.*, 428.

The *via media* of Erasmus also characterized English Protestantism (especially from 1570-1640), in particular Chillingworth and Donne, whose interests were especially meaningful for thoughts on Christian unity—a subject which was of great importance to Wesley; cf. his sermon “Catholic Spirit.” *PMER*, 382. For example, note this quote from Donne: “We must be so far from straitening salvation to any particular Christian Church or any subdivided name, Papist or Protestant, as that we may not straiten it to the whole Christian Church.” *Ibid.* Thus, at least one hundred years before the Wesleyan awakening, the Church of England attempted to strike a middle way between the extremes of Roman Catholicism and Puritanism (Presbyterianism). This “middle way” was considered by Anglicans as simple “apostolical” Christianity. Cf. *Ibid.*, 375-418. Familiar as he was with the history of his church, Wesley was constitutionally unable to under-

stand Christian doctrine in terms of a few “essentials” and many “options.”

7 In determining the validity of experience in Christ, Wesley appealed first to Scripture, then tradition, with reason and experience following in that order. Natural reason could aid humans only so far in their quest for God. True Christianity was not irrational, since it had its own logic based on the experience of Christ. It is typical of Methodism to underscore Jesus’ teaching that the Holy Spirit is our teacher. Cf. WJW, XIII, 23.

8 Lyle’s book, *Methodism Mocked*, is a good general reference work on “the satiric reaction to Methodists in the eighteenth century.”

9 Boland’s book, *The Problem of Methodism*, shows something of the depth of feeling against the perfectionist teachings of Wesley in nineteenth century American Methodism. Boland considers Wesley’s “second change” theory of salvation and his “residue theory of sin” as genuine theological problems.

10 Wesley was opposed to the Quietists’ insistence that one must wait passively for salvation. Cf. Outler, S, 214-16, n. 68, 81. As regards the mystics, while he appreciated much in their faith, Wesley stood against their tendency to privatize the revelation of God and to disregard the means of grace (though this last critique varied from person to person). Cf. WJW, XIII, 25, 28.

Evelyn Underhill may be of help here. Referring to Baron von Hugel, she distinguishes between “inclusive mysticism” and “exclusive mysticism.” Inclusive mysticism “alone is truly Christian; because its philosophic basis is in the doctrine of the Incarnation, with its continuance in the Church and Sacraments.” Exclusive mysticism is “the attempt to ascend to the vision of God by turning away from His creatures by an unmitigated other-worldliness, [which] is not Christian at all.” WM, 12. Clearly, by Underhill’s definitions, Wesley was a mystic of the first type.

11 Bishop Jeremy Taylor, an intellectual and high churchman, had to defend himself against accusations that he was more Catholic than Anglican. For an interesting overview of Taylor’s role in the development of Anglican spirituality, see OPPAS, 104ff.

Outler says Wesley was “stoutly anti-Papist.” S, 77. Yet his (and Taylor’s) “asceticism-within-the-world” were seen to have Catholic tendencies. Cf. S, 61. Surely one reason for this suspicion was Wesley’s “two ways” of Christian experience (lower and higher), about which more will be said below. Wesley seemed to have resurrected the “double standard of morality” which Anglicans believed to be characteristic of Roman Catholicism. Cf. PMER, 95f.

12 Cf. Wesley’s brief discussion in CPJW, 114-17. This is especially important in relation to the “tests” of gospel faith seen in the text below. Cf. Outler’s note, JW, 298-99. Also S, 22-23, on the Quakers, Ranters and Jumpers. Also *Ibid.*, 24, on Wesley’s distaste for “excesses” in preaching.

13 WJW, I, 271f.

14 On Susanna Wesley's view of raising children, see FC, 58ff. On the subject of "breaking the will" of children, cf. WJW, "On the Education of Children," 92f.; Ibid., "On Obedience to Parents," 103f. For a humorous account of Susanna's inability to break the will of her own children, see M.JW, 17-18.

15 Personally I find á Kempis helpful. One cannot read *The Imitation of Christ* without being driven to the conclusion that for á Kempis, this life is an arena of struggle. Therefore, to triumph over life requires constant diligence. Certainly here Wesley would have been introduced to the benefits of solitude. In a letter to Miss Bishop (June 17, 1774; WJW, XIII, 28), Wesley tells how he and Charles were attracted to the "love of solitude" though they were to resist the temptation. Piette in JWFP has some interesting insights on Wesley's attraction to and fear of loneliness (266-72).

16 Scupoli's book, *The Spiritual Combat*, seems to me much like á Kempis in his earnestness to emerge victorious from the struggles of life. Since his book was important in Wesley's home, it is obvious that it would have helped shape his mindset. Early in his work, Scupoli sets out the nature of "the spiritual life":

"It actually consists in knowing the infinite greatness and goodness of God, together with a true sense of our own weakness and tendency to evil, in loving God and hating ourselves, in humbling ourselves not only before Him, but, for His sakes, before all men, in renouncing entirely our own will in order to follow His. It consists, finally, in doing all of this solely for the glory of His holy name, for only one purpose—to please Him, for only one motive—that He should be loved and served by all His creatures." (SC, 5)

Reading Scupoli one understands Wesley's rationale for breaking the will of children at an early age in order to help them to holiness. How helpful that idea was has to be judged on the basis of what kinds of people such action actually produced.

It is important at least to mention Henry Scougal's book, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*—which was the "textbook" of the Holy Club. The serious Christian is to take note of Christ's "entire resignation" to the will of God. This is, for Scougal, the foundation of the life of Gospel happiness; that is, the path is one of entire unquestioning obedience to God. Cf. Outler's note on "will-mysticism," S, 32, n. 5.

17 Richard P. Heitzenrater referring to Cell's *The Rediscovery of John Wesley*, observes, "He is the first to attempt an analysis of Wesley's understanding of salvation in the light of historic Christian theologies. Not only do we see Kempis, Law, Taylor and the other traditional Wesley sources march across the pages of this book, but also St. Francis, Abelard, Aquinas, Erasmus, Eckhardt, and a host of others (R. P. Heitzenrater: *The Elusive Mr. Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984), Vol. II, 199). This is just a bit misleading, at least as concerns St. Francis. Cell does not show that St. Francis informed Wesley's "understanding of salvation." Rather, Cell only compares Wesley and Francis, showing some important similarities. (cf. RJW, 347ff.; 387ff.). The central idea these "two sceptered sovereigns of practical

Christianity” (349) had in common was that “the idea of the Holy is the heart of Christianity” (348). Reflecting on what he calls “evangelical perfection,” Cell observes:

This is the sum and substance, this is the soul and body of the Franciscan understanding of the Gospel, of his mode of life and example of Christian service, and of his far-flung attempt to realize the Kingdom of God in the midst of a torn and tortured race. It can be said of St. Francis in some measure what is true only of Christ in full measure, that he who has once felt the pulse and quality of his life can never again be the same man he was before nor ever thereafter escape the empire of his influence. The fact of St. Francis alone would be more than enough to fall in love with the Wesleyan doctrine of holiness and evangelical perfection (348-49).

18 Of course, a more definitive overview requires one to read the “Sermons on Several Occasions: Volumes I-IV.” Cf. S, 8. 19 “The order of salvation, as Wesley had come to see it, is an organic continuum: conscience, conviction of sin, repentance, reconciliation, regeneration, sanctification, glorification. All of these are progressive stages in the divine design to restore the image of God in human selves and society.” S, 80. Wesley sometimes reduces the order of salvation to three key concepts: (1) original sin or repentance, (2) justification by faith, (3) holiness. Cf. WL, II, 268; JWMB, 152-53.

Wesley is rather consistent in dividing humankind into three categories. In “The Good Steward,” these are called “debtor,” “servant” and “steward.” WJW, VI, 136. In “The Spirit of Bondage and Adoption,” these categories are referred to as the “natural man,” “legal man” and evangelical man.” SS, I, 194-95.

20 It is instructive to note that baptism is not one of the “means” of grace. This lends support to the notion that Wesley did not accept as valid the Church of England’s insistence that baptism did in fact confer grace. Certainly Wesley’s constant invitations to repent and experience forgiveness implies immediate rather than mediated experience. However Wesley’s advice to Godparents, plus his republication of his father’s tract on baptism, does suggest a kind of baptismal regeneration approach to grace.

21 In JW, Outler says the “most distinctive” aspect of Wesley’s theology was his view of Christian perfection. (30.) Here Wesley leaned toward Eastern and Catholic sources rather than Reformation sources. S, 65. “Perfect love,” as Wesley understood it, is the conscious certainty, in a present moment, of the fullness of one’s love for God and neighbor, as this love has been initiated and fulfilled by God’s gifts of faith, hope and love.” JW, 31. “‘Perfection’ is the fulfillment of faith’s desire to love God above all else and all else in God, so far as conscious will and deliberate action are concerned.” JW, 32; cf. Ibid., 10, on the joining in Wesley’s mind of “disciplined” love and “aspiring” love.

Outler is very close to what I think is Wesley’s notion of Christian perfection. The one thing which seems to be missing in Outler is Wesley’s stress on experiencing this perfection now and that by faith. His sermon, “The Scripture Way of Salvation.” is a case in point: as well as CPJW,

138-39. Wesley's distaste for works righteousness, plus his strong belief in faith and the witness of the Spirit, lead him to expect the highest levels of sanctity at any point in one's history of Christian experience. And, for Wesley, now is a better time than later. This perspective undercut the Catholic idea of perfection with its emphasis on penances. It also enlarged the Anglican idea of perfection by reinstating a two-level (or two-way) Christian experience, a higher and a lower.

"The saint for English Protestantism is, in summary, anyone in any profession, calling, or station who lives a fully Christian life." PMER, 97. Against this background, Wesley could easily be seen as more Roman than Reformed. Scougal's working definition of Christ's perfection could have been significant for Wesley: "Perfect love is a kind of self dereliction, a wandering out of ourselves; it is a kind of voluntary death, wherein the lover dies to himself and all his own interest, not thinking of them nor caring for them any more, and minding nothing but how he may please and gratify the party whom he loves." LGSM, 52. For Scougal, Christian perfection seems more an extension of the whole process of being conformed to God, rather than looking for a sort of two stage approach with clear lines of demarcation between them.

22 Indeed, the objective of Methodists to reform society and church, and to spread abroad the message of holy living strengthen this global vision of righteousness. Also, Wesley's belief that love can conquer "all things" suggests a world-wide application of the gospel. Cf. S, 223, n.31, on holiness as "active" love to God and neighbor.

23 Wesley's "low" and "high" ways of Christian life seem to correspond to Clement's ideas of "faith" and "knowledge." Cf. HD, I, 144f. Regarding Wesley's classical, Anglican and Puritan sources, cf. S, 71-88; also JW, 9-10.

24 On Wesley as a Eudaemonist, see S, 213, n. 65; also Ibid, 222, n. 21, on the "socialization of Eudaemonism."

25 NNT, 28, n. on verse 2.

26 Cf. Wesley's translation of "blessed" as "happy" in the beatitudes. ENNT, 28f. Outler notes, "Holiness and happiness had long been linked in the Anglican (Catholic) tradition as reciprocals. . . . Wesley finds it easy and natural to presuppose the integrity of God's design for humanity (happiness) and his demand upon it (holiness)." Commenting on the phrase "holy and happy," Outler observes, "if holiness is active love toward God and neighbor, then happiness is one's enjoyment and security in such love." S, 185.

27 CPJW, 11-12.

28 Ibid, 15-16.

29 Ibid., 66.

30 S, 24.

31 Ibid., 24-5.

32 In an address to novices Merton says that the notion of abandonment to God carries over into the virtues. That is. a Christian should not be con-

cerned about the virtuous character of his actions. God puts virtue into our actions if we live in abandonment to Him. The main thing is to be sure that God is the sole content of one's life. LSHL. This is very close to Wesley's emphasis on having holy intentions.

33 TS, 52-53.

34 CPJW, 13.

35 WJW, V, 79.

36 Another problem Wesley had with monastics was their tendency toward "apophatic" theology. "Faith is sight," Wesley says, "that is, spiritual sight: and it is light, and not darkness; so that the famous Popish phrase, "The darkness of faith," is a contradiction in terms." WJW, XIII, 20. "Darkness," says Wesley, "seldom comes upon us but by our own fault." On the other hand, "heaviness" of soul may come from any number of experiences. Ibid, 27. In all likelihood, Wesley did not understand the nature of apophatic theology. In fact, it does not seem that Wesley read many, if any, of the very good spiritual writings of the Catholic and Orthodox monastics without prejudice.

Writing of the theology of Dionysius, Lossky says:

"All knowledge has as its object that which is. Now God is beyond all that exists. In order to approach Him, it is necessary to deny all that is inferior to Him, that is to say, all that which is. If in seeing God one can know what one sees, then one has not seen God in Himself but something intelligible, something which is inferior to Him. It is by unknowing (*agnosia*) that one may know Him who is above every possible object of knowledge. Proceeding by negations one ascends from the inferior degrees of being to the highest, by progressively setting aside all that can be known, in order to draw near to the Unknown in the darkness of absolute ignorance. For even as light, and especially abundance of light, renders darkness invisible; even so the knowledge of created things, and especially excess of knowledge, destroys the ignorance which is the only way by which one can attain to God in Himself." MTEC, 25.

Wesley did not trust unaided (natural) reason and, therefore, did not have much confidence in philosophy. But he did have great confidence in the witness of the Spirit. His notion that the way of Christ is light, as opposed to "darkness" or theology as negation, is understandable when one realizes that faith is its own kind of sight—a type of light—and that every believer may at least know this: that in Christ one has not only the experience of redemption but the confirmation of it. Aside from this Christian experience is limited. This is sufficient, however, to produce contentment and peace—that is to say, joy.

37 CD, 171

38 CNT, 249-50. Professor Cobb has an excellent chapter on love in SCE. Discussing the possibility of Christian love, he defines such love as "love that uniquely transcends self-centeredness in a genuine concern for the other, untainted by concern for its consequences for the lover" (135). Again,

“But for the Christian, love is the possibility of openness to the other as another and concern for him as such. It is made possible by the gift of an undeserved love, and hence it cannot seek a deserving object for its expression. The possibility of its occurrence consists in a freedom from the sickness of self preoccupation, hence, the prior relation to the other to the self cannot be relevant” (135-36).

39 CPJW, 10.

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JW for McConnell-John  
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## MYSTICISM IN AMERICAN WESLEYANISM: THOMAS UPHAM

Darius Salter

Thomas Upham (January 30, 1799-April 2, 1872) was widely respected academically. He wrote approximately twenty major works; his best known within the academic community being *A Philosophical and Practical Treatise on the Will* (1834), called by Frank Hugh Foster “one of the first original and comprehensive contributions of American scholarship to modern psychology.”<sup>1</sup> His work *Outlines of Imperfect and Disordered Mental Action* (1840), is said by Herbert W. Schneider to be the first full treatise on abnormal psychology written in the United States. Because of Upham’s work entitled *Elements of Mental Philosophy* (1841), Schneider calls him “the first great American textbook writer in mental philosophy.”<sup>2</sup> Jay Wharton Fay, in his *American Psychology Before William James* (1939), assessed that Upham anticipated “many ideas commonly supposed to be modern.”<sup>3</sup>

The historical thesis underlying my investigation of Upham’s theology is that his greatest recognition came from identifying himself with the nineteenth century holiness movement, which was largely Methodist. He was the first man to attend the highly publicized Tuesday meetings for women, directed by Phoebe Palmer, and counted her his spiritual advisor. Not only was he the first man, but as a Congregationalist the first prominent person from outside Methodism to adopt the perfectionistic teachings of the Palmers.

In a sense, Upham was the progenitor of the ecumenicity created by the American search for entire sanctification. Besides the religious works which Upham wrote,<sup>4</sup> he personally contributed to the movement by opening his own home in Maine for meetings patterned after those in New York City, and was a constant contributor to the best known holiness periodical of the time, the *Guide to Christian Perfection*. Even though the immediate cause of Thomas Upham’s experience of “entire sanctification” was the Wesleyan theology of Phoebe Palmer, the actual substance of his theology was influenced by his study of French Catholic mysticism, his Scottish common sense philosophy, the general tenor of theological change

within America (1800-1850), and his understanding of the psychological makeup of humanity.

Upham's writings are the first attempt to weigh the tenets of holiness theology against the rubrics of psychological investigation. His findings are an integral chapter in the history of the psychology of religion. Upham's *Principles of the Interior Life* (1843), may be the best attempt to stress experiential holiness theology within a psychological context in the first half of the nineteenth century. His writings are the most extensive and most gratifying contribution to spiritual nurture within all of the ante-bellum holiness movement.

In a sense, Upham was simply a product of his time. Mental philosophy, Scottish common sense philosophy, and Newtonian physics all served to provide a certitude about existence that was not unlike the certitude about spiritual life, which was inherent to holiness theology. Arminian-Wesleyan theology was not only better adapted to the academic climate of ante-bellum America, but was existentially oriented to the optimistic-economic-millenarian fervor. Understanding and confidence concerning God and his universe were intellectual precedents for the certitude within perfectionism. Transcendentalism and holiness theology were not unlike Upham's study of inner consciousness; they all focused on an immanent God, who was interested in man's harmony, happiness, and holiness.

The intense spirituality which marked Thomas Upham's writings, relied on the thought patterns of seventeenth and eighteenth century European mysticism more than any other source. More specifically, Upham drew from the French Quietists Francois de Sales, Francois Fenelon, Madame Guyon, and the Italian Catherine Adorna.<sup>5</sup> Christian mysticism, despite its frequent usage in either general theological conversation or formal writings, is a word with ground rules poorly laid and not easily agreed upon. On the one extreme, mysticism may connote an immediacy or immanence which disregards historical roots, sacraments, original sin, scriptures, means of grace, and that which is worthy of a sane Christian gospel. At the other end of the continuum, it may be loosely defined as that element of contact with God, which differentiates genuine worship and life from dead formalism.<sup>6</sup> The purpose of this essay will not be to expound on how the writer believes the word "mysticism" is to be used, but will seek to discover the particular influence which the above writers and others had on Upham, how he interpreted them, and what differences from Wesleyan holiness, if any, they imparted to his theology.

### **Sanctification Through Suffering**

Throughout his writings, Upham evidences a notable accordance with the mystics' concept of sanctification through suffering. "The crucifixion of our inward nature cannot take place without the experience of suffering."<sup>7</sup> Attractive objects that draw our attention from God must be removed from our lives by the divine, sovereign, sanctifying process.<sup>8</sup> Physical suffering and weaknesses are to be welcomed as "a means of growth and grace" and "as the forerunners of increased purity and happiness."<sup>9</sup> Upham comments on Catherine Adorna that "she held with great truth, that it is by means of such temptations and afflictions accompanied by the influence of the Holy Spirit that God, as a general thing, destroys those depraved tendencies, which constitute 'what is denominated the life of nature.'"<sup>10</sup>

Upham's definition of sin is at the heart of his sanctification theory of suffering. Sin primarily consists of desires and affections attached to wrong objects. God sovereignly changes our value structure by destroying and removing those objects on which we place inordinate value.

And this is done by a course, the reverse of that which sin has previously prompted it to take, namely, by the substitution of a right faith for a wrong one, by taking the desires from wrong objects, and by suppressing all their inordinate action. But this is a process which is not ordinarily gone through without suffering.<sup>11</sup>

Throughout Madame Guyon's biography, Upham has stayed true to her own account that suffering is crucial to the sanctifying process. This is how Madame Guyon understood her unhappy marriage, mistreatment by her mother-in-law, her physical illnesses, and attacks by the church; Upham understood them no differently. Both are in agreement with John Tauler that God would sooner "send an angel from heaven, to refine his chosen vessel through tribulations, than leave it without sufferings."<sup>12</sup> Commitment, consecration, and love to God can be best nurtured by sorrow, earthly loss, and earthly pain.<sup>13</sup> Suffering will be the means of testing our consecration and assuring us of its sincerity. Sanctification is enhanced by the crucifixion of every psychological and material prop, which depreciates reliance upon divine grace. Upham quotes from Lady Maxwell: "Put a thorn in every enjoyment, a worm in every gourd, that would either prevent our being wholly thine or any measure retard my progress in the divine life."<sup>14</sup>

### **Acquiescence**

Upham consistently maintains that acquiescence to providence and the sovereignty of God in the sanctification process gives validity to suffering. Upham defends Fenelon: "That quietude is bad which is the result of the ignorant and unbelieving pride of self; but it is not so with the quietude which is the result of an intelligent and believing acquiescence in the will of God."<sup>15</sup> Complacency and confidence in the character and administration of God are foundational for complete acquiescence in the will of God in all things.<sup>16</sup> Growth in sanctification is to a great extent evidenced by being able to accept cheerfully greater and greater crosses and burdens. Acquiescence purifies the tendencies of the will to rebel against the providence of God which is a mark of a sinful disposition.<sup>17</sup> Right feelings about adverse circumstances are unmistakable indications of the extent of our sanctification.<sup>18</sup>

For Upham, acquiescence in the laws of providence are just as important as obeying the law of scripture; the two are in agreement.<sup>19</sup> We cannot lay claim to the God of scripture without accepting the arrangements of providence, of which God, excepting sin, is the chief and only originator. God's direction applies to all events, except sin, and at that point, there is simply divine permission. "We must then sacrifice the riches, privileges and gifts, both spiritual and temporal, to the arrangements of Providence, in order that we may retain and enjoy, what is infinitely more valuable, the God of Providence."<sup>20</sup> But even though sin does not come from God, God directly uses the wickedness of others to be the instrumentality of our suf-

fering, just as if it were God inflicting the blow.<sup>21</sup> There is a sovereign will in control of all events whether great or small, and affection for those events, positive or negative, is tantamount to affection for the God behind them.<sup>22</sup> Upham clearly states the relationship of providence and holy affections:

The law of Providence requires the modification of the feelings as strictly and as truly as the written law; so that we may lay it down as a principle, that the law of Providence must regulate, to a considerable extent, not only our outward acts, but our affections. It is Providence which places before us the objects we most love; and, what is more, it indicates the degree of our love, and the ways of its manifestation. And, on the other hand, the same Providence indicates to us the objects which should excite our disapprobation, and also the degree and manner of our disapprobation.<sup>23</sup>

Wesley also emphasized the necessity of providential suffering. Though it may not always be understood, it promotes spiritual keenness and growth, may be a form of chastisement, and can always be used for profit. To Lady Maxwell in 1769, he wrote: “You have accordingly found pain, sickness, bodily weakness, to be real goods; as bringing you nearer and nearer to the fountain of all happiness and holiness.”<sup>24</sup> Pain serves the purpose of cleansing us from remaining sinful affections, and from stifling temptations, which would otherwise prevent the perfect work of holiness. There is, likewise, the indication that this infliction is directly imposed by God because of his determined purpose to honor that person through his hallowing purpose.<sup>25</sup> One of the clearest, concise statements of the relation of suffering to Christian perfection, was written by Wesley to Mary Bishop in 1777:

We have now abundant proof that very many are made better by sickness; unless one would rather say in sickness. This is one of the grand means which God employs for that purpose. In sickness, many are convinced of sin, many converted to God, and still more confirmed in the ways of God and brought onward to perfection.<sup>26</sup>

### **Dark Night of the Soul and Indifference as Opposed to Assurance**

Until this point, most of what has been said would be agreeable to Wesley and subsequent nineteenth century holiness theology. But the hallmark of Wesleyan holiness has been moderation, while one of the chief characteristics of Quietism has been logical conclusions. The two logical conclusions of acquiescence to providence have been the extreme positions of the Quietist principle of “indifference” and the “dark night of the soul.” The ultimate spiritual state for Quietism was not assurance but indifference, later to be theologically designated as disinterested benevolence. The French Mystics expound this doctrine as consistently as any other single group within the history of the church.

Upham does not remain uninfluenced by these two stoical and mystical characteristics. The philosophical premise behind Upham’s disinterested love is that “right love is love precisely conformed to its object in all the

facts and relations of the object, so far as the object is susceptible of being known.”<sup>27</sup> God contains everything that is loving or perfect and thus is deserving of pure love.<sup>28</sup> It will be a love that terminates in the object loved, rather than the person who loves.<sup>29</sup> Upham argues that perfect love is not truly self-sacrificing if it has any regard to its reward.<sup>30</sup> It never thinks of what consolation may come in the relationship of divine union, because “it thinks more of what God is than what God gives.”<sup>31</sup> Thus, there is no distinct teaching in all of Upham’s writings concerning assurance or the direct witness of the Spirit.

Robert Tuttle argues that Wesley completely bypassed the mystical concept of “the dark night of the soul.” He quotes Wesley’s premise that “so long as they believe, and walk after the spirit, neither God condemns them, nor their own heart.”<sup>32</sup> And, again from Letters, Wesley writes: “It is no more necessary that we should ever lose it (the sense of God’s love) than it is necessary we should omit duty or commit sin.”<sup>33</sup> Wesley found it was difficult to divorce emotions from obedience or non obedience to the Holy Spirit. In order to protect his doctrine of assurance, he perceived the emotional state and spiritual health to be vitally related. The following excerpt from one of Wesley’s letters demonstrates the attention which, unlike the mystics, he paid to the emotions.

What is the difference between ‘the frame of my mind and the state of my soul?’ Is there the difference of an hair’s breadth? I will not affirm it. If there be any at all, perhaps it is this: the frame may mean a single, transient sensation; the state, a more complicated and lasting sensation; something which we habitually feel. By frame, some may mean fleeting passions; by state, rooted tempers. But I do not know that we have any authority to use the terms thus or to distinguish one from the other. He whose mind is in a good frame is certainly a good man as long as it so continues. I would no more require you to cease from judging of your state by your frame of mind than I would require you to cease from breathing.<sup>34</sup>

The Quietists were at opposite positions with Wesley at the points of both darkness and sheer, naked faith. Darkness for the Quietists, and at times for Upham, is preferable to assurance, even if it could be avoided in spite of circumstances. The “dark night of the soul” is much more profitable to spiritual development than the assurance of faith. There is an indifference to everything and especially the assurance of salvation.<sup>35</sup> In fact, the way of faith will be directly opposed to the way of assurance. Madame Guyon comments on the conversion of Father La Combe from light, knowledge, ardor, assurance, sentiments; to the poor, low, despised path of faith and of nakedness.<sup>36</sup> The following from Madame Guyon is in marked contrast to the triumphant death bed scenes of John Wesley and Francis Asbury:

Many people have been astonished to see very holy persons, who have lived like angels die in terrible anguish, and even despairing of their salvation. It is because they have died in this mystical death; and as God wished to promote their advancement, because they were near their end, He redoubled their

sorrow. The work of stripping the soul must be left wholly to God.<sup>37</sup>

### **The Will**

Historically, Wesleyans have no problem with the equating of consecration without reserve with the negation of self-will. Upham states that those who aim at the highest results of the divine life ought not to have and cannot have a will of their own, in distinction from and at variance with the divine will.<sup>38</sup> The aspect of the human will that needs to die, is the part which is “resting in the origin of its movement on the limited and depraved basis of personal interest, and out of harmony with the will of God.”<sup>39</sup> The language of Upham places the will at the heart of Madame Guyon’s sanctification experience. She not only desired to be holy, but resolved to be holy. “Her will was in the thing,—the will, which constitutes in its action the unity of the whole mind’s action, and which is the true and only certain exponent of the inward moral and religious condition.”<sup>40</sup>

Upham takes the spiritual development of the will one step further. The affections can be so sanctified that doing the will of God is somewhat automatic, “a life springing up and operative within,” the will of God done “quietly, freely, naturally, continually.”<sup>41</sup> In a sense, the sanctified will no longer needs “the constraints of conscience, because being moved by perfect love, it fulfills the will of God, and does right without constraint.”<sup>42</sup> The sanctified individual does not so much rely on conscience, but is said to act by nature, and not by constraint; by a self moved life at the center, and not by a compulsive instigation, which has no higher officer than to guard and compel the centre.<sup>43</sup> Still the language can safely be said to be consistent with Wesleyan teaching. In speaking of someone justified but not sanctified Wesley wrote:

His will was not wholly melted down into the will of God: But although in general he could say, “ I come ‘not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me,’ “ yet now and then nature rebelled, and he could not clearly say, “Lord, not as I will, but as thou wilt.” His whole soul is now consistent with itself; there is no jarring stirring.<sup>44</sup>

But when the human will becomes so absorbed in the divine, that persons become oblivious to natural desire, the case is overstated. One wonders if Upham is consistent with the Wesleyan position that sin is primarily an act of the will. He writes: “The life of faith, which cherishes the love of God, as the supreme inward principle allows of no desire, no emotion, no passion, which is inconsistent with this love.”<sup>45</sup> Upham does not censor Madame Guyon when she says that “nothing entered into my imagination but what the Lord was pleased to bring.”<sup>46</sup>

Upham gives the impression that our natural desires are so automatically fulfilled doing the will of God, that we are not even conscious of human or earthly needs.<sup>47</sup> Upham often makes the distinction between a legitimate self love and selfishness, but at other times, he implies that there is an indifference to self as well.<sup>48</sup> Desires are so distinguished that the circumstances of life, whether oppressive or delightful, adverse or favorable, are all the same.<sup>49</sup> In describing the sanctified life: “Whether he suffers or

does not suffer, the throne of peace is erected in the center of his soul. Wretchedness and joy are alike. He welcomes sorrow, even the deepest sorrow of the heart, with as warm a gush of gratitude, as he welcomes happiness, if the will of God is accomplished.”<sup>50</sup>

The above language sounds more like some of Wesley’s rash statements at the beginning of his ministry than his more mature assessments of spiritual experience, which he made in later years. In 1741, Wesley wrote that the sanctified are “free from self-will, as desiring nothing but the holy and perfect will of God, not supplies in want, not ease in pain, or life, or death, or any creature; but continually crying in their inmost soul, ‘Father, thy will be done.’“ In 1777, he commented on the above: “This is too strong. Our Lord Himself desired ease in pain. He asked for it, only with resignation: ‘Not as I will, I desire, but as thou wilt.’ “<sup>51</sup>

### **Temptation**

Upham’s above depreciation of the desires in favor of an assimilation of the human psyche into the divine mind, lends a quite non-Wesleyan understanding to his theory of temptation. Upham is clear with both the Wesleyan and Oberlin perfectionists, that man in whatever spiritual state he may be, is susceptible to temptation. In an article on “Peculiar Dangers Attending a State of Holiness,” Upham discusses increased vulnerability to temptation because of lack of awareness.<sup>52</sup> He gives a helpful psychological suggestion in overcoming temptation, i.e., instead of giving direct resistance to the temptation, keep the mind focused on God in prayerful trust.<sup>53</sup> There is also a helpful distinction between evil thoughts and thoughts of evil, the latter which are not sinful because there is no consent or feeling added to them.<sup>54</sup> But when Upham advocates that when temptation moves past the intellect into the affections and there is the least amount of desire for that object which is out of God’s will, it is sin, he makes a serious blunder; “if temptations advance in their influence beyond the intellect, and take effect in the desires and will, prompting them to action when they should not act at all, or prompting them to a prohibited and inordinate degree of action when they are permitted to act, they are always attended with sin.”<sup>55</sup>

Upham’s explanation of the temptation of Christ is that the offers of Satan were merely propositions and there was no desire in the mind of Christ attached to them. Upham’s intellectual theory of temptation, when compared to most concepts of inner spiritual warfare, is no temptation at all. Temptation for Upham does not mean that an act or object has to be presented to the mind which is actually appealing, but simply that there is a possibility for the will making a choice in regard to the proposition.<sup>56</sup> Merritt Caldwell correctly points out that the practical application of Upham’s theory is that the automatic horror at objects of temptation rules out the spiritual contest and there is “no other alternative but loathing or sin.”<sup>57</sup>

Upham had somewhat removed the liability to and danger of sinning from the Christian pilgrimage. But then at times, Wesley exhibited superhuman security in the matter himself; when using the illustration of a solicitous woman in clarifying how temptation is concurrent with sanctification: “But in the instant I shrink back and I feel no desire to lust

at all, of which I can be as sure as that my hand is cold or hot.”<sup>58</sup> At other times, he seemed more realistic and demonstrated progression of thought. When describing the sanctified life in 1741, he stated: “They are in one sense, freed from temptation; for though numberless temptations fly about them, yet they trouble them not.”<sup>59</sup> He later responded in 1777: “Sometimes they do not; at other times they do, and that grievously.”<sup>60</sup> The historical Wesleyan interpretation has been that temptations are not real unless there is affinity between the enticement and natural desire, and there is an ensuing struggle between the desire and the moral ought.

### **Divine Union**

Even a casual perusal of the mystics will clue us as to why Upham suggested a third stage of spiritual experience or work of grace which he designated “Divine Union.” Nowhere does Upham state this belief in a third stage of spiritual experience more than in the following:

Divine union is to be regarded as a state of the soul different from that of mere sanctification both because it is subsequent to it in time and sustains the relation of effect; and also because its existence always implies two or more persons or beings, who are subjects of it.<sup>61</sup>

Although neither Upham nor Wesley ever taught permanent sanctification, there is a confident attainment of grace by the Bowdoin professor of which Wesley, at least in his later years, would have been wary. The state of divine union is a static concept, which does not lend itself to a dynamic ongoing relationship with and reliance on Christ. Wesley saw the danger of thinking in terms of spiritual experience as a plateau which had been reached, and once and for all, conquered. A minute of the 1770 Conference, is crucial for retaining a concept of dynamic sanctification; and correcting any misconception that a single work of grace wrought in a moment of time, will unconditionally validate one’s spiritual security:

Does not talking . . . of a justified or sanctified state, tend to mislead men, almost naturally leading them to trust what was done in one moment. Whereas we are every moment pleasing or displeasing to God according to our present inward tempers and outward behaviour.<sup>62</sup>

### **Critical Distance from the Mystics**

But the foregoing discussion should not imply that Upham does not at all keep a critical distance from the mystics. He often explains or qualifies exaggerated or overly-simplistic language. Concerning Madame Guyon, he wrote:

I am aware that some of the methods she took seem to imply an undue degree of violence to principles of our nature, which are given us for wise purposes, and which in their appropriate action are entirely innocent.<sup>63</sup>

Such corrections are in keeping with Upham’s understanding of the psychological drives and human propensities which can be used for the glory of God while at the same time maintaining their distinctive purposes.



When Madame Guyon speaks of a will lost or annihilated, Upham argues that if such language was actually fact, moral agency would be destroyed. At this point, Upham is expressing, in psychological language, the Wesleyan assertion that the “bent to sinning” which clings to our will, can be crucified. The will’s

. . . original life such as it had when it came from the hand of God is not necessary to destroy; but it is necessary, indispensably necessary to destroy all that fake and vitiating life, which sin, availing itself of the immense influence of the law of habit, has incorporated so strongly with the will’s original nature that they now seem to be one.<sup>64</sup>

Upham asserted that any union between God and man that would imply physical union would endanger our personality and moral accountability.<sup>65</sup> There needs to be a modified interpretation of those passages of scripture which speak of the union of the regenerated with the mind of God.<sup>66</sup> What is to be recognized is not a union of substance or essence, but of morality, spirituality, and religion.<sup>67</sup> But on the other hand, a person can testify to self-annihilation, though not literally, because he “knows enough of himself as an individual to know that he is not his own, that his soul has become, a living fountain which takes its use from God, and flows out to all the boundless variety of existences.”<sup>68</sup>

Upham was most often correcting or qualifying Quietists’ statements concerning loss of desire or of the will. He paraphrased Catherine Adorna’s claim that she was without desire, by saying “that the sanctified or holy soul is a soul so united to God by conformity with the divine will as to be without desire; that is to say without any desire of its own, or any desire separate from the will of God.”<sup>69</sup> In fact, as human beings, we do not even have the right to not desire our own good or to act in a way which would be destructive to our well being.<sup>70</sup> Loss of will does not differentiate us from our fellow men in essence, and neither does it mean that we cannot have a strong energetic will, but only that our will cannot be at variance with God’s will.<sup>71</sup> The will shall cease to act on the depraved basis of personal interest, but the will itself will remain, as it is psychologically essential to human existence.<sup>72</sup>

But Upham’s corrections of the Seventeenth Century mystics did not completely satisfy his spiritual mentor. Phoebe Palmer was of the firm opinion that Upham was too extreme in his treatment of the will. She thought his “death of the will” to be an over-statement and unrealistic in view of true spirituality and scriptural teaching. Palmer argued that those who thought the life of nature to be extinct, would be more susceptible to the onslaughts of Satan. Because self, human nature and the individual will has been completely absorbed into the divine, then the Christian will not be on guard against temptation.<sup>73</sup> The issue at stake was loss of self-identity, i.e., completely annihilating the human traits and limitations.

There is plenty in Upham’s writings to counteract fanatic irrationality in terms of spiritual experience. Upham’s teachings on the propensities is enough to tell us that a person after sanctification will retain a strong sense of self. Appetites and desires are legitimate in themselves, and it is only when the love of self or self interests are not controlled by the Holy Spirit,

that they become inordinate. Upham tersely reminds us that “the scriptures require us to become Christian; but they do not require us to cease to be men.”<sup>74</sup>

Upham defines what he means by death of the will in that the phrase suggests we cannot have a will of our own; our own will cannot be at variance with the divine will.<sup>75</sup> He was too much of a psychologist and too concerned with the integrity of humanity to turn people into robots. He qualified this teaching by stating “. . . man’s will can never die. A will is essential to man’s nature, as it is to the nature of every moral being.”<sup>76</sup> The sense that the will must die is that it, through the power of grace, must be harmonized with God’s will and must cease to operate “on the limited and depraved basis of personal interest.”<sup>77</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Melvin Dieter’s defense of Upham in the face of Phoebe Palmer’s criticism, needs to be further explicated. Concerning Palmer’s charge that Upham’s “divine union” moved beyond the clear teachings of scripture, Dieter states: “A careful reading of Upham’s writings does not seem to bear out the intensity of these fears or the continuing charge of ‘heresies.’”<sup>76</sup> The question was not so much with heresy (though Upham was charged with it), as with extremism of language, which needed to be qualified. Upham was at times contradictory when he tried to be both psychologically true to reality and simultaneously use mystical language. For the most part, the contradictions can be explained away. But the mentality that wants theology meticulously, consistently, and systematically presented, may call for Upham to do a lot of explaining. Indeed, the concepts of indifference, inactivity, absorption, etc., may have been too extreme for nineteenth century holiness exponents, even with a lot of qualifying. Upham left himself open, but then again, he was not all that concerned about being on guard.

Even though Wesley abhorred much of the mystics’ practice, there was an intimacy with God and a discipline of devotion which he inherited from them and never lost. Experiential piety and a faith beyond philosophical speculation were streams that flowed from the mystics to Wesley, and subsequently to the holiness movement. The radical “death” and “crucifixion” language used by Wesley and the American exponents of entire sanctification was not unlike the spiritual descriptions of the seventeenth century European mystics. Upham fused them together in a manner that demonstrated a good deal of agreement and compatibility. In a sense, Upham’s writings are Wesley’s spiritual discoveries from the mystics (1725-38), coming home to roost. Whether John Wesley would have been somewhat chagrined, is another question.

At the core of both Wesleyan perfectionism and Madame Guyon’s mysticism was the religion of the heart. Upham’s introspective psychology was easily adapted to both. Each aimed at total commitment of the “will” to God and each strove for an intimacy with God, which was beyond nominal Christianity and sheer rationalism. The holiness movement, at least for Upham, epitomized in contemporary form that which he had read about in a century gone by.

## Notes

1 Frank Hugh Foster, *A Genetic History of the New England Theology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1907), p. 249.

2 Herbert W. Schneider, *A History of American Philosophy*, Second Edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), p. 210.

3 Jay Wharton Fay, *American Psychology Before William James* (New York: Octagon Books, 1966), p. 186.

4 The most popular of these was *Life, Religious Opinion and Experiences of Madame Guyon*, 37 editions and *Principles of the Interior or Hidden Life*, 18 editions. Also, *Christ in the Soul*, *Divine Union*, *Inward Divine Guidance*, *The Life of Faith in Three Parts*, *Madame Catherine Adorna*, and Ratzon, *Discipline or the Constitution of the Congregational Churches*.

5 Other mystics whom Upham quotes from are William Law, George Fox, Thomas á Kempis, and Jacob Boehme.

6 “No deeply religious man is without a touch of mysticism; and no mystic can be other than religious, in the psychological, if not in the theological sense of the word.” Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1961), p. 70.

7 Thomas C. Upham, *The Life of Faith in Three Parts* (Boston: Waite, Pierce and Company, 1845), p. 244.

8 Thomas C. Upham, *Divine Union* (Boston: George C. Rand and Avery, 1856), p. 168. 9\*\*Ibid., p. 394.

10 Thomas C. Upham, *Madame Catherine Adorna* (Boston: Waite and Pierce, 1845), p. 179.

11 Upham, *Divine Union*, p. 168.

12 Thomas C. Upham, *Life, Religious Opinion and Experiences of Madame Guyon* (London: H. R. Allenson, Ltd., 1908), Volume II, p. 365.

13 Thomas C. Upham, *American Cottage Life* (Boston: American Tract Society, 1850), p. 127.

14 Thomas C. Upham, *Principles of the Interior or Hidden Life* (Boston: Waite and Pierce, 1845), p. 222.

15 Upham, *Madame Guyon*, Volume II, p. 330.

16 Upham, *Interior Life*, p. 147.

17 Upham, *Divine Union*, p. 166.

18 Ibid

19 Ibid., p. 196.

20 Ibid, p. 210.

21 Upham, *Madame Guyon*, Volume II, p. 43.

22 Upham, *American Cottage Life*, p. 176.

- 23 Upham, *Divine Union*, p. 197.
- 24 John Wesley, *Letters of the Rev. John Wesley*, edited by John Telford. (London: Epworth Press, 1931), Volume V, p. 134.
- 25 Ibid, Volume, I, p. 103.
- 26 Ibid, Volume VI, p. 279.
- 27 Upham, *Interior Life*, p. 111.
- 28 Ibid, p. 113.
- 29 Ibid., p. 111.
- 30 Ibid, pp. 149-150.
- 31 Ibid., p. 156.
- 32 Robert G. Tuttle, Jr., *John Wesley: His Life and Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), p. 339.
- 33 Ibid, p. 340.
- 34 Wesley, Letters Vol. V, p. 200.
- 35 Francois Fenelon, *Fenelon's Letters to Men and Women*, edited by Derek Stanford (London: Peter Owen Ltd., 1957), p. 19.
- 36 Madame Guyon, *The Exemplary Life of the Pious Lady Guion, translated from her own account by Thomas Digby Brooke* (Philadelphia: Joseph Crukshank, 1804), p. 281.
- 37 Madame Guyon, *Spiritual Torrents*, translated from the Paris edition of 1790 by A. W. Marston (London: H. R. Allenson, Ltd.), p. 64.
- 38 Upham, *Life of Faith*, p. 211.
- 39 Upham, *Divine Union*, p. 157.
- 40 Upham, *Madame Guyon*, Volume I, p. 109.
- 41 Upham, *Madame Guyon*, Volume I, p. 186.
- 42 Upham, *Divine Union*, p. 391.
- 43 Ibid, p. 392.
- 44 John Wesley, *Works* (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1872. Reprinted Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, no date given), Volume VI, p. 489.
- 45 Upham, *Life of Faith*, p. 456.
- 46 Upham, *Madame Guyon*, Volume I, p. 338.
- 47 Upham, *Madame Guyon*, Volume II, p. 165.
- 48 Ibid, p. 228.
- 49 Ibid., p. 366.
- 50 Upham, *Interior Life*, p. 109.
- 51 Wesley, *Works*, Volume XI, p. 379.
- 52 Thomas C. Upham, "Peculiar Dangers Attending a State of Holiness," *Advocate of Christian Holiness*, (July, 1872), p. 13.

53 Upham, *Life of Faith*, p. 431.

54 Upham, *Interior Life*, p. 161.

55 Ibid., pp. 157-158.

56 Ibid, p. 159.

57 Merritt Caldwell, *The Philosophy of Christian Perfection* (Philadelphia: Sorin and Ball, 1848), p. 141. Upham is a better psychologist than theologian, but this is one point where expertise in the former does not enhance the latter. In other words, Upham's theory of temptation does not make sense in view of his psychology on conscience. "The class of mental states, which are termed emotions, are followed not merely by desires, but also by another class, distinct from desires, and yet sustaining the same relation of proximity to the will, which, for want of a single term, we have been obliged to denominate feelings of obligation. Desires are founded on the natural emotions, or those which involve what is pleasurable or painful, while obligatory feelings are exclusively based on emotions of a different kind, viz., moral emotions, or emotions of moral approval and disapproval. The obligative states of mind, although they are easily distinguished by our consciousness from desires or the decisive states of mind, agree with the latter in being in direct contact with the voluntary power, and not infrequently these two classes of mental stand before the will in direct and fierce opposition to each other." "Theory of Temptation," *Methodist Quarterly Review*, Volume 24 (1842), p. 153.

58 Wesley, *Works*, Volume XI, p. 419.

59 Wesley, *Works*, Volume XI, pp. 379. 380.

60 Ibid., p. 380.

61 Upham, *Catherine Adorna*, p. 236. John Tauler spoke of three phases of personal life: the sensuous nature, the reason, and the third way, the spiritual life of pure substance of the soul. The number three dominates the writing of Hugo de Saint Victor. In contemplation, there are three kinds: suspense, silence, sleep; and of silence, three stages (which sounds similar to Madame Guyon), the silence of lips, thought, and reason. Ignatius of Loyola explicated the three states of humility; the third is the way of the perfect in which the Christian's will "is completely set upon one object, for which they easily abandon everything else—to make their lives harmonize with the life of Christ." "

62 Wesley, *Works*, Volume VIII, p. 338.

63 Upham, *Madame Guyon*, Volume I, p. 84.

64 Ibid, p. 133.

65 Upham, *Interior Life*, p. 374.

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid.

68 Upham, *Absolute Religion*, p. 264.

69 Upham, *Catherine Adorna*, p. 92.

70 Ibid., p. 93.

71 Upham, *Life of Faith*, pp. 210-211.

72 Upham, *Divine Union*, p. 157.

73 Richard Wheatley, *Life and Letters of Mrs. Phoebe Palmer* (New York: W. C. Palmer, Jr., 1876), pp. 518-523.

74 Upham, *Interior Life*, p. 211.

75 Upham, *Life of Faith*, p. 211.

76 Ibid, p. 157.

77 Ibid

78 Melvin E. Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century* (Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1980), p. 53.

**WHAT THE HOLY SPIRIT  
CAN AND CANNOT DO:  
THE AMBIGUITIES  
OF PHOEBE PALMER'S  
THEOLOGY OF EXPERIENCE**

Charles Edward White

Phoebe Palmer played an important role in the sanctification of Thomas Upham, and they maintained a cordial relationship throughout their lives,<sup>1</sup> but in 1851, Mrs. Palmer wrote Professor Upham a strongly worded letter denying that the Holy Spirit had done what Upham claimed he had done. This paper will discuss Mrs. Palmer's certainty about the activities of the Paraclete. It hopes that in so doing it will shed light on a neglected area of women's theology and spirituality.

Phoebe Palmer never thought of herself as a theologian. She did not like "theology": to her it signified a complex, man-made substitute for God's simple truth. Theology had long kept her from understanding God's word:

I was, for years, hindered in spiritual progress by theological hair-splitting and technicalities, and it was not until I resolved to let all these things alone, and take the simple, naked word of God, . . . that the steady light of truth beamed upon my heart.<sup>2</sup>

Mrs. Palmer loved to picture herself as a simple believer in contrast to the erudite theologians. She said, "It has been my aim to avoid most carefully everything like a display of theological technicalities. . . . I have aimed to follow the simple Bible mode of teaching."<sup>3</sup> She did not waste her time in abstruse or otiose discussions, but simply obeyed Christ by witnessing to the truth:

. . . we have never felt it [our] duty to sermonize in any way, by dividing and subdividing with metaphysical hair-splitting in theology. We have nothing to do more than Mary, when by the command of the Head of the Church, she proclaimed a risen Jesus to her brethren-. . . [John 20:17-18]<sup>4</sup>

Despite these disclaimers, Phoebe Palmer was a theologian. If she were not a systematic theologian like Calvin, an occasional theologian like Luther, or

even a polemic theologian like Wesley, still she was a popular teacher of Biblical truth, whose various ideas may be fitted into a consistent pattern. That pattern may not qualify as academic theology, but Mrs. Palmer and thousands of her followers found it adequate to explain their faith.

Mrs. Palmer never published an analysis of how she arrived at theological formulations, but scattered through her writings are many comments about the various ways to discover God's truth. From these occasional remarks, one may induce the method of her theology. Not surprisingly for one who imbibed Methodism with her mother's milk, her method turns out to be the Wesleyan quadrilateral of Scripture, reason, experience, and tradition.

## **1 Scripture**

Phoebe Palmer's theology began with the Bible. As an eleven-year-old child, she had written a poem claiming God's guidance through His word,<sup>5</sup> and she returned to this theme in the introduction to her first book. There she asserted that "the BIBLE was the all commanding chart by which the propriety of each successive step [in her spiritual journey] was determined."<sup>6</sup>

Phoebe could trust the Bible as her chart through life because it was the authoritative word of God. The foundational tenet of her theology was that when the Bible speaks, God speaks. She said that human language failed to express how deeply she was convinced that "the Bible is the living voice of the living God." Mrs. Palmer believed:

The Bible was as much the WORD OF GOD as though she could hear Him speaking in tones of loudest thunder every moment, or as though she could see it written in a sign arching the heavens.<sup>8</sup>

Phoebe was fond of repeating, "The voice of the Scriptures is the voice of the Holy Ghost."<sup>9</sup> Actually, Mrs. Palmer thought the voice of the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures was even more reliable than a heavenly voice. She pointed out that Peter heard the heavenly voice at the Transfiguration, and yet called the Scripture "the more sure word of prophecy" (2 Peter 1:17-19).<sup>10</sup> To her, the word of God in its inscripturated form was as valid as if "the Word were again made flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).<sup>11</sup> Every word in the Bible was given at the "express dictation of the Holy Spirit" and thus, the Scripture was "the One Infallible standard" to which believers must subject "our own and all human opinions."<sup>12</sup>

## **2 Reason**

After the Scripture itself, the second locus of theological authority for Phoebe Palmer was human reason. She taught that the proper way to learn how to think and act was first to ask the Holy Spirit to teach through the Scripture, and then to urge rational hermeneutical rules to interpret that Scripture. Only the Bible, reasonably interpreted, could be trusted to confirm or deny one's impressions of the Holy Spirit's leading. Nothing which was absurd or unreasonable could be part of God's truth, so people should use their common sense when trying to determine the Bible's meaning: "There are no . . . inconsistencies in the Bible, and sensible people



are not required to go beyond their senses and believe there are.”<sup>13</sup> God is not unreasonable, so He never contradicts Himself, or commands us to do what is impossible.<sup>14</sup> Because God is reasonable, and because He is the source of the believer’s mind, Christians may trust their regenerated intellects:

I saw that the God of nature, as the giver of every good gift, had given me judgment, the power to perceive, through a sanctified medium, whatsoever things were pure and lovely. That grace did not take away my power to reason, but turned it into a more refined, sanctified channel, and then required the full use of a renovated intellect.<sup>15</sup>

### **3 Experience**

Discovering theological truth by examining one’s own spiritual experiences and learning from those of others was the third part of Phoebe Palmer’s theological method. She revealed her own convictions about the value of experience in a paragraph she and Walter wrote about Bishop Hamline: “Lastly, Mr. H[amline] was convinced that to know anything satisfactory of religion, we must experience it. To speculate upon it is like laboring to ascertain the flavor of a fruit without tasting it.”<sup>16</sup> She taught that the things which people learn from experience were “more deeply written on the heart than what is learned by mere precept.”<sup>17</sup> Phoebe wrote books relating her own spiritual experience, and published biographies which explained the experience of others because “[theological] difficulties, in many minds, may be met by observing how other minds, similarly constituted, were helped out of [their] difficulties.”<sup>18</sup>

Even more than her comments about the value of experience, or the books she published about it, the existence of the Tuesday Meeting for the Promotion of Holiness shows the value Phoebe Palmer placed on experience as a teacher of theological truth. After singing, prayer, and some brief introductory remarks, the meeting was opened for anyone there to relate her or his spiritual experience. Sometimes seekers told of their uncompleted search for holiness, and requested those present to pray for them. At other times, the sanctified would explain how they had received the blessing, and tell about the difference it made in their lives.<sup>19</sup> Often the simple testimony of one who found full salvation would cut through the clouds of perplexity that surrounded others. Mrs. Palmer related the story of “a teacher in Israel of some celebrity, and a professor in a neighboring literary institution” who was sanctified after listening to the testimony of the timid wife of a minister. “Never,” he said, “did I see the simplicity of the way to be saved from all sin, as by hearing the simple testimony of Mrs. .”<sup>20</sup> Besides holding the Tuesday Meeting in her home, Mrs. Phoebe Palmer was careful to promote “social meetings” for the relation of experience whenever she held revival meetings. She also devoted a section of the Guide to Holiness each month to publishing the testimonies given at the Tuesday Meeting in an effort to widen their influence.<sup>21</sup>

While her practice of holding social meetings and publishing books of testimonies shows that Mrs. Palmer thought that experience was a powerful way to discover theological truth, her explicit teaching warns of its dangers. If experience were not tested against the standard of the Bible,

it could lead to false conclusions. Mrs. Palmer blamed much of her early confusion about her spiritual state on “the fault of taking the feelings and experience of others as a standard for my own, in place of going to the word of the Lord.”<sup>22</sup> Especially when she heard others speak of their assurance of pardon or of their reception of sanctification, she was convinced that they had been given some “luminous” revelation which “constrained [them] irresistibly to believe.” Because she had received no such revelation, she became uncertain and depressed about her spiritual state.<sup>23</sup> Only when Phoebe resolved to disregard her feelings, and to take the Bible as her authority did she begin to make progress in her spiritual life.<sup>24</sup> She thus concluded that God was “persuasively directing her mind away from the uncertain traditions and example of the fallible creature, to the only INFALLIBLE STANDARD- the ONE STANDARD of the only wise God,” that is, the Bible.<sup>25</sup> She was fond of repeating that the Bible must be the Christian’s authority, and not the experiences of fallible men.<sup>26</sup>

The irony of Mrs. Palmer’s position about experience is that experience taught her that Scripture is superior to experience. She seems to be trapped in the logical cul-de-sac of arguing on the basis of experience that experience may not always be valid. Like one who reasons to the conclusion that we may not trust reason, this would be an absurdity. Phoebe Palmer’s position is not absurd, however. True, experience did lead her to Scripture, but her reliance on Scripture was not dependent on her experience. When Phoebe learned that she could not depend on experience, she turned to the Scripture for her authority. Convinced of its divine origin, she accepted its truth as the axiom of her existence, and began to rebuild the structure of her faith on this foundation. It was as if she had been following a greenhorn guide through some unknown territory. The guide often misled her and finally, they both became hopelessly lost. The guide then admitted that the task was too difficult for him and pulled a map from his pocket. “You can’t always trust me,” he confessed, “but you can trust this map.” Phoebe was not so foolish as to trust the map on the word of the unreliable guide, but when she saw for herself the signature of the chief surveyor on it, she decided to follow its directions.

Mrs. Palmer was careful to subordinate experience to Scripture and reason because of the ill effect their inversion had had on her own life, and also because of a new doctrine which arose among some of her followers. She had taught the traditional Wesleyan doctrine of two distinct “works of grace” justification and sanctification. Some of her followers, however, claimed to have experienced a “third work of grace.”<sup>27</sup>

In its quietistic form, taught by Thomas Upham, this doctrine holds that the third work of grace annihilates the human will, and produces a holy indifference in which the heart is free from all personal desires and passions: “We have no pleasure of our own, we have no desires of our own, we have no will of our own.”<sup>28</sup> Temptation therefore loses all its appeal, and only the will of God has any attraction for the Christian in this state. No desire that does not come from God will arise in the heart of the perfected one. Thus Satan can no longer subtly seduce the one who had gone beyond sanctification by placing unholy longings in the heart. Instead, he “must come boldly up and make his attack face to face, as he did in the temptation

of the blessed Savior.” And Satan may expect similar results, Upham implies.<sup>29</sup>

Mrs. Palmer learned of Upham’s ideas from an article he wrote entitled “Divine Guidance.” She disagreed vigorously with his idea of the death of the will and reported that reading the article pained her heart, and made her head ache so severely that it took her several sittings to finish it. Evidently she had not known of his views until she read this article in the spring of 1851, but the concept of a work beyond sanctification which annihilates the human will had appeared in both his earlier books on holiness written in the mid-1840s.<sup>30</sup>

The antinomian form of this doctrine, taught by some unnamed disciples of Phoebe Palmer, began with Upham’s assertion that every desire in the perfected Christian’s heart comes from God. They went on to argue that sin is impossible because the believer is united with God. If sin is no longer possible, ordinary spiritual discipline is unnecessary. Because every desire comes from God, anything which attracts the believer is right. Thus the believer is free to do anything she or he desires. If such a Christian feels an attraction for an action which breaks one of the Ten Commandments, that believer could take the desired action, confident that God is leading into “sin” for His own greater glory, and that He actually approves of the deed.<sup>31</sup>

Mrs. Palmer pronounced her anathema on both forms of the “third work of grace” doctrine. In response to Upham’s published views, she wrote the Professor and his wife a personal letter, gently pointing out the errors she thought he had made. She did not reject his words about union with God, rather her gravamen was that he had gone beyond Scripture in speaking about the death of the will. She inquired, “Now, where does the Bible speak of ‘the death of the will?’”<sup>32</sup> She went to argue that the Scripture gives no instance of one who experienced this level of spirituality; even Jesus Himself had a human will which was never dead, but always “in subjection to the will of His Father.”<sup>33</sup>

Mrs. Palmer knew that one of Upham’s sources for the doctrine of the death of the will was the writings of the Roman Catholic mystics, such as Madame Guyon and Archbishop Fenelon. She argued that the experience of these writers is suspect, because of their neglect of the Bible. Those who look to the mystics, instead of to the Bible, for guidance “have missed the mark,” she said. She was equally suspicious about private revelations from God as another source of this new doctrine: “The Holy Spirit never takes us beyond the written Word.” Citing the traditional proof text for the closing of the canon, Revelation 22:18, “If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues written in the book,” she argued that the Holy Spirit no longer gives authoritative revelations. Because Satan can transform himself into an angel of light [2 Corinthians 11:14], one must test every experience against the standard of Scripture. “How exceedingly dangerous,” she warned, “not to bring every new phase in experience to the law and the testimony.” Besides all this, Phoebe is most concerned that Upham’s quietistic form of the third blessing will lead others to accept the doctrine in its antinomian form.<sup>34</sup>

Professor Upham does not appear to have been totally convinced by Mrs. Palmer’s arguments. A later edition of his work on Madame Guyon

carries unchanged the provocative statement that every desire of a perfected person comes from God.<sup>35</sup> Whether Upham was unable or unwilling to change the text of this treatment of the annihilation of the will in this book, he evidently did modify his ideas about temptation. A few years after Phoebe Palmer wrote to him opposing his views on the death of the will, she cited his opinion against those who taught the “third work” doctrine in its antinomian form. Some of those who had been led into the second work of grace under Mrs. Palmer’s ministry later returned and attempted to lead her into the third. When these erstwhile disciples claimed they were free from Satan’s touch, she quoted Upham, “He now assaults thee, by not assaulting thee, and knows that he shall conquer when thou fallest asleep.”<sup>36</sup> Her argument against these misguided followers was the same one she used against Upham’s ideas, but now she stated it more forcefully and publicly. The “third work” teachers held that they did not need stated seasons of prayer, instruction from human teachers, or reminders of ordinary Christian duties because their spirits were entirely one with God. In reply Phoebe pointed to the Biblical injunctions about prayer, instruction, and obedience, urging her opponents to test themselves by Scripture. They taught that one who relies on the Bible is still in a lower state, and cannot appreciate the ‘holy liberty which the Spirit gives to those who are made free indeed.’ Mrs. Palmer answered this argument with the reminder that Satan transforms himself into an angel of light, and the Christians must test the spirits [1 John 4:1] to see if they come from God. Her would-be teachers inquired whether she would be willing to sin, if God required it. She responded, “No! no! no! . . . God never wanted any one to sin,” and pronounced this a “doctrine of devils.” She concluded that all of the Holy Spirit’s teachings were found in the Bible and that every article of belief needed explicit Scriptural foundation:

For anyone to imagine, that the Holy Spirit will lead him into a state, beyond where the teachings of the WORD may be specially needful, or lead him into a state or a belief, for which an explicit “thus saith the Lord,” may not be given is erroneous. And wherever such a device has obtained, whether among ministry or laity, we fearlessly, in the name of the Lord, pronounce it a device of Satan.<sup>37</sup>

Although Mrs. Palmer thought quietistic and antinomian mysticism were of the devil, she did not entirely dismiss all that was not rational. If an experience had a precedent in Scripture, and if its content did not contradict the Bible’s teaching, she might accept it as a valid message from God. For example, she was sure that God spoke with His children through dreams and visions, and such communications were an important part of her spiritual life.<sup>38</sup> As a thirteen-year-old she had a dream which assured her of God’s love, and other significant dreams and visions continued to occur at critical junctures throughout her adult life.<sup>39</sup> Dreams and visions must not be taken at face value, however. Because Satan may speak through these means, every communication must be tested by the Bible: “To the law and the testimony; if not according to these it is because there is no light in them” [Isaiah 8:20].<sup>40</sup> If the content of the dream or vision reinforced some Biblical truth, the dream came from God; if it contradicted the

Scriptures, it came from Satan. When the message did not directly relate to the Bible, the task of discernment was more difficult. “Some dreams are manifestly foolish” and may be disregarded, but others should be considered in the light of their circumstances.<sup>41</sup>

Sometimes the circumstances led Phoebe to trust her dreams. Near the end of Mrs. Palmer’s life, a friend wrote her about a dream announcing Jesus’ imminent return. Phoebe had been too busy to give much attention to eschatology, so she prayed that if her friend’s dream were correct, the Lord would confirm the message. Shortly after that prayer Mrs. Palmer had a dream herself in which she saw the Lord return. Because the dream followed the prayer so quickly, Phoebe concluded that she should trust its message.<sup>42</sup> At other times the circumstances led her to dismiss her dreams. In 1838 Phoebe had a dream that informed her that she would die soon. The next day she was faced with a decision about the long-term future, so she asked the Lord to let her know if the dream had been correct. If she were to die soon, she wanted the Lord to deepen the impression the dream had made. If not, then let the Lord take the impression away, she prayed. From that moment, the dream began to seem unreal, and Phoebe concluded from this circumstance that the dream’s message was not correct.<sup>43</sup>

Phoebe Palmer considered her spiritual impressions a valuable source of divine guidance. She urged her readers to give “the most minute attention to impressions,” and gave examples of how the Spirit had guided by this means.<sup>44</sup> Especially if they were repeated should one obey them.<sup>45</sup> Like dreams and visions, however, impressions could be misleading. The believer should test them by the Scripture, and if still not sure whether they came from God, should go to some experienced Christian for help in knowing what they mean.<sup>46</sup>

#### **4 Tradition**

Because she read about dreams, visions, and impressions in the Bible, Mrs. Palmer could accept these mystical experiences as valid communications from God. About most other kinds of mystical experience she was doubtful. There were, however, five other experiences of extra biblical mysticism which she seemed to accept without question. The first was her sense of close approach and even union with God which she felt on “the day of days,” the day she was sanctified. She testified: “My spirit returned consciously to its source, and rested in the embrace of God,”<sup>47</sup> and continued, “I felt that I was but a drop in the ocean of infinite LOVE, and Christ was all in all.”<sup>48</sup> Another mystical experience of Mrs. Palmer’s for which there is no Biblical precedent is a dream in which she had died and was being judged.<sup>49</sup> A third was the “near communion and distinctness of perception of the persons of the Trinity” which she recorded in her diary on September 9, 1838.<sup>50</sup> The fourth was regular communion with her mother through dreams for years after Mrs. Worrall’s death.<sup>51</sup> Lastly she once reported going to heaven in a vision and seeing the mansion that was prepared for her.<sup>52</sup> This was the woman who taught: “Think no experience desirable, however luminous, [except] as you may have a ‘Thus saith the Lord’ for it,” yet she publicized these five spiritual experiences for which she had no scriptural precedent.<sup>53</sup> How could she accept and publicize these extra biblical experiences? Why could she believe that the Holy Spirit had

given her these experiences, when she disbelieved that He could have performed a third work of grace?

For some reason she did not mistrust these five experiences as she did the experiences of those who claimed the third work of grace. Mrs. Palmer never recognized this seeming inconsistency in her theology, so she never explained why she was prepared to accept some extra biblical experiences while rejecting others. Although Mrs. Palmer never answered this question, she left enough data for the historian to construct a solution. The reason is not that she trusted her own experiences and mistrusted those of others. As her response to her dreams shows, she was prepared to reject her personal experience as counterfeit. The key to her acceptance of these mystical experiences is rather to be found in Mrs. Palmer's early reading. Four of the five extra biblical experiences Mrs. Palmer reported are recorded in the journals of the early Methodist women that Phoebe Palmer knew so well; evidently their theology and spirituality became a model for her own. Some of the early leaders of Methodism had kept diaries in which they recorded the events of their spiritual lives. Beginning with Wesley's Journals, many of these works were published in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Three women were especially prominent among these diarists. These were Hester Ann Rogers, Mary Bosanquet Fletcher, and Darcy Lady Maxwell. Each made outstanding contributions to the Methodist movement, and each had a mystical strain. Phoebe Palmer was familiar with the biographies of all three women.<sup>54</sup>

Hester Rogers may have been the least mystical of the three, but still she recorded a dream of her judgment day. Mrs. Palmer also dreamed about her judgment day, but it would be stretching the evidence to claim a causal connection between the two women's dreams. The historian may be on firmer ground to suggest that Mrs. Rogers' devotional practice influenced the spirituality of Phoebe Palmer. Both Phoebe and her sister, Sarah, had been helped toward sanctification by following Hester Rogers' example of reckoning themselves dead to sin; it may be that Phoebe copied Hester's piety as well.<sup>55</sup> Mrs. Rogers read the Bible on her knees, and followed the schedule of reading the Old Testament in the morning, the Gospels at noon, and the Acts or Epistles at night. She also was careful to commemorate the anniversary of the day of her sanctification. Because this is exactly the practice Phoebe Palmer followed, one wonders if she did it in imitation of Hester Rogers.<sup>56</sup> The experience of Mary Bosanquet Fletcher probably also encouraged Phoebe Palmer to be less distrustful of mysticism. She believed that the dead in Christ were still concerned with the "dear fellow pilgrims they have left behind" and that these departed saints come to the aid of believers still left on earth. In addition, she recorded in her journal how God communicated with her through a dream and a vision.<sup>57</sup>

Lady Maxwell probably influenced Phoebe Palmer's mysticism more than any other person. As Lady Maxwell neared the end of her life, she began to write of mystical experiences. As her desire for entire sanctification increased, she frequently spoke of "sinking down into God" and experiencing a particular closeness with the Deity. She also recorded the ability to distinguish the approach of the three separate persons of the Trinity, and claimed to be often "on the borders of immortality, holding converse with its heavenly inhabitants."<sup>58</sup>

We know that Mrs. Palmer had read about union with God, dreams of judgment day, communion with the three separate persons of the Trinity, and conversation with the inhabitants of heaven in the lives of the leading Methodist women. We also know that she experienced these extra biblical phenomena, and accepted them without her customary distrust of mysticism. If it is true that Mrs. Palmer accepted her extra biblical mystical experiences because she had read about them in the lives of the early Methodist female saints, then this fact reveals the fourth locus of authority in her theological method. This fourth means of discovering theological truth may be called “tradition,” if one remembers that it refers only to the experience and usages of the people called Methodists.

Phoebe Palmer never mentions tradition as a source for her theology. In fact, all of her concern is to point people to the Bible and away from merely human authority. In one letter she explicitly tells her reader not to trust even Mr. Wesley’s theology, but to go directly to the Scripture for herself. Of course she hastens to add that when her friend goes to the Bible for herself, she will find in it exactly what Wesley taught.<sup>59</sup> Despite this outspoken insistence on the authority of the Scripture alone, her reliance on Methodist tradition is shown by her acceptance of traditional Methodist mystical experiences.

Her problem with Upham was not so much that he claimed an extra biblical experience, but that the one he claimed was not endorsed by the pillars of early Methodism. True, there were early Methodists who claimed to have experienced what we have called the third work of grace, but they were males, and they inevitably made trouble for John Wesley. George Bell and Thomas Maxfield taught what we have called antinomian mysticism. They claimed that they had reached a state in which it was no longer possible for them to sin, and that thus they had no further need of the disciplines of the Christian life. They went on to disparage Mr. Wesley’s spiritual state and his ability as a teacher of righteousness. Consequently, Wesley was forced to remove them from his connexion.<sup>60</sup> It seems that the extra biblical mysticism did not form an important part of the spirituality of the men who remained loyal to Wesley. Neither John Fletcher, William Bramwell, nor John Nelson reported the kind of mystical phenomena which the leading female Methodists experienced.

Thus there seems to be a line of benign mysticism running through female Methodism, while the males contract a malignant strain. Phoebe Palmer is in that line of female spirituality which runs through Hester Rogers, Mary Bosanquet Fletcher, and Lady Maxwell. This finding raises several interesting questions: Why was it that male mysticism led to breaks with Wesley, while female mysticism drew him closer to those who experienced it? Is there a difference in male and female spirituality? Should historians who are becoming aware of women’s contributions to Christianity look for such differences in spiritual life, and then try to trace their causes and consequences?

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## Notes

1 Phoebe Palmer, *Diary*, 3 Jan 1840, in Richard Wheatley, *The Life and Letters of Mrs. Phoebe Palmer* (New York: W. C. Palmer, Jr., 1876), pp.

238-241. [Hereafter citations from Mrs. Palmer's diary printed in Wheatley will appear as *Diary*, date, and pages in Wheatley. Letters which Wheatley prints will appear as A to B, date, and pages in Wheatley]; George Hughes, *Fragrant Memories of The Tuesday Meeting and its Fifty Years' Work for Jesus*, introduction by W.F. Mallalieu (New York: Palmer & Hughes, 1886), pp. 26-28 [Hereafter *TM*]; Phoebe Palmer, *Faith and Its Effects: or, Fragments from My Portfolio* (New York: Joseph Longking, Printer, 1852), p. 170. [Hereafter *F & E*].

2 Phoebe Palmer, *Incidental Illustrations of the Economy of Salvation, Its Doctrines and Duties* (New York: Foster & Palmer, Jr., 1855), p. 308. [Hereafter *II*].

3 *Guide to Holiness* 29 (1856): 155. [Hereafter *GTH*. See appendix for further information.]

4 *GTH* 44 (1863): 97.

5 Young Phoebe apostrophizes the Bible: "Henceforth I take thee as my future guide." See *GTH* 66 (1874): 161 (*WCP*).

6 Phoebe Palmer, *The Way of Holiness with Notes by the Way; Being A Narrative of Religious Experience Resulting from a Determination to be a Bible Christian*, 2nd. ed. (New York: G. Lane & C. B. Tippet, 1845), p. 6. [Hereafter *WOH*].

7 *GTH* 82 (1882): 148.

8 *II*, p. 190. See also *F & E*, pp. 17, 20, and *GTH* 30 (1856): 33.

9 *Ibid*, p. 309. See also *F & E*, pp.125, 152, *GTH* 48 (1865): 137, *GTH* 51 (1867): 8, and Phoebe Palmer to Mrs. Hamline, 22 May 1848, Wheatley, p. 516.

10 *F & E*, p. 126.

11 *Ibid*, p. 241.

12 *WOH*, p. 44; *GTH* 59 (1871): 152. See also *WOH*, p. 132 and *F & E*, p. 6.

13 [Phoebe Palmer], *Promise of the Father; or, A Neglected Speciality of the Last Days* (Boston: H. V. Degen, 1859- reprinted., Salem, Ohio: Schmul Publishers, 1981), p. 165.

14 *WOH*, p. 32. See also *F & E*, p. 144, and *GTH* 4 (1842-3): 74, *GTH* 47 (1865): 25, and *GTH* 60 (1871): 88.

15 *Beauty of Holiness* 9 (1858): 209.

16 Walter C. Palmer, *Life and Letters of Leonidas L. Hamline, D. D., Late One of the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, Introductory Letters by [T. A.] Morris, [Edmus S.] Janes, and [E.] Thompson (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1866), p. 62.

17 *WOH*, p. 95.

18 *II*, p. vi.

19 *TM*, pp. 39-42.

20 *II*, pp. 284-5.



21 See, for example, *GTH* 49 (1866): 32ff.

22 *F & E*, p. 67.

23 *WOH*, pp. 74-5.

24 *F & E*, p. 67.

25 *WOH*, p. 113.

26 See for an instance *F & E*, pp. 67, 143, 319, and *GTH* 1 (1839-40): 127.

27 Neither Mrs. Palmer nor her opponents refer to this experience as a “third work of grace.” The phrase is merely a useful name for the concept of a further work of God in the soul beyond entire sanctification.

28 Thomas C. Upham, *Principles of the Interior Hidden Life: Designed Particularly for the Consideration of those Who are Seeking Assurance of Faith and Perfect Love*, 3rd. ed. (Boston: Waite, Pierce, and Company, 1845), pp. 364-5.

29 Thomas C. Upham, *Life and Religious Opinions and Experience of Madame de la Mothe Guyon: Together with Some Account of the Personal History and Religious Opinions of Fenelon, Archbishop of Cambray*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1847), p. 344.

30 See Phoebe Palmer to Professor and Mrs. Upham, 30 April 1851, Wheatley, pp. 518-23. I have not been able to locate the article to which Mrs. Palmer refers in her letter, nor is it listed in Salter’s bibliography. Upham’s books, however, contain several of these passages about the extinction of the human will which would have made Mrs. Palmer’s head ache if she had read them. Besides the passage quoted above, in his second book on sanctification, Upham speaks of the “annihilation of the will,” which allows a person “to find a passage, as it were, into God Himself, and to become one with Him, in a mysterious but holy and glorious union.” The one in this state has no personal desires, nor is such a one even disquieted at the worst misfortune. See Thomas C. Upham, *The Life of Faith in Three Parts, Embracing Some of the Scriptural Principles or Doctrines of Faith, the Power or Effects of Faith in the Regulation of Man’s Inward Nature, and the Relation of Faith to the Divine Guidance* (Boston: Waite, Pierce and Company, 1845), pp. 210-25. See also Darius Salter, “Thomas Upham and Nineteenth Century Holiness Theology,” Ph.D. dissertation, Drew University, 1983; Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 83-17858, 1983, pp. 177-9 for a further discussion of Upham’s doctrine of a work of grace beyond sanctification.

31 For the teaching of the unnamed believer, see II, p. 56. See also, *GTH* 65 (1874): 112-3.

32 Either Upham used the phrase “death of the will” in the article, or else the phrase is Mrs. Palmer’s way of referring to the annihilation of the human will taught in Upham’s earlier works. Despite the change in terminology, the concept is the same.

33 Phoebe Palmer to Professor and Mrs. Upham, 30 April 1851, Wheatley, pp. 518-23.

34 *Ibid*

35 Thomas C. Upham, *Life and Religious Opinions of Madame de la Mothe Guyon: Together with Some Account of the Personal History and Religious Opinions of Fenelon, Archbishop of Cambray*, 2 vols. (Harper & Brothers, 1864), p. 344

36 II, p. 124. Once again I have not been able to locate the writing of Upham from which Mrs. Palmer quotes these words. If she is quoting him accurately and fairly, and if Upham wrote these words after 1851, then they represent a much more cautious attitude about temptation, if not a substantial change from the attitude expressed in 1845.

37 Ibid, pp. 56-9, 121-33.

38 *WOH*, pp. 209-12.

39 Ibid., pp. 76-77.

40 *GTH* 27 (1855): 74.

41 *GTH* 69 (1876): 47.

42 *GTH* 69 (1876): 75-76. Perhaps if Mrs. Palmer had better followed her own injunctions about testing dreams by Scripture, she would not have come to this erroneous conclusion.

43 *GTH* 69 (1876): 47; *GTH* 70 (1876): 5; *WOH*, p. 195.

44 II, p. 251-4; Phoebe Palmer, *Four Years in the Old World: Comprising the Travels, Incidents, and Evangelistic Labors of Dr. and Mrs. Palmer in England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales*, 3rd ed. (New York: Foster & Palmer, Jr., 1866), p. 541, [Hereafter *FY*]; See also *F & E*, p. 261.

45 *GTH* 72 (1877): 106.

46 Ibid., p. 107.

47 *GTH* 1 (1839-40): 146.

48 *Diary*, 27 July 1837, Wheatley, pp. 43-44.

49 *WOH*, pp. 108-10.

50 *Diary*, 9 September [1838], Wheatley, p. 48.

51 *GTH* 61 (1872): 18.

52 *GTH* 41 (1862): 118.

53 [Phoebe Palmer], *The Parting Gift to Fellow Laborers and Young Converts*, New York: Walter C. Palmer, [1869], p. 32.

54 *FY*, p. 28; *GTH* 43 (1863): 82-83; *GTH* 4 (1843-4): 133.

55 John Roche, *The Life of Mrs. Sarah A. Lankford Palmer Who for Sixty Years Was the Able Teacher of Entire Holiness*, introduction by John P. Newman (New York: George Hughes and Co., 1898), pp. 32-33; *GTH* 1 (1839-40): 125.

56 For Mrs. Rogers' dream and devotional practice, see Hester Ann Rogers, *An Account of the Experience of Hester Ann Rogers*. . . (New York: S. & D. A. Forbes, 1830), pp. 18ff., 43, 51, 53, 196-7. For Phoebe Palmer's devotional practice, see *GTH* 27 (1855): 73; *WOH*, p. 124; *F & E*, p. 155.

57 Henry Moore, *The Life of Mrs. Mary Fletcher*. . . (New York: J. Emory and B. Waugh for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1830), pp. 174ff., 205, 236.

58 Lady Maxwell's letters to Alexander Mather, written in the late 1790s, contain her most mystical language. For her description of sinking down into God, and other similar experience of closeness with the Deity, see John Lancaster, *The Life of Darcy, Lady Maxwell* . . . (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1837), pp. 285-310. For the experience of the Trinity and her communion with departed saints, see pp. 247-8.

59 She comments, "It is now no small satisfaction for me to know, that the views received, by thus carefully testing every onward movement by the law and the testimony, are so fully in accordance with Mr. Wesley's views of Bible truth." *F & E*, pp. 251-2.

60 John Wesley, *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, edited by Nehemiah Curnock, Standard ed., 8 vols. (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1909-16), 1 November 1762-23 January 1763, 4:535-5:7.

## Appendix

*The Guide to Holiness*, edited by Mrs. Palmer from 1864 to her death in 1874 bore several names. Founded by Timothy Merritt in 1839, it was called the Guide to Christian Perfection until 1846. From then, it was called *Guide to Holiness* until the Palmers bought it and merged it with *Beauty of Holiness and Sabbath Miscellany* in 1864. This new combined magazine was given the inelegant title, Guide to, and Beauty of Holiness and Revival Miscellany. The title was streamlined in 1867 to *Guide to Holiness and Revival Miscellany*, a title it bore until Sarah Lankford Palmer died in 1898. From then until the fall of 1901, it was called *Guide to Holiness and Pentecostal Life*, and ended its career as the *Consecrated Life and Guide to Holiness* in December of that year. For ease of reference I have referred to this magazine as *Guide to Holiness* throughout.

From its beginning until July of 1844 each volume covered a full year, beginning in July. Thus citations of volumes 1-5 will include both years. From volume 6 on, each volume had only six issues. Volume 7 began in January, 1845, and volume 8 began in July of that year. This practice of having two volumes a year was maintained throughout the life of the publication. Two other points might cause confusion. One is that volume 48 (July 1865) is also called new series volume 3. The two previous volumes are not called new series volumes 1 and 2 but after 1865 most volumes have both numbers. I will refer to the volumes by their old series number, even when that number is not printed on the magazine. The other confusing thing about the numbering of the volumes is that sometimes the volume numbers listed on the issues themselves are wrong. For example, the January issue of 1882 says it is volume 79, when it is actually part of volume 81. In these cases I will cite the correct volume number. Unfortunately these kinds of editorial lapses were not uncommon in the Palmers' work. Volume 49 for 1866 apologizes on page 95 for mislaying a manuscript, and volumes 58 and 59 in 1870 and 1871 print the same

editorial twice within six months (pages 183 and 182 respectively). Mrs. Palmer once even included the same illustrative story twice in one of her books. See *Faith and Its Effects*, pp.57, 198. The string of Theseus that will guide the reader through this confusing labyrinth of volumes and years is to locate each reference by its year. Most collections of the *Guide to Holiness* are books bound according to year. After 1844 each binding contains at least one year. Because in these books the monthly issues are not separated, it does one little good to know the month in which the article the reader seeks appeared. However, the page numbers do increase sequentially throughout each volume, and the odd-numbered volumes are for the first half of the year (January to June) and the even numbered volumes are for the second half of the year (July to December). Thus, if one wishes to verify a reference that is cited *GTH* 81 (1882) 16, the reader should find the book containing the volumes for 1882, note that since 81 is an odd number, it refers to the first half of the year, and find page 16 at the beginning of the book.

When the *Guide to Holiness* is cited, and the article has been written by someone outside the Palmer family, the author's name will appear in parentheses after the page number. Articles written by Walter C. Palmer will have (*WCP*) after them, and those by Sarah Lankford Palmer will have (*SLP*). Phoebe Palmer is the author of the citations that have no other author indicated.

After Phoebe's death in 1874, the editors of the *Guide to Holiness* continued to print articles she had written, along with some of her letters and diaries. Unfortunately they rarely gave the dates of these compositions. These posthumous writings will therefore be cited in the same way as Mrs. Palmer's other contributions to the *Guide to Holiness*. Thus one of her undated letters, obviously written before her death in 1874, but not published until 1882 will be cited: *GTH* 81 (1882): 151.

## WESLEY'S THEOLOGY OF LOVE

David L. Cubie

Two questions under investigation in contemporary Wesleyan research are (1) to what extent must Wesley be considered a serious theologian? and (2) how does Wesley's quadrilateral of scripture, experience, reason and tradition relate to his theological enterprise? Wesley was not a systematic theologian. Yet that he thought systematically is evident from the organization of his sermons and hymns. That the hymns themselves were a theological enterprise is amply demonstrated by the lengthy theological introductions which he gave to his *Hymns and Sacred Poems* of 1739, 1740, 1745. He specifies this systematic purpose in *Hymns: For the Use of the People Called Methodists* (1780):

The hymns are not carelessly jumbled together, but carefully ranged under proper heads, according to the experience of real Christians. So that this book is, in effect, a little body of experimental and practical divinity.<sup>1</sup>

Two questions need to be asked: (1) Was Wesley a consistent thinker? and if so, then (2) What principle provides coherence to his thought? If it can be demonstrated that Wesley is a consistent thinker with a coherent principle, then he must be reconsidered as a serious theologian. Furthermore, his fourfold authority of scripture, reason, experience and tradition, instead of being seen as an eclectic and scholastic listing of authorities, will need to be re-evaluated to see if there is an underlying synthesis and wholeness to his thought.

Albert Outler has described him as a folk theologian.<sup>2</sup> Though some have taken this in a pejorative sense,<sup>3</sup> this was not Outler's intent, for he also called Wesley "the most important Anglican theologian in his century."<sup>4</sup> Rather what he was describing was what Wesley stated as his intent in publishing his Sermons: "I design plain truth for plain people."<sup>5</sup> Wesley was a serious theologian, but one who instead of writing for theologians, wrote for the people. A better term, less subject to misinterpretation, would be to refer to him as a pastor theologian. His office was that of the ancient bishop, who counted among his responsibilities that of teaching his flock.

Wesley has been accused of being an eclectic. Certainly his use of scripture, experience, reason and tradition as authorities would not give the lie

to that accusation. In fact, it could support it. That which could deliver Wesley from this accusation is the demonstration of coherence throughout this usage. The principle which gives coherence to Wesley's thought is love. Love is the controlling principle in all his theological activity. Wesley sought to understand all of life from the perspective that God is love. As he asked his episcopal opponents who denounced the Methodist lay preachers as being out of order, "What is this order of which you speak? Will it serve instead of the knowledge and love of God?"<sup>6</sup> This search began as far back as his undergraduate years. As he recalled those years,

The fundamental constitutions of the University of Oxford . . . require every Bachelor of Arts . . . to read three public lectures on moral philosophy, on whatever subject he chooses. My subject, I well remember, was 'the love of God.'<sup>7</sup>

Other coordinating principles have been suggested, including Outler's "Sustained Evangelical Concern"<sup>8</sup> and Randy Maddox's "Responsible Grace,"<sup>9</sup> which he derives from Outler. Frederick Dryer would throw out the whole theological enterprise. He asserts, "The question to be asked concerns not Wesley's theology, but his epistemology. . . . In all of his controversies, he assumes this same principle: nothing is known that cannot be felt."<sup>10</sup> As will become evident, for Wesley, responsible grace is defined by love. Furthermore, the epistemological question is itself a question of authority, that is, of identifying that which is true, and is another way of addressing the quadrilateral. Dryer's research into Wesley's epistemology is useful in identifying what Wesley meant by experience, but it does not ask, how can one know which experience is true? Wesley was not interested in the variety of religious experiences. Instead, his concern was for that which is ultimately true. As he said, "I want to know one thing—the way to heaven; how to land safe on that happy shore."<sup>11</sup>

We should be alerted to the possibility that love is Wesley's coordinating principle by such expressions as "the heaven of heavens is love;"<sup>12</sup> "love . . . is His [that is, God's] darling, His reigning attribute, the attribute that sheds an amiable glory on all his other perfections;"<sup>13</sup> and "Love is the sum of Christian Sanctification."<sup>14</sup>

To say that Wesley's coordinating principle is love does not, of course, imply that his doctrine of love is in harmony with the New Testament. That certainly was his aspiration, but the concept of love, because of its importance to the Church throughout its history, had developed great complexity. To be Christian was to love God and neighbor, but what does it mean to love neighbor? The Augustinian tradition added to the scribal question, "Who is my neighbor?", another which is, "how should I love my neighbor?" Though, according to Christian teaching, every neighbor should be loved, the quality and manner of giving love began to be seen as varying according to the worthiness of the neighbor. This resulted in a complex theory of love. As John F. Burton observes,

The idea that love, expressed reasonably and appropriately, is a good thing, can be found throughout medieval society. In religious terms every Christian should love his neighbor, and in feudal terms, vassal and lord and their families should be bound by love. According to a ninth century manual a vassal should

‘fear, love, worship and cherish’ the relatives of his lord. Neither Christian charity nor feudal love necessarily involved an emotional or passionate personal attachment. . . . Love could express a purely formal relationship, a political alliance, the deference of a vassal before his lord, the bond of all the monks in a monastery, including those who dislike each other. In these terms, it increased one’s worth to ‘love’ another worthy person, as it increased one’s honor to ‘love’ a person of higher status.<sup>15</sup>

D. R. Howard indicates how inclusively the concept of love became. It was applied to all of life:

Charity is, then, the whole moral expression of the Christian life; it is both individual and social. It is so broad a concept, amenable to so much variation, that it did not limit the medieval artist. But however broad, it is specifically Christian, is indeed the very core of Christian doctrine; and it is the set theme of all ‘serious’ medieval poetry.<sup>16</sup>

From the Biblical command “thou shalt love,” there developed a casuistry of love which described how love was to be applied in all circumstances and in all relationships.

In the succeeding centuries not every thinker made love central, but for those who did there was a vocabulary of love available. Wesley made use of this vocabulary. One example of Wesley’s use of these terms occurs in the several articles and sermons which he wrote to defend his relationship to the Church of England. The terms of love which Wesley used in his teaching regarding the Church are ( 1 ) *Storge*: love or loyalty to family and nation; (2) Benevolence or beneficence: an equal compassion and care for all; (3) Complacence, delight: love for the saints; (4) Reciprocal love: the *Koinonia* fellowship love which is the opposite of schism; (5) Catholic love: a comprehensive love which includes all the preceding, plus an ecumenical concern for the whole Christian Church; (6) Zeal: love aflame, but prioritized according to the degree of value in its object. It is by the interplay of these concepts that Wesley explained and defended his relationship to the Church of England. The love terms which Wesley used to maintain union with the Church of England were *storge* and benevolence. He also used the concept of unity which, though not a term for love, he defines as a primary characteristic. The term which he used to argue for some type of separation, at least from sinners within the Church, was complacence. Around zeal he organized his priorities of love, that is, whether love for the Church or love for the souls of men should come first.<sup>17</sup>

A similar complex vocabulary was used both in describing the Christian’s relationship to God and man and in defining perfect love. Love for God was both thankful love and desire. When the latter was used to define perfect love, a psychological problem was created as the Christian sought to maintain all desire for God. Similarly, perfect love for neighbor allowed a distinction to be made in the kind of love given to the neighbor, whether benevolence, which for Wesley was equal mercy to all, or complacence, which was delight for the saints. This distinction permitted Wesley to say that “From a wrong apprehension, I may love and esteem you either more or less than I ought.”<sup>18</sup> Even when the various distinguishing terms were not used, the contrasting thoughts symbolized by these terms is evident.

The centrality of love is such that one could as easily refer to a quinquilateral as a quadrilateral. Truth for Wesley had a moral test, the test of love, but as no test for Wesley stands by itself, it is appropriate to examine how love is applied within those four tests by which Wesley himself evaluates truth. These are scripture, reason, experience, and tradition. We will look at tradition first, then experience and scripture, and then conclude with reason.

Among the four sources of authority, often referred to as Wesley's quadrilateral, tradition is that to which Wesley appealed the least and which for him, though important, was the least reliable. His letter to Conyers Middleton gives his most thorough analysis of tradition. In this letter he was comparing tradition with the inward evidence. Thus in comparison with the inward principle, Wesley said of tradition "I cannot set it on a level with this."<sup>19</sup> His reason is that "traditional evidence is of an extremely complicated nature. . . . On the contrary, how plain and simple is this. . . . 'One thing I know; I was blind, but now I see?'. . .'"<sup>20</sup> Furthermore,

The traditional evidence of Christianity stands as it were, a great way off. . . . Whereas the inward evidence is intimately present to all persons, at all times, and in all places. It is nigh thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart, if thou believest in the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>21</sup>

His final argument in this comparison with the inward witness anticipates the age of criticism, just then beginning. He wrote:

If then it were possible (which I conceive it is not) to shake the traditional evidence of Christianity, still he that hath the internal evidence (and every true believer hath the witness or evidence in himself) would stand firm or unshaken.<sup>22</sup>

Wesley with prophetic vision saw the day when the external evidence should be shaken, but contrary to expectations, with beneficial results. As he saw these bicentenary years:

In a century or two the people of England will be fairly divided into real Deists and real Christians.

And I apprehend this would be no loss at all, but rather an advantage to the Christian cause. Nay, perhaps it would be the speediest, yea, the only effectual way of bringing all reasonable Deists to be Christians.<sup>23</sup>

Then with ironical tone he even encouraged those who would shake this external evidence:

Go on, Gentlemen, and prosper shame these nominal Christians out of their poor superstitions, which they call Christianity. Reason, laugh them out of their dead empty forms, void of spirit, of faith, of love. . . . Press on; push your victories, till you have conquered all, that know not God. And then He whom neither they nor you know not, shall rise and gird himself with strength, and go forth in his almighty love, and sweetly conquer you all together.

O that the time were come! How I do long for you to be partakers of the exceeding great and precious promise!<sup>24</sup>



The worthy tradition is one in which both tradition and faith combine to reproduce the character of love. Thus in this comparison of tradition and inner witness, Wesley defined this teaching as follows:

Christianity . . . is that system of doctrine which describes the character . . . particularly in [1 Cor. 13 and the Sermon on the Mount]. Secondly, Christianity promises this character shall be mine, if I will not rest until I attain it . . . [Thirdly] Christianity tells me . . . how I may attain the promise; namely by faith.<sup>25</sup>

This respect was derived from the Epworth parsonage. As he wrote:

From a child I was taught to love and reverence the Scripture, the oracles of God; and next to these, to esteem the primitive Fathers, the writers of the three first centuries. Next after the primitive church, I esteemed our own, the Church of England, as the most scriptural national church.<sup>26</sup>

Though he was to change from rigid adherence or, to use Wesley's expression, from being "strongly attached" he maintained these points of reference throughout his life. Thus in 1748 in replying to Conyers Middleton's attack on miracles, he refused to discuss miracles beyond the first three centuries. Regarding Middleton's reference to Hilarion and Jerome, Wesley said: "I have no concern for either, for they did not exist in the three first centuries."<sup>27</sup> Even late in life the point of reference for the uncorrupted Church was that prior to "that evil hour, when Constantine the Great, called himself a Christian."<sup>28</sup>

Though by no means receiving the same fullness of praise, Wesley had a similar regard for the Church of England during its reformation, especially during the brief reign of Edward VI (1547-53), who Wesley implied was a Biblical monarch who sent priests "to search into the law of God and teach it to all the people."<sup>29</sup> During his reign, Wesley's second source for tradition was adopted. This included the liturgy, The Book of Common Prayer (the Second, 1552) and the first collection of Homilies (1547). This same evangelical influence was to reassert itself early in the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603), resulting in the adoption of the remaining Homilies and the Thirty-Nine Articles (1571).<sup>30</sup> Archbishop Secker (alias 'John Smith') also identified Wesley's preference for the Reformation period of the Church of England. The following is Wesley's quotation from Secker's letter.

When your adversaries tax you with differing from the Church they cannot be supposed to charge you with differing from the Church as it was a little after the Reformation, but as it is at this day. And when you profess deference and veneration for the Church of England, you cannot be supposed to profess it for the Church and its pastors in the year 1545, and not, rather in the year 1745. If, then, by 'the Church of England' be meant (as ought to be meant) the present Church, it will be no hard matter to show that your doctrines differ widely from the doctrines of the Church.

Wesley's answer was, "Nay, I think, unless I differ from these men (be they bishops, priests, or deacons) just as widely as they do from those Articles

and Homilies, I am no true Church of England man.”<sup>31</sup> These are the writings to which Wesley principally appeals as authoritative.

Wesley was not locked into two sets of golden years. In these two periods, and more especially throughout the long centuries between and after, Wesley evaluated tradition by a moral standard. So for Wesley there was a holy tradition. Thus in his reply to Conyers Middleton he refused to discuss miracles beyond the

three first centuries. . . . Because “after the empire became Christian” . . . “a general corruption of faith and morals infected the Christian Church . . .” And this very reason St. Chrysostom himself gave . . . “that it was owing to the want of faith, and virtue and piety in those times.”<sup>32</sup>

He could also reject an appeal to St. Augustine by the retort, “When Augustine’s passions were heated, his word is not worth a rush.” He described that saint “as full of pride, passion, bitterness, censoriousness, and as foul-mouthed to all that contradict him, as George Fox himself.”<sup>33</sup> In contrast to Augustine, Pelagius was “one of the holiest men of that age.”<sup>34</sup> Elsewhere though he quotes sayings of Augustine with approval.

This Holy tradition, though basically closed at the end of the third century, did include those who expressed true religion, by which he meant “the love of God filling the heart and governing the life.” The sure effect of which was “the uniform practice of justice, mercy, and truth.” Some exemplars of this whom he included are “Archbishop Fenelon, in France; Bishop Ken, in England; and Bishop Bedell, in Ireland,”<sup>35</sup> both Roman Catholic and Anglican, but all men of piety and good conscience. Wesley’s evaluation of tradition by moral guidelines was further underlined by his concept of “apostolic” succession. In 1745 after reading Lord Peter King’s and Bishop Edward Stillingfleet’s refutations of the concept that authority was conveyed from Christ through an unbroken succession of bishops, Wesley defined spiritual authority as being conveyed through “a succession of Pastors and Teachers; men both divinely appointed; and divinely assisted; for they convert sinners to God.”<sup>36</sup> These indicate that Wesley’s primary tradition was that originating with and passed on by holy men.

Wesley’s seemingly exaggerated evaluation of the Apostolic Fathers becomes understandable when one sees that his principle of evaluation was moral. In his Christian Library he introduced the Apostolic Fathers as those who not only . . . “were not mistaken in their interpretations of the Gospel of Christ; but that in all the necessary parts of it, they were so assisted by the Holy Ghost, as to be scarce capable of mistaking.”<sup>37</sup>

The key term is “the Gospel of Christ.” In other areas, he admitted their limitations. Writing to Conyers Middleton he stated:

I allow that some of these had not strong natural sense, that few of them had much learning. . . .

Hence I doubt not but whoever will be at the pains of reading over their writings for that poor end, will find many mistakes, many weak suppositions and many ill drawn conclusions.<sup>38</sup>

His reason for revering these, which included

Clemens Romanus, Ignatius, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Origen, Clemens Alexandrinus, Cyprian; . . . Macarius and Ephraim Syrus, . . . [was] . . . because they were Christians, such Christians as are above described. And I reverence their writings, because they describe truly genuine Christianity, and direct us to the strongest evidence of the Christian doctrine. . . .

. . . they never relinquish this: what the Scripture promises, I enjoy. Come and see what Christianity has done here; and acknowledge it is of God.<sup>39</sup>

The character of these trustworthy conveyors of truth is love. Wesley by this emphasis does not de-emphasize either the necessity of knowledge or the assistance of the Holy Spirit. But he is saying that tradition is most truly maintained by one who loves. Thus in his response to Middleton he said that a primitive Christian is one in whom “the ruling temper of his heart is . . . grateful love.”<sup>40</sup> Notice that love which is described as directed toward the variety of neighbors included benevolence (a universal disinterested love), *storge* (a family or loyalty love), and complacence (a love given only to the righteous). As he typically does, he then elaborated on the inclusive character of this one who so loves that he is a worthy conveyor of the tradition. He not only loves God with “grateful love” but he also loves his neighbor. Above all

remembering that God is love, he is conformed to the same likeness. He is full of love to his neighbor; of universal love; . . . And yet this universal love does not interfere with a peculiar regard for his relations, friends, benefactors; a fervent love for his country; and the most endeared affection to all men of integrity, of clear generous virtue.<sup>41</sup>

This individual has “universal, disinterested love (which) is productive of all right affections.” Such a witness is trustworthy because

this love constrains him to converse, not only with a strict regard to the truth, but with artless sincerity and genuine simplicity, as one in whom there is no guile. And, not content with abstaining from all such expressions as are contrary to justice or truth, he endeavors to refrain from every unloving word, either to a present or of an absent person. . . . The same love is productive of all right actions.<sup>42</sup>

This is the tradition which Wesley recommends.

As noted, Wesley had a very high evaluation of experience, especially as an inward principle, which, as he says in his letter to Middleton, “I conceive to be the strongest evidence of the truth of Christianity.”<sup>43</sup> This is not to place scripture in a secondary place. Instead he affirms, “what the Scripture promises, I enjoy.”<sup>44</sup> Experience stands as fulfillment in relationship to scripture, which is the promise. Thus he says, “Christianity, considered as an inward principle, is the completion of all these promises.”<sup>45</sup> As noted, this evidence has an immediacy: “directly from God into the believing soul;” a simplicity: “One thing I know; I was blind but now I see;” a proximity: “intimately present to all persons, at all times, and in all places;” and an unshakableness which the traditional evidence does not possess.

Frederick Dryer's article entitled "Faith and Experience in the Thought of John Wesley" underlines the importance of experience in Wesley's thinking by affirming that empiricism is the organizational principle of Wesley's thought. He does so both by rejecting a possibility of finding a theological principle: "Whoever interprets Wesley's thought in theological terms must concede that it is incoherent, that Methodism is in some measure a pastiche,"<sup>46</sup> and by affirming the empirical evidence of feeling: "In all of his controversies, he assumed the same principle: nothing is known that cannot be felt."<sup>47</sup> While Dryer does demonstrate the method, he does not recognize that the content is love. The empirical test has theological content.

Wesley's affirmation that true Christianity is recognizable by inward feelings stirred up charges of enthusiasm by such Anglicans as Dr. Thomas Rutherford (1768), Dr. Conyers Middleton (1748-49), Archbishop Thomas Secker (1745-48), and William Warburton, Bishop of Gloucester. In his defense both against concerned churchmen such as Archbishop Secker, and inflammatory controversialists such as Bishop Warburton, Wesley took great pains to explain what he meant by inward feelings.

First it must be observed that what Wesley meant by feeling was not emotion but an awareness of the mind. As Dryer comments, Wesley "was . . . a thoroughgoing adherent of the principles of Locke's epistemology. . . . What the mind could know was restricted to the ideas that it received from the senses."<sup>48</sup> The following passages from Wesley's "An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion" (1743) and the sermon "On the Discoveries of Faith" (1788) demonstrate this empiricism. In the former Wesley stated:

Seeing our ideas are not innate, but must all originally come from our senses, it is certainly necessary that you have sense capable of discerning objects of this kind: Not those only which are called natural sense, which in this respect profit nothing, as being altogether incapable of discerning objects of a spiritual kind; but spiritual senses, exercised to discern spiritual good and evil.<sup>49</sup>

Similarly, he wrote in the latter,

For many ages it has been allowed by sensible men, *Nihil est in intellectu quod non fuit prius in sensu*: That is, 'There is nothing in the understanding which was not first perceived by some of the senses.' All the knowledge which we naturally have is originally derived from our senses. . . . Some indeed have, of late years, endeavored to prove that we have innate ideas, not derived from any of the senses, but coeval with the understanding. . . . It is agreed by all impartial persons, that although some things are so plain and obvious, that we can hardly avoid knowing them as soon as we come to the use of our understanding; yet the knowledge even of these is not innate, but derived from some of our senses.<sup>50</sup>

In this latter sermon written in 1788 Wesley identified this spiritual sense as faith. "He hath appointed faith to supply the defect of sense. . . . Its office begins where that of sense ends. Sense is an evidence of things

that are seen. . . . Faith, on the other hand, is the ‘evidence of things not seen’ of the invisible world.”<sup>51</sup> This, of course, is not Wesley’s only definition of faith.

In contrast Wesley’s earlier works described the means of knowing, not so much in terms of a new sense, as in the distinguishable character of the objects. The objects observed are distinct dispositions, such as ease and pain, wrath and love:

How does it appear to you, that you are alive, and that you are now at ease, and not in pain? Are you not immediately conscious of it? By the same immediate consciousness, you will know if your soul is alive to God; if you are saved from the pain of proud wrath, and have the ease of a meek and quiet spirit. By the same means you cannot but perceive if you love, rejoice, and delight in God. By the same you must be directly assured if you love your neighbor as yourself; if you are kindly affectioned to all mankind, and full of gentleness and longsuffering.<sup>52</sup>

In the sermon, “The Discoveries of Faith,” (1789) the two aspects of knowing are combined. Wesley was not analyzing faith, but relating faith’s operation in the Christian as he progresses from the state of a servant to that of the son and in the state of sonship from the stage of being a babe in Christ, through that of the young man, to that of being a father in Christ. Of interest is the distinction he makes between the faith of a servant and that of a son. Faith is transformed from spiritual sight regarding the things that one needs to know to the living experience of a son. As he stated, “The faith of a servant implies a divine evidence of the invisible and the eternal world; yea, an evidence of the spiritual world, so far as it can exist without living experience.”<sup>53</sup> This evidence includes such a “knowledge” of my own soul, of God as “He that is, that was, and that is to come,” of the Trinity, “that these Three are One,” and “that the Holy Spirit is the giver of spiritual life,” of heaven and hell, of the general judgment, and of sin. “The faith of a son,” in contrast, is a “living experience.” The transition includes passing “from faith to faith”; from the faith of a servant to the faith of a son; from the spirit of bondage unto fear to the spirit of childlike love: “Love is the new object of this new faith. Sonship includes being able to testify, ‘The life that I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me,’—the proper voice of a child of God.” Furthermore, “He will experience what St. Paul means by. . . . ‘the love of God is shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost who is given unto him’ (Rom. 5:5)<sup>54</sup> Both in the controversial correspondence and in the sermons on the “witness of the Spirit,” the empirical evidence, whether direct or indirect, is summarized as love.

The fact toward which faith points is love. The direct witness of God’s love is given to assure even when the evidences that faith and sight are supposed to bring are unsure. His argument hinges on knowable evidence, which once given, is unmistakable. Love, by its fruits, is open to all and becomes a means of awakening and convicting the sinner. Thus Wesley’s argument never takes the turn which is so possible from the argument of the gift of faith as a sixth sense, that the sinner just doesn’t understand. Though Wesley can affirm that he may not, the potential for understanding

is there. The evidence is open to all. Wesley's Christian is not a Gnostic, one of a select group, however achieved, who have their own secrets gained by a special sense or sight or revelation. The Biblical evidence may be evaluated by all. This method of verification asks whether love and other holy evidences are present. This is expressed by the following explication of the verse "God 'reveals them unto us by his Spirit.' "

*Reveals*, that is, unveils, uncovers, gives us to know what we did not know before. Have we love? It 'is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.' He inspires, breathes, infuses into our soul, what of ourselves we could not have. Does our spirit rejoice in God our Savior? It is 'joy in,' or by 'the Holy Ghost.' Have we true inward peace? It is the 'peace of God,' wrought in us by the same Spirit. Faith, peace, joy, love, all his fruits. And as we are figuratively said to see the light of faith; so, by a like figure of speech, we are said to feel this peace and joy and love; that is. we have an inward experience of them, which we cannot find any fitter word to express.<sup>55</sup>

The evidence which the sons and daughters receive is not of a different kind but one that is open to the evaluation of all. That which is inwardly and directly known by a child of God can be known outwardly and indirectly—by the "natural man" or servant. The children of God experience God by the inward awareness of love, both that God loves them and that they love both God and neighbor. Those who are not sons and daughters of God also see love, but they see it in its outward manifestations. In his dialogue with the unregenerate, Wesley observes:

Perhaps you will say, 'But this internal evidence of Christianity affects only those in whom the promise is fulfilled. It is not evidence to me' . . . . And yet it may bring a degree of evidence, it may reflect some light on you also.

For first, you see the beauty and loveliness of Christianity. . .

Secondly, you know the Scripture promises this, and says it is attained by faith, and by no other way.

Thirdly, you see clearly how desirable Christian faith is, even on account of its own intrinsic value.

Fourthly, you are a witness, that the holiness and happiness above described can be attained no other way. . . . Thus far you have personal experience.

Fifthly. . . . Now transfer this to the case before us: And those who were blind, but now see,—those who were sick many years, but now are healed,—those who were miserable, but now are happy,—will afford you also a very strong evidence of the truth of Christianity; . . .<sup>56</sup>

Wesley was convinced about the effectiveness of this love. As he wrote to Bishop Thomas Secker (alias 'John Smith'), "The speaking of faith working by love, of uniform outward religion springing from inward, has already been the means of converting several Deists and one Atheist (if not more) into real Christians."<sup>57</sup> The outward evidence which was the principle means of convincing others was love.

As was noted, the identification of feeling in terms of the moral quality of love was his principle defense against enthusiasm. The language of experience and feeling has been frequently distorted both by its proponents and opponents to mean unusual and extraordinary emotional manifestations. This was not what Wesley meant, anymore than it was what Schleiermacher intended by his definition of religion as a “feeling of absolute dependence.” Wesley had to defend himself and his Methodists from this misapprehension. The two basic accusations in Wesley’s day were that the Methodists laid claim to an extraordinary inspiration, not available to all, and that they excited or indulged in emotional excesses. Wesley’s careful answer regarding feeling was that he was not talking about emotional manifestations, but rather about the perceptible evidence of love and other graces. His repeated distinction is “by the operations (inspirations or workings) of the Spirit, I do not mean the manner in which he operates, but the graces which He operates (inspires or works) in a Christian.”<sup>58</sup> He made a similar distinction in his letter to Dr. Thomas Rutherford (March 28, 1768)<sup>59</sup> and rebuked Rutherford’s misinterpretation of Wesley’s “Journal.” He asks, “in which of these passages do I ‘call fallings and roarings by the name of convictions?’ Excuse me; if I cannot distinguish God from the devil, I can at least distinguish the soul from the body.”<sup>60</sup> Rutherford had quoted Wesley’s description of some that professed “feeling the blood of Christ running down their arms, or going down their throats, or poured like water upon their breast and heart.” Wesley’s response was “I will tell you more. I was so disgusted at them for those dreams, that I expelled them out of the society.”<sup>61</sup> Wesley sought to guard his methods from dependence upon both emotionalism and inner impression. As he wrote to Thomas Maxwell,

I dislike something that has the appearance of enthusiasm, over-valuing feeling and inward impressions; mistaking the mere work of imagination for the voice of the Spirit; expecting the end without the means; and undervaluing reason, knowledge, and wisdom in general.<sup>62</sup>

In practice this distinction between emotions and the inward fruits of the spirit was difficult to maintain. As Wesley admitted in his correspondence with Archbishop Thomas Secker, the ‘John Smith’ of his correspondence, “It is not easy (at least to me) to be ‘always zealously affected in a good thing’ without being so sometimes affected in things of an indifferent nature.”<sup>63</sup> Archbishop Secker had written to him, “The son of a Wesley and an Annesley is in no danger of lukewarmness, but ought to take great care on the side of impetuosity and zeal.”<sup>64</sup> Even here, though, Wesley makes the same careful distinction between the degree of emotion and love: “I detest all zeal which is any other than the flame of love.”<sup>65</sup> As he stated in his sermon “On Zeal,” “Christian zeal is all love. . . . It is fervent love. True Christian zeal is no other than the flame of love.”<sup>66</sup> Thus true Christian experience, even as emotion, must be evaluated by whether it purely expresses love. Even where God is genuinely present Wesley wanted to be careful to keep the graces in focus, rather than the manner or degree. Thus to Rutherford’s attempt to pick on some of Wesley’s own witnesses, Wesley replied, “ ‘Lucy God shall felt the love of God in an unusual manner.’ She

did, I mean in an unusual degree,” and regarding another incident about which he had written,

I mean thereby that the comfort which God administers, not his power distinct from it, the love and purity which he works, not his act of working distinguished from it, are as clearly discernible by the soul as outward objects by the senses. And I never so much as dreamed that any one could find any other meaning in the words.<sup>67</sup>

As he also explained to Rutherford, “(1) The fruit of his ordinary influences are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness. (2) Whoever has these, inwardly feels them; and if he understands the Bible, he discerns from whence they came. Observe, what he inwardly feels is these fruits themselves: Whence they come, he learns from the Bible.”<sup>68</sup>

In summarizing his arguments regarding “inward feelings,” Wesley made love central, “For take away the love of God and our neighbor, the peace of God, and joy in the Holy Ghost, or, which comes to the same, deny that they are felt, and what remains but a poor lifeless shadow?”<sup>69</sup> Similarly, in his correspondence to Archbishop Secker his repeated description of that which is perceived was “faith, hope, and love,”<sup>70</sup> and “peace and joy and love.”<sup>71</sup>

For Wesley, even where a person claims not to have had the witness, love is still the measure. While arguing for the perceptible witness, he nowhere argued that those who have not the witness are by that fact alone, outside of God’s covenant of salvation. As he wrote to Secker, there are many, including himself, before 1738, who are in

“invincible ignorance. In this case, undoubtedly many thousands are saved who never heard of these doctrines; and I am inclined to think this was our own case, both at Oxford and for some time after. Yet I doubt not but, had we been called hence, God would first, by this inspiration of His Spirit, have wrought in our hearts that holy love without which none can enter glory.”<sup>72</sup>

In the letter of June, 1746, he reaffirmed this principle.<sup>73</sup>

Over and above a doctrine of the perceptible witness, what matters most is the reality of love. As he stated in the same correspondence,

I suppose that every Christian believer, over and above the imperceptible influence, hath a direct perceptible testimony of the Spirit that he is a child of God. . . .

I would add that I regard even faith itself not as an end but a means only. The end of the commandment is love, of every command, of the whole Christian dispensation. Let this love be attained, by whatever means, and I am content; I desire no more. All is well, if we love the Lord our God with all our heart and our neighbor as ourselves.<sup>74</sup>

Thus we see that for Wesley, what mattered was the presence of love. It is love, with also the other fruits of the spirit, which is that which can be distinctly perceived. When love is not present, all experiences are invalid.



As is evident in the previous quotation, though he clearly states the primacy of love, he is nevertheless affirming the importance of the witness. Thus in the same correspondence Wesley gives the often quoted testimony which Samuel Wesley gave to John on his deathbed, “The inward witness, son, the inward witness . . . that is the proof, the strongest proof, of Christianity.” When John asked him, “ ‘Sir, are you in much pain?’ he answered aloud, with a smile, ‘God does chasten me with pain—yea, all my bones with strong pain; but I thank Him for all, I bless Him for all, I love Him for all!’ “75 In this, both the witness and its content, love, are present.

This same correspondence asks whether this witness is given instantaneously. Wesley answers, “I do not deny that God imperceptibly works in some a gradually increasing assurance of his love.”76 As is evident, what matters is that the change wrought is love.

When Wesley analyzes the witness of the spirit into components of perception, each one of these components of perception or feeling has love as its chief characteristic. These components of perception include the direct and indirect witness. Furthermore, the direct witness contains two witnesses, God’s Spirit and ours. As he states in his first discourse on “The Witness of the Spirit” written in 1746: The “testimony of the Spirit of God must needs in the very nature of things, be antecedent to the testimony of our own spirit.”77 In 1767 he affirmed the same, but around the evidence of love: “Now we cannot love God, till we know he loves us: ‘We love him, because he first loved us’: And we cannot know his love to us, till his Spirit witnesses to our spirit.”78

God’s love is central to the witness, not only initially, so that “We ‘know the things that are freely given us of God,’ “79 (1 Cor. 2:12), but also throughout the life of the Christian. God’s witness quietens the troubled, especially the babe in Christ who is aware of the carnal mind, about whom he writes, “And which way can these souls possibly be comforted, but by a divine testimony (not that they are good or sincere, or conformable to the Scripture in heart and life, but) that God justifieth the ungodly.”80 Faith itself is “A divine *elegchos* (evidence or conviction) of the love of God the Father, through the Son of his love, to him a sinner, now accepted in the Beloved.”81 For Wesley, God’s love is the identifiable sign of his presence.

The direct witness of our own spirit is also love and as such can be distinctly perceived. He asks, “How does it appear, that we do love God and our neighbor, and that we keep his commandments . . . [That is,] How does it appear to ourselves, not to others?” He answers,

How does it appear to you that you are alive . . . ? Are you not immediately conscious of it? By the same immediate consciousness, you will know if your soul is alive to God; if you are saved from the pain of proud wrath, and have the ease of a quiet Spirit. By the same you must be directly assured, if you love your neighbor as yourself; if you are kindly affectioned to all mankind, and full of gentleness and longsuffering . . .

He continues,

Now this is properly the testimony of our own spirit; even the testimony of our own conscience, that God hath given us to be holy of heart, and holy in outward conversation. It is a con-

sciousness of our having received, in and by the Spirit of adoption, the tempers mentioned in the Word of God, as belonging to his adopted children; even a loving heart toward God, and toward all mankind;82

One indirect witness is the witness of our conscience, functioning empirically and discursively:

God has made us thinking beings, capable of perceiving what is present, and of reflecting or looking back on what is past. In particular, we are capable of perceiving whatsoever passes in our own hearts or lives; . . . But what we usually term conscience, implies somewhat more than this. . . . Its main business is to excuse or accuse, to approve or disapprove, to acquit or condemn.83

The conscience itself is love in operation. It is the law written upon the heart. This is “that blessed love of God . . . ‘shed abroad in our hearts’ which enables us to love one another as Christ loved us.”84 This is partially restored to those in the natural man and the servant states, but is fully restored in those who have become sons of God by faith. “Faith,” Wesley writes, “was originally designed of God to re-establish the law of love. . . . It is the grand means of restoring the holy love wherein man was originally created.”85

Wesley wants all to go beyond the indirect witness. As he states, “Yet all this is no other than rational evidence, the witness of our spirit, our reason, our understanding. It all resolves into this: Those who have these marks are children of God.”86 The empirical evidence is made secure by the conjoining of the direct and indirect witness. “And while they are joined, we cannot be deluded: Their testimony can be depended upon.”87 Love is the essential quality and the thread running through each aspect of the witness. God’s witness, my witness and the witness of a transformed life.

We can now again ask Wesley the question, How can we know which experience or feeling is true? In his first discourse on “The Witness of the Spirit” (1746) Wesley answers,

Hereby you shall know, that you are in no delusion, that you have not deceived your own soul. The immediate fruits of the Spirit, ruling in the heart, agree ‘love, joy, peace, bowels of mercies, humbleness of mind, meekness, gentleness, longsuffering.’ And the outward fruits are, the doing good to all men, the not doing evil to any; and the walking in the light,—a zealous, uniform obedience to all the commandments of God.88

Briefly stated: for Wesley, “You know that you are in no delusion” by love. Thus the consistent principle by which Wesley evaluates the Christian experience is love. He asks, do you have the inner witness of God’s love to you, and do you have both the direct and indirect inner evidence and the indirect external evidence of your life that you love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and your neighbor as yourself?

To understand Christian experience as fulfillment of the Biblical promise brings into focus the primacy of scripture. While discussing the comparative value of experience and tradition, Wesley could say about the inward principle. “And this I conceive to be the strongest evidence of the

truth of Christianity.”<sup>89</sup> What must be remembered, as already noted, is that “the truth [or knowledge] of Christianity” is derived from scripture. As he said about the person who asked about the source of the inward feelings of “love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness,” “if he understands the Bible, he discerns from whence they come. Observe, what he inwardly feels is the fruits themselves: whence they come, he learns from the Bible.”<sup>90</sup>

The Bible itself is never sufficient in and of itself but it is intertwined with the other authorities of the quadrilateral. Though Wesley could describe himself as “*homo unius libri*,” “a man of one book,”<sup>91</sup> the Bible must be correlated with both reason and experience. Wesley’s strong statement is “that to renounce reason is to renounce religion; that reason and religion go hand in hand.”<sup>92</sup>

Yet reason, experience, and scripture are insufficient, because a further question must be asked, who is “the safest guide” to interpret scripture? Wesley’s answer is, he who “has meditated on these things, and given himself wholly to them.” If such persons have not done so, though they “understand philosophy ever so well, and be such critics in Greek and Hebrew, ‘they will pervert the Scriptures when they pretend to interpret them’ and that not only to their own destruction.”<sup>93</sup> That which has priority “for a guide of souls” and by implication, an interpreter of scriptures “is, a faith unfeigned, the love of God and our neighbor, a burning zeal for the advancement of God’s Kingdom, with an heart and life wholly devoted to God.”<sup>94</sup> To be “*homo unius libri*,” “a man of one book,”<sup>95</sup> as Wesley describes himself, is not just to be a man knowledgeable in the scripture, but a man saturated in it both as word and life. Using some of the language of Rutherford, Wesley contrasted his lay preachers to “cursing, swearing, drinking clergyman” and in the process gives his own pictures of a sound interpreter of scripture. His typical lay preacher is “a tradesman, who has . . . ‘from childhood known the Holy Scriptures, and has for five years (to say no more) faithfully and diligently made use of all the helps, which the English tongue has put into his hand, who has given attendance to reading, has meditated on these things, and given himself wholly to them.’”<sup>96</sup>

The importance of a godly life is based on the fact that sound interpretation is dependent upon God’s aid. His opponents sought to turn this claim to God’s assistance for the unlearned and unordained, but godly tradesmen preachers into the accusation, “What! Then you make yourselves like the Apostles.” Wesley replied with an affirmation that God who equipped the apostles was able to prepare the Methodists:

Woe unto every ambassador of Christ, who is not like the Apostles in this! in holiness, in making full proof of his ministry in spending and in being spent for Christ! We cannot, and therefore we need not, be like them in working outward miracles; but we may, and ought, in working together with God for the salvation of men. And the same God who was always ready to help their infirmities, is ready to help ours also. He who made them ‘workmen that needed not to be ashamed, will teach U9 also ‘rightly to divide the truth.’<sup>97</sup>

Some, such as Archbishop Secker, saw in this type of answer an appeal to the value of ignorance. Wesley denied this. Furthermore, when Thomas

Maxfield, George Bell, and others became unteachable because they thought they were perfect, Wesley rebuked Thomas Maxfield:

I dislike your saying that one saved from sin needs nothing more than looking to Jesus, needs not to hear or think of any thing else; believe, believe, is enough; that he needs no self-examination, no times of private prayer; needs not mind little or outward things; and that he cannot be taught by any person who is not in the same state.<sup>98</sup>

Thus his appeal was not to ignorance but to understanding equipped by love.

The importance of love to his theological method is evidenced not only by affirming that the trustworthy exegete is one who loves, but also in that within scripture, a writing is given comparative value in relationship both to the holiness of the author and the moral content of the scripture itself. There is some danger of magnifying Wesley's few statements into a radically moralistic approach to scripture. Nevertheless, he does give the principle in Discourse I, of the series of sermons "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount," that "from the character of the speaker we are well assured that he hath declared the full and perfect will of God."<sup>99</sup> Wesley seems to judge Paul's writing in this way. After stating, "That the generality of believers whom we have hitherto known (Aug. 2, 1745) were not so sanctified till near death," he further adds about Paul, "Nor he himself at the time of writing his former Epistles."<sup>100</sup> Was Wesley making a judgment regarding Galatians, especially its contentious passages? If he was, he does not reveal this opinion either in his translation or comments on Acts 15:39 and Galatians 2:9 and 5:12.<sup>101</sup> One could well imagine that Paul's language in Galatians was in violation of Wesley's standard of perfect love. This opinion is further implied by Wesley when in dialogue with those who taught that of necessity, all sin in thought, word, and deed every day, he kept open the possibility that Paul, Peter and Barnabas may have sinned in this contention.<sup>102</sup>

Wesley did compare scripture with scripture, even in an evaluative sense. For example, in identifying the law which Paul says is good (1 Tim. 1:8), he made a sharp distinction between "the Mosaic dispensation," "that imperfect and shadowy dispensation"<sup>103</sup> and the New Law in Christ. The comparison being made is not between the texts of the Old and New Testament so much as between dispensations, between that written on stone and that written upon the heart.<sup>104</sup> Nevertheless, a comparison between the Old and New Testaments is implied. He also compared the law-giver Moses and "the great Author of it himself."<sup>105</sup> It is as the "authentic comment on all the branches of [the law]" by the Great Law-giver, that the Sermon on the Mount and other teachings of Jesus surpass all other passages of scripture.

Love is central to his hermeneutic. Even a passage of Scripture, Wesley says, cannot prove "that God is not love, or that his mercy is not over all his works—that is, whatever it prove beside, no scripture can prove predestination." "[It were better] to say it had no sense at all, than to say it had such a sense as this."<sup>106</sup> Similarly, in the introduction to his book of worship for the American churches, he states that there were "Many Psalms left out and many parts of others, as being highly improper for the mouths of a Christian Congregation."<sup>107</sup> The psalms omitted are the psalms of imprecation.

There is a limit to such an exegesis for Wesley. Though he may work comparatively within scripture, he does not do so to the rejection of scripture. He will not follow William Law in the logic of love so as to deny God's wrath and judgment versus sin. Part of his rejection of William Law's thesis was his concern for the doctrine of the atonement. As he wrote to Mary Bishop, "But it is certain, had God never been angry, He could never have been reconciled. So that, in affirming this, Mr. Law strikes at the very root of the Atonement."<sup>108</sup> A further concern was for the validity of scripture. As he wrote cryptically to William Law, "No hell, no heaven, no revelation."<sup>109</sup>

That love is his coordinating principle in exegesis can also be seen by examining several of his sermons. An investigation of Wesley's thirteen discourses, "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount," reveals that all of these are constantly ordered by the theme of love. Discourses VI and VII may be exceptions, but even these tell the reader, 'do not forget love.' This is true even in Discourse VII, which is a somewhat medieval exposition on fasting and on the dangers of "sensualizing the soul."<sup>110</sup> This sermon describes the soul as "sinking into a level with the beasts that perish" and "the inferior appetites [as those] which naturally tend to chain it down to earth."<sup>111</sup> Discourse VI (1750) interprets the Lord's Prayer around the theme of intention. Though Wesley does not focus this sermon toward love, he affixed to it a nine stanza poem, entitled "A Paraphrase On the Lord's Prayer," which is a trinitarian exposition of love.<sup>113</sup> In this the "FATHER of all" shows "bounteous love to all . . . and fillest every ["creature's"] mouth with good." His hallowed name, his "attributes divine" are described as, "Wisdom and might, and love are thine. " His reign on earth is a work of love equipping us to do His will: As Creator,

*Thee Sovereign Lord let all confess  
That moves in earth, or air, or sky;  
Revere thy power, thy goodness bless  
Jehovah reigns! Be glad, O earth!  
And shout, ye morning stars, for joy!*

As Redeemer

*Son of thy Sire's eternal love,  
Take to thyself thy mighty power;  
Let all earth's sons thy mercy prove,  
Let all thy bleeding grace adore.  
The triumphs of thy love display . . .*

As indwelling Spirit,

*Spirit of grace, and health, and power,  
Fountain of light and love below;  
Abroad thine healing influence shower,  
O'er all the nations let it flow.  
Inflame our hearts with perfect love;  
In us the work of faith fulfil,  
So not heaven's host shall swifter move  
Than we on earth to do thy will.*

The work which faith fulfills is love. The poem also affirms that through the continuous grace of “the living bread” and the ever-sprinkling of the blood of the “Eternal, spotless lamb of God,” God equips us to forgive men their trespasses and reveal his love to all. Thus,

*To every soul (all praise to Thee!)  
Our bowels of compassion move:  
And all mankind by this may see  
God is in us; for God is love.*

The result is,

*Blessing and honor, praise and love*

to the

*Co-equal, co-eternal Three.*

Discourse VIII, which further develops the theme of intention begun in Discourse VI, around Jesus’ words, “the light of the body is the eye” (Matthew 6:22), defines intention as “the eye of the soul” and “the eye of the mind.” For Wesley, intention’s purpose is to be the spiritual eye “fixed . . . on God in Christ . . . [until] we are more and more filled with the love of God and man.”<sup>114</sup> The *telos* of intention is love. Both faith and intention are the means to love immediately, finally and eternally. Other characteristics are introduced as worthy goals of intention, but love for God and man is the goal which is consistently mentioned. Other doctrines are correlated with love, including an interpretation of Acts 2:42 in which communion (koinonia) is interpreted by “they had all things common” (Acts 4:32). Wesley indicates his meaning by the command, “We charge you who are rich in this world . . . to be habitually doing good, to live in a course of good works. . . . Be a steward, a faithful and wise steward, of God and the poor.”<sup>115</sup> What Wesley implies in Discourse VI he makes explicit in Discourse VIII.

A similar relationship exists between two discourses which follow the series on the Sermon on the Mount. Both are entitled “The Law Established Through Faith.” In Discourse I, the Law is the moral law, in relationship to which love is only mentioned. In the second, the Law is love. Faith, its handmaid, is a means toward it. As he says, “Faith, then, was originally designed of God to re-establish the law of love.”<sup>116</sup> Love is thus the *telos* of Divine purpose.

In “Sermon on the Mount, Discourse I,” the kingdom that belongs to the poor in spirit is “the image of God stamped upon the heart . . . [which is] but the love of God, because he first loved us, and the love of all mankind for his sake,”<sup>117</sup> and comfort by “his Spirit” is a “fresh manifestation of his love.”<sup>118</sup>

Sermons II, VIII, and IX of this series deal with the restoration of the image. Love is described in Sermon II as the goal of the Christian’s desire:

*The painful thirst, the fond desire,  
Thy joyous presence shall remove,  
But my full soul shall still require  
A whole eternity of love.<sup>119</sup>*

Love for God and neighbor are applied in sermon XIII. Faith is the power to love in sermons IV, V, VIII, IX, and X. The inwardness of love is taught in III, VIII, and IX.

After his thirteen sermons on the Sermon on the Mount, Wesley added three sermons on the Law in which he first by implication and then explicitly defines the law as love, and then faith as the handmaid who brings us to love. In these, love is described as both the original condition and the ground and the goal of all. Thus it can be concluded that love is the authoritative principle by which scripture is interpreted.

These sermons take us beyond hermeneutics and demonstrate that love is the coordinating principle within the rational process. Reason, along with scripture, is always mentioned when he is listing the Quadrilateral. Experience or tradition may interchange.<sup>120</sup> “We prove the doctrines we preach by Scripture and reason; and, if need be, by antiquity.”<sup>121</sup> This is not to say that reason is more important than experience—“Our ideas are not innate, but must all originally come from our senses”<sup>122</sup>—but that demonstrating that Methodism was reasonable was essential to his dialogue with his Anglican peers. “Experience” could be and was translated “enthusiasm” by his opponents who were not observing his careful use of the term. Wesley was far from being an irrationalist. Thus, when Dr. Thomas Rutherford charged that

“It is a fundamental principle in the Methodist school, that all who come into it must renounce their reason,” Wesley retorted, “Sir, are you awake . . . ? It is a fundamental principle with us, that to renounce reason is to renounce religion; that religion and reason go hand in hand— and that all irrational religion is false religion.”<sup>123</sup>

His emphasis upon reason not only occurred in defense but also against “enthusiasm” within Methodism and in his rejection of mysticism. Thus he rebuked Thomas Maxfield, one of his preachers, for “undervaluing reason, knowledge, and wisdom in general.”<sup>124</sup> He rejected the “mystic divines,” that “utterly decry the use of reason.”<sup>125</sup> He valued scripture precisely because it is reasonable. Hebrews surpasses “all the productions of ancient or modern time” in its “chain of reasoning or argumentation” and Paul of Tarsus is “the strongest reasoner whom we have ever observed (excepting only Jesus of Nazareth).”<sup>126</sup> After re-reading Luther’s commentary on Galatians in 1741, he observed,

How does he (almost in the words of Tauler) decry reason, right or wrong, as an irreconcilable enemy to the Gospel of Christ! Whereas, what is reason (the faculty so called) but the power of apprehending, judging and discoursing? Which is no more to be condemned in the gross, than seeing, hearing, or feeling.<sup>127</sup>

Contained in this statement is Wesley’s definition of reason: “The power of apprehending, judging, and discoursing.” Similarly, in his “An Earnest Appeal” (1743), “before it is possible for you to form a true judgment, . . . it is necessary that you have a clear apprehension . . . fixed, distinct, and determinite.”<sup>128</sup> Discourse is “the inferring one thing from

another.”<sup>129</sup> In his sermon, “The Case of Reason Impartially Considered” (1781), he defined the components of reason as follows:

*Simple apprehension* is barely conceiving a thing in the mind; the first and most simple act of the understanding. *Judgment* is the determining that the things before conceived either agree with or differ from each other. *Discourse*, strictly speaking, is the motion or progress of the mind from one judgment to another.<sup>130</sup>

He concludes, “The faculty which includes these three operations I here mean by the term *reason*.”<sup>131</sup> Where experience enters the process, for Wesley, is that “our ideas are not innate, but must all originally come from our senses.”<sup>132</sup> In his appeals to the “Men of Reason and Religion,” both “An Earnest Appeal” and “Farther Appeals,” he repeatedly appeals to (1) experience, (2) “Reasonable Men”—a common sense concept—and (3) consistency to one’s own principles. By this last, when addressing Christians and Jews, he argues for consistency with Biblical principles. To the other men of Reason and Religion, he appeals to conscience and the evidence from nature itself.

That which is central to our investigation is that he makes love the principle which cannot be avoided if we are truly reasonable. This does not mean that reason can produce love. He specifically denies the possibility. Reason alone cannot produce faith or hope and thus, as he says, “however cultivated and improved, cannot produce the love of God” or neighbor.<sup>133</sup> This latter love he defines as “a calm, generous, disinterested, benevolence to every child of man.”<sup>134</sup> True to his empirical theory, that which is needed are “*spiritual* senses. . . . the hearing ear and the seeing eye.”<sup>135</sup> Though love so defined is not possible to the natural man from his own experience, as Wesley testifies, the rational necessity of it is one of his appeals to the man who neither believes the Scripture nor “the Christian system to be of God.”<sup>136</sup>

The religion Wesley would talk about to these is one that is “worthy of God that gave it.” This, he states, “we conceive to be no other than love; the love of God and of all mankind; the loving God with all our heart and soul and strength, as having first loved us, as the fountain of all the good we have received, and of all we ever hope to enjoy; and the loving every soul which God hath made every man on earth, as our own soul.”<sup>137</sup> This religion he further describes as “The religion of love: the law of kindness brought to light by the gospel. What is this good for? To make all who receive it enjoy God and themselves; to make them like God, lovers of all.”<sup>138</sup>

The very language used in reference to God, such as “worthy of God,” “from above,” “just and good” are, as he comments, “attributes inseparable from the very idea of God.”<sup>139</sup> From this premise regarding God’s goodness, he then argues, “ought we not thus to seek him with all diligence?”<sup>140</sup> Wesley then appeals to their “own conscience” and asks them, “Is it not reasonable to love God? . . . Whether, therefore, you do love God or no, you cannot but own ‘tis reasonable so to do; nay, seeing he is the parent of all good, to love him with all your heart.”

In all of this Wesley argued that love is reasonable. Thus he asked, “Is it not reasonable to love our neighbor: every man whom God hath made?”<sup>141</sup>



Regarding love for neighbor, he asked, “And can there be a more equitable rule of our love” and affirmed, “You will plead for the reasonableness of this, as also for that golden rule (the only adequate measure of brotherly love, in all our words and actions), “whatsoever that ye would that men should do unto you, even so do unto them.”<sup>142</sup> Wesley pushed reason toward its ultimate concern and declared that its goal is love. As he addressed these non-biblical “Men of Reason and Religion,”

But one question still remains to be asked: ‘What do you mean by reason?’ I suppose you mean the eternal reason, or the nature of things: the nature of God and man, with the relations necessarily subsisting between them. Why, this is the very religion we preach: a religion evidently founded on, and every way agreeable to eternal reason, to the essential nature of things. . . . it begins in knowing him. . . . It goes on in loving him and all mankind—for you cannot but imitate whom you love. It ends in serving him in doing his will, in obeying him whom we know and love.”<sup>143</sup>

Love, being the very religion that reasonable men want and because it is unattainable by reason, ought to be sought where it is promised. Nevertheless, these rational men tolerate the idea of being saved by love, but not by faith. But to reject faith knowing that it promises the reasonable religion of love is irrational. Wesley’s reason is, “You cannot do this without a secret condemnation in your own breast. O that you would at length cry to God for that heavenly gift whereby alone this truly reasonable religion, this beneficent love for God and man, can be planted in your heart!”<sup>144</sup>

In turning to those who believe in both scripture and Christianity, the rational principle Wesley argues is consistency. To these men of Reason and Religion, he asks, “Do you answer to the character under which you appear? If so, you are confident with yourselves: your principles and your practices agree together.”<sup>145</sup> He then questions whether their claim is true: “How is it you call yourselves men of reason? Is reason inconsistent with itself? . . . A common swearer, a sabbath-breaker, a whoremonger, is a monster upon earth, the greatest contradiction to his own as well as to the reason of mankind . . . Either profess you are an infidel, or be a Christian.”<sup>146</sup> The religion which is consistent with the Bible and “which alone is of value before God, is. . . the religion of love.”<sup>147</sup> In “A Farther Appeal. . . . Part II,” he addresses the old non-conformists, Quakers and Baptists (“Anabaptists”), and asks whether their lives are consistent with what they teach, especially whether their lives are in harmony with love for God and neighbor. To the Quaker who is still wearing black, but now expensive black, he asks, “surely you cannot be ignorant that the sinfulness of fine apparel lies chiefly in the expensiveness. In that it is robbing God and the poor: it is defrauding the fatherless and widow: it is wasting the food of the hungry, and withholding his raiment from the naked to consume it on our own lusts.”<sup>148</sup> The Quakers failed in love for neighbor. As they prospered, and after they had ministered to their own, they “did not bestow what was more than enough for all your own [“all that you had to spare”], on the poor belonging to other societies.<sup>149</sup>

No stronger statement could be made regarding the centrality of love for Wesley, than the following affirmation of Wesley's in his "Farther Appeal:"

No stress has been placed on anything as though it were necessary to salvation but what is undeniably contained in the Word of God. And of the things contained therein the stress laid on each has been in proportion to the nearness of its relation to what is there laid down as the sum of all—the love of God and neighbor. So pure from superstition, so thoroughly scriptural is that religion which has lately spread in this nation.

"It is likewise rational, as well as scriptural; it is as pure from enthusiasm as from superstition. . . . Who will prove that it is enthusiasm to love God?150

Love is central to both the interpretation of scripture and rational method.

The centrality of love in Wesley's concept of reason is further demonstrated by a brief review of some of his doctrines. Wesley's statement that "Love is the sum of Christian sanctification"151 takes on new significance as does his identification of perfection as perfect love. Love is not oriented toward this single issue, but permeates all of life. As noted in the hierarchy of ideas, "the stress laid on each has been in proportion to [its] . . . nearness . . . to . . . the love of God and neighbor." The same pattern of priorities is found in his doctrine of the Church. In his sermon "On Zeal," which he describes as a treatise on "comparative divinity,"152 love expressed as love for God and neighbor, takes priority over the Church and its ordinances. The church is a means toward love. Love itself is the *summum bonum*: "see that you must be zealous for love."153

This teleology of love is also seen in its relationship to faith. A study of this relationship also gives more precise understanding of Wesley's analogy of salvation, that repentance is the porch, faith the door, and holiness the house. Faith is the means to make love operative, but as means faith becomes secondary to love. Love is the *Summum Bonum*. Faith, for Wesley, is grace for fallen man. In this he follows Clement of Alexandria who said, "Faith, so to speak, is the attempt generated in time; the final result is the attainment of the promise, secured for eternity."154 One could hardly expect Luther to make the following statement by Wesley:

What St. Paul observed concerning the superior glory of the gospel, above that of the law, may, with great propriety, be spoken of the superior glory of love, above that of faith. . . . Yea, all the glory of faith, before it is done away, arises hence, that it ministers to love: It is the great temporary means which God has ordained to promote that eternal end."155

Though love never ceases, faith shall. As he comments in his Notes on 1 Cor. 13: "Faith, hope, love—are the sum of perfection on earth; love alone is the sum of perfection in heaven." And in his Sermons, "The angels . . . had no occasion for faith." Neither did Adam. Only fallen man needs faith.156

For Wesley, faith answers to two lacks in fallen man: his lack of knowledge and his lack of moral right and ability. These two lacks relate to two

kinds or operations of faith. The first is “faith in its general notion.” This is “faith . . . as the evidence of things not seen, whose office is to supply the want of sight.”<sup>157</sup> The second is “faith in particular” which is “faith in the blood of Jesus”<sup>158</sup> and “in the atonement”<sup>159</sup> or stated as trust in God, “confidence in redeeming love”<sup>160</sup> and “confidence in a pardoning God.”<sup>161</sup> Neither of these faiths is needed by angels or man before the fall, but both are needed after the fall. Faith, to Wesley, is a special grace for fallen man, grace for an inferior dispensation.

Regarding faith in “its general notion,” his argument is that “the angels who, from the moment of their creation, beheld the face of their Father that is in heaven, had no occasion for faith.” Similarly, Adam before the fall did not need faith since “it is highly probable that Adam, before he rebelled against God, walked with Him by sight, and not by faith. . . . He was then able to talk with Him face to face.”<sup>162</sup> This faith is fulfilled in sight.

Faith in general is closely related to the rational faculty of intention. Both intention and faith are described by Wesley as “the eye of the soul.”<sup>163</sup> Both are the means by which “we are more and more filled with the love of God and man”<sup>164</sup> and “our affections are more and more loosened from earth, and fixed on things above. So that faith, in general, is the most direct and effectual means of promoting all righteousness and true holiness; of establishing the holy and spiritual law in the hearts of them that believe.”<sup>165</sup> Here faith in its general sense contributes to the restoration of the image, which as the law written upon the hearts, is love.

Just as faith in the general sense was not needed by angels or man before the fall, so also faith in the particular redemptive sense was not needed before man sinned. Faith in this sense “pre-supposes sin, and the wrath of God declared against the sinner. . . . Consequently, as there was no need of an atonement before the fall, so there was no place for faith in that atonement.”<sup>166</sup> This is saving faith and is distinct from faith in general,” which establishes “the holy and spiritual law in the hearts of them that believe.”<sup>167</sup> Faith . . . in a pardoning God . . . enables us . . . to give our hearts to Him who was given for us.”<sup>168</sup> This faith also is fulfilled in love. “Faith [in this particular redemptive sense] . . . was originally designed of God to reestablish the law of love. . . . It is the grand means of restoring that holy love wherein man was originally created . . . it leads to that end, the establishing anew the law of love in our hearts.”<sup>169</sup> He further adds:

For there is no motive so powerfully inclines us to love God, as the sense of the love of God in Christ. And from this principle of grateful love to God arises love to our brother also . . . this love to man, grounded on faith and love to God, ‘worketh no ill to’ our neighbor”: consequently it is . . . ‘the fulfilling of the whole negative ‘law’ . . . [“likewise”]. It continually incites us to do good. . . . It is therefore, the fulfilling of the positive law.<sup>170</sup>

The difference between Wesley and Luther is that for Luther justification is the coordinate, whereas for Wesley love was. In Wesley with love as the coordinate, what happens to faith? (1) Faith becomes a means toward the goal of love; (2) faith is temporal; (3) faith is a handmaid to eternity; (4) nevertheless, faith is essential until faith becomes sight and entire love is perfected in the eternal life with God.

Regarding this last, Wesley is very careful not to imply, as did the mystics, that faith could be eclipsed by union, sight, knowledge, or even love in this life. The fact is that for Wesley, in this life we always need the atonement. There is no such perfect freedom from sin in this life or perfect love that we no longer need particular faith, faith in a crucified Savior, and no such perfect knowledge that we no longer need general faith.

How important love is to him as a rational discipline is seen in that it is precisely when discussing love that he comes the closest to becoming what he tried to avoid, that is, becoming a speculative theologian. Wesley has a metaphysic of love. As he stated, “the heaven of heavens is love”<sup>171</sup> and regarding God, love “is His darling, His reigning attribute, the attribute that sheds an amiable glory on all his other perfections.”<sup>172</sup>

His metaphysical tendency is evident in his sermons dealing with the Law, especially “The Original, Nature, Property, and Use of the Law” and “The Law Established Through Faith, Discourse II.” In the first of these he is defining the “law [which] is holy, . . . just, and good” (Rom. 7:12). This law “is not the ceremonial law,” “neither . . . the Mosaic dispensation.” “The Apostle,” Wesley says, “never bestows so high commendations as these upon that imperfect and shadowy dispensation. He nowhere affirms the Mosaic to be a spiritual law or; that it is holy, and just, and good.”<sup>173</sup> Instead, it “is no other than the moral law.”<sup>174</sup> “It is the face of God unveiled. . . . It is the heart of God disclosed to man.”<sup>175</sup> “The law of God is all the virtues in one.”<sup>176</sup> It is “the law of liberty,” “the law of mercy and truth, of love to God and man, of lowliness, meekness and purity.”<sup>177</sup> As he forthrightly states, “O stand fast in this liberty . . . ! Stand fast in loving God and to walk in all his commandments.”<sup>178</sup>

In the following, love takes on a personification similar to “Wisdom” in Proverbs 8; then like the divine Logos of John, it becomes Christ: These laws in one are “in such a shape as to be beheld with open face by all those whose eyes God hath enlightened. What is the law but divine virtue and wisdom assuming a visible form?”<sup>179</sup> It is “the offspring of God, . . . the copy of all his imitable perfections.”<sup>180</sup> Both Christ and love seem to be intended by reference to the eternal law, for the sermon closes; “‘Look unto Jesus;’ and in order thereto, look more and more into the perfect law, ‘the law of liberty’; and ‘continue therein’; so shalt thou daily ‘grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.’”<sup>181</sup> The moral law is also described as “an incorruptible picture of the High and Holy One that inhabiteth eternity. . . . It is the face of God unveiled; . . . It is. . . *the streaming forth or out beaming of his glory, the express image of his person.*”<sup>182</sup>

In the sermon, “The Law Established Through Faith, II,” the law which is eternal is specifically described as love. Thus love is described as pre-existent, as the original nature of angels and men at their creation and as the *telos* of all that is made. It is cosmic, transcendent and eternal: “Love existed from eternity, in God, the great ocean of love. Love had a place in all the children of God, from the moment of their creation: They received at once, from their gracious Creator, to exist and to love.”<sup>183</sup> This latter is, of course, a direct allusion to his statement regarding “the original of the law of God.” “With regard to man, it was coequal with his nature; but with regard to the elder sons of God [the angels], it shone in its full splendour.”<sup>184</sup>

In the following Wesley gives a metaphysical application to the words, “the end of the commandment is love.”<sup>185</sup>

God hath given this honor to love alone: Love is the end of all the commandments of God. Love is the end, the sole end, of every dispensation of God, from the beginning of the world to the consummation of all things. And it will endure when heaven and earth flee away; for “love” alone “never faileth.”<sup>186</sup>

The law, then, which is “the streaming forth or out beaming of his glory”<sup>187</sup> is love. Notice how he waxes eloquent over the eternal law, which is love:

We may trace its origin higher still, even beyond the foundation of the world; to that period, unknown indeed to men, but doubtless enrolled in the annals of eternity, when ‘the morning stars’ first ‘sang together,’ being newly called into existence. It pleased the great Creator to make these, his firstborn sons, intelligent beings that they might know Him that created them.<sup>188</sup>

In this passage he could have been a ghost writer for J.R.R. Tolkien in his *Silmarillion*.<sup>189</sup> Again, Wesley states:

Love is the end of all the commandments of God. Love is the end, the sole end of every dispensation of God, from the beginning of the world to the consummation of all things. And it will endure when heaven and earth flee away; for ‘love’ alone ‘never faileth.’ Faith will totally fail; it will lie swallowed up in sight, in the everlasting vision of God. But even then, love,—

*Its nature and its office still the same,  
Lasting its lamp and unconsumed its flame,—  
In deadless triumph shall for ever live  
And endless good diffuse, and endless praise receive.*<sup>190</sup>

These passages evidence that Wesley had a strong bent toward the speculative and mystical. No wonder he reacted so strongly to “Mr. Law’s book on the New Birth” as “Philosophical, speculative, precarious; Behmenish, void and vain!”<sup>191</sup> Yet what is important for us is that in this metaphysical exercise his logic is always the logic of love.

Love as the coordinating principle is nowhere more grandly expressed than in his eschatology regarding the Church. Though in a variety of ways and through a variety of terms, he had argued that love unites and that the Methodists ought to remain in the Church of England, nevertheless division was occurring. Wesley saw the inevitable. He ordained first for the Methodist Church in America, then for Scotland, and then for England itself, though the last is sometimes disputed. Amazingly, at the same time as he was ordaining, he was also writing his sermon, “The General Spread of the Gospel” (1783, AM), in which he looked forward to the day when God’s promises regarding the church would be fulfilled. As he states,

The grand ‘Pentecost’ shall ‘fully come’ and ‘devout men’ in every nation under heaven . . . shall all be filled with the Holy Ghost . . . And there shall be no ‘root of bitterness’ springing up either to defile or trouble them. . . . There will be no partiality. . . . Consequently, . . . .

*They all are of one mind and soul*

*And only love informs the whole.*<sup>192</sup>

Wesley was not blind toward the difficulty of attaining unity. In fact he questioned the physical possibility of organizational unity.<sup>193</sup> Nevertheless, a union of love was possible. As he asks about the differences of opinion, “Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike?”<sup>194</sup> Despite the artificial barriers which men or the devil have built, Wesley sought for a way to encourage “every child of God to say, . . . ‘whosoever doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.’”<sup>195</sup> He looked for the day when “the true primitive Christianity” of Catholic love should “spread over all the earth.”<sup>196</sup>

The above exposition of Wesley’s theology demonstrates the consistency of his thought and would underline his nomination by Outler as “the most important Anglican theologian in his century.”<sup>197</sup> Wesley is the theologian of love, but not just love in a speculative sense, but love which is both informed by scripture, reason, experience and tradition, and also is the coordinating principle around which these are organized. His system is love. In light of this research, it may be inadequate to refer to the quadrilateral alone, especially when we consider that for Wesley “only love informs the whole.” Instead we must recognize a genuine quinquelateral of scripture, reason, experience, tradition and love.

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## Notes

1 “List of Poetical Works” II, IV, V, XLI; *The Works of Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, 3rd ed. (Ed. by Thomas Jackson. London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1829-31; reprint, 5th ed., London: Wesleyan Conference Office, n.d.), XIV, 319-345. Hereinafter referred to as *Works*. In his *A Pocket Hymn Book*, he referred back to this 1780 hymn book as having “a clear explication of every branch of speculative and practical divinity.” *Ibid*, XLIX; *Works*, XIV, 345.

2 Albert C. Outler, *John Wesley*, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. vii.

3 See Frederick Dryer, “Faith and Experience in the Thought of John Wesley,” *American Historical Review* (The American Historical Association, Feb., 1983), vol. 88, no. 1, p. 28.

4 Albert C. Outler, “John Wesley As A Theologian—Then and Now” (Willson Lectures at Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, D.C., Oct. 18-19, 1973), p. 1.

5 “Preface, § 3, Sermons on Several Occasions, Series I”; *Works*, V, p. 2.

6 “A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion” Part III, (1745), § III, 15; *Works*, VIII, 224-225.

7 “A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion” Part III, (1745), § III, 13, 15; *Works*, VIII 223.

8 Albert Outler. *John Wesley*, p. 120.

- 9 Randy Maddox, “Responsible Grace: The Systematic Perspective of Wesleyan Theology” (A paper presented at the American Academy of Religion 1984), p. 10.
- 10 Dryer, p. 29.
- 11 “Preface,” 5; *Sermons on Several Occasions, Series I; Works*, V, 3.
- 12 “Farther Thoughts on Christian Perfection” (1759); “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection” (1725-1777), § 19; *Works*, XI, 397.
- 13 *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament* (1754) (London: The Epworth Press, 1950), 1 John 4:8; p. 914.
- 14 Sermon: “On Patience” (Published 1784 in the *Arminian Magazine*, and preached, according to Timothy Smith, in 1761), § 10; *Works*, VI, 488.
- 15 John F. Burton, “Clio and Venus: An Historical View of Medieval Love” in *The Meaning of Catholic Love*, edited by F. X. Newman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1968), pp. 29-30.
- 16 Donald R. Howard, *The Three Temptations: Medieval Man in Search of the World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 19. He is summarizing from D. W. Robertson Jr.’s “Historical Criticism.”
- 17 See my article “Separation or Unity? Sanctification and Love in Wesley’s Doctrine of the Church” in *Wesleyan Theological Perspectives, IV: The Church* (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, Inc., 1984), pp. 333-395.
- 18 Sermon: “On Perfection” (1785 AM; 1761 Smith), §10; *Works*, VI, 412.
- 19 Letter, “To the Reverend Doctor Conyers Middleton (Jan. 4, 1749), § VI, III, 1; *Works*, X, 75. *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, ed. by John Telford (London: The Epworth Press, 1931), vol. II, p. 383. Hereinafter referred to as *Letters*.
- 20 *Ibid*, § VI, III, 2; *Works*, X, 75-76; *Letters*, II, 384.
- 21 *Ibid*, § VI, III, 3; *Works*, X, 76; *Letters*, II, 384.
- 22 *Ibid*, § VI, III, 4; *Works*, VI, 76; *Letters*, II, 384.
- 23 *Ibid*, § VI, III, 6; *Works*, X; *Letters*, II, 385.
- 24 *Ibid*, § VI, III, Sects. 8-9; *Works*, X, 77; *Letters*, II, 386.
- 25 *Ibid*, § VI, II, 1-5; *Works*, X, 72-73; *Letters*, II, 380-81.
- 26 “Farther Thoughts on Separation From the Church of England” (1789), § 1-2; *Works*, XIII, 272.
- 27 Letter, “To Conyers Middleton” (1748-49), § III, 7; *Works*, X, 43.
- 28 Sermon: “The Ministerial Office” (1790 AM), §8; *Works*, VII, 276. For another example, see Sermon: “Of Former Time,” (1787 AM), § 16; *Works*, VII, 164.
- 29 “Ought We to Separate From the Church of England” (1755), § II. [4]; in the “Appendix” of Frank Baker’s *John Wesley and the Church of England* (Nashville: 1970), pp. 330-331.

30 See *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. by Elizabeth Livingston (Oxford: 1977).

31 Letter, "To John Smith" (Sept. 1745), § 20; *Letters*, II, p. 50. "It is believed that 'John Smith' was the nom de plume of Thomas Secker, who was born in 1693, was consecrated Bishop of Bristol in 1735, and in 1737 became Bishop of Oxford. . . . He was made Archbishop of Canterbury in 1758, and died in 1768," Telford, Introductory note to this correspondence (1745-1748); *Letters*, p. 48.

32 Letter, "To Conyers Middleton" (1748-49), § 4; *Works*, X, 1-21.

33 Sermon: "The Wisdom of God's Counsels (c. 1784), 9; *Works*, XIII, 328-329.

34 Ibid

35 Sermon: "Of Former Times" (1787), § II; *Works*, VII, 162.

36 Letter, "To the Editor of the London Chronicle" (Feb. 19, 1761), § I; *Works*, III, 42.

37 "Preface to The Epistles of the Apostolic Fathers, . . ." § II; "Preface to A Christian Library" (1749-1755); *Works*, XIV, 225.

38 Letter: "To Dr. Conyers Middleton" (Jan. 4, 1748-49), § VI, III; *Works*, X, 79; *Letters*, II, p. 387.

39 Ibid, VI, III, 11-12; *Works*, 79; *Letters*, II, 387.

40 Ibid, § VI, I, 3; *Works*, X, 67; *Letters*, II, 376.

41 Ibid, § VI, I, 3-5; *Works*, X, 67-68; *Letters*, II, 376-77.

42 Ibid, § VI, I, 7-9; *Works*, X, 68-69; *Letters*, II, 377.

43 Letter: To Middleton (1748-9), § VI, III, 1; *Works*, X, 75; *Letters*, II, 383.

44 Ibid, § VI, III, 12; *Works*, X, 79; *Letters*, II, 387.

45 Letter to Middleton, § VI, II, 12; *Works*, X, 75; *Letters*, II, 383.

46 Dryer, "Faith and Experience," etc., p. 28.

47 Ibid, p. 29.

48 Ibid, p. 22.

49 "An Earnest Appeal" (1743), § 32; *Works*, VIII, p. 13.

50 Sermon: "Discoveries of Faith" (1761: AM 1789) § 1; *Works*, VII, 231.

51 Ibid, Par. 4, p. 232.

52 Sermon: "The Witness of the Spirit, Discourse I" (1746), par. I, 5; *Works*, V, 114.

53 Sermon: "The Discoveries of Faith" (1761, SR; 1789, AM) § 14; *Works*, VII, 236.

54 Ibid, Sects. 4-14; *Works*, VII, 232-236.

55 "A Further Appeal" (1744), par. V. 28; *Works*, VIII, 106.

56 Letter to Middleton, § III, 10; *Works*, X, 78.



- 57 Letter, “To ‘John Smith’ “ (Dec. 30, 1745), par. 6; *Letters*, II, 59.
- 58 Letter, “To ‘John Smith’ “ (June 25, 1746), par. 9; *Letters*, II, 74.
- 59 Letter to Dr. Thomas Rutherford (March 28, 1768), par. III, 5; *Letters*, V, 5; also *Works*, XIV, 355.
- 60 Ibid, III, 9; *Letters*, V, 366-67; *Works*, XIV, 357.
- 61 Ibid
- 62 Letter, “To Thomas Maxwell,” (Nov. 2, 1762), § 2; *Works*, III, 120; *Letters*, IV, 193.
- 63 Letter, “To ‘John Smith’ “ (June 25, 1746), § 1; *Letters*, II, 68.
- 64 Ibid, p. 75.
- 65 Ibid
- 66 Sermon: “On Zeal” (1758, SR), § I, 2-3; *Works*, VII, 59.
- 67 Ibid, III, 6; *Letters*, V, 368; *Works*, XIV, 357-358.
- 68 Letter, To Dr. Rutherford (1768), § III, 1; *Letters*, V, 363; *Works*, XIV, 353-354.
- 69 Ibid, III, 13; *Letters*, V, 368; *Works*, XIV, 359.
- 70 Letter, To ‘John Smith’ (June, 1746), § 7; *Letters*, II, 71.
- 71 Ibid, Letter, (Dec., 1745); p. 64.
- 72 Ibid, § 15; p. 64-65.
- 73 Letter, (June, 1746), § 2; Ibid, p. 69.
- 74 Letter, “To ‘John Smith’ “ (June 25, 1746), par. 9; *Letters*, II, 75.
- 75 Ibid., Letter (March, 1748), § 6; p. 135.
- 76 Ibid, Letter (Sept. 1745), § 12; p. 46.
- 77 Sermon: “The Witness of the Spirit; Discourse I” (1746), part I, 8; *Works*, V, 115.
- 78 Sermon: “The Witness of the Spirit; Discourse II” (1767), § III,5; *Works*, V, 127.
- 79 “The Witness of the Spirit, Discourse I,” § I, 9; *Works*, V, 116.
- 80 § III, 7; *Works*, V, 128.
- 81 Sermon: “Scriptural Christianity” (“At St. Mary’s, Oxford,” Aug. 24, 1744), § I, 2; *Works*, V, 39.
- 82 Sermon: “The Witness of the Spirit: Discourse I” (1746), § I, 5, 6; *Works*, V, 114-116.
- 83 Sermon: “The Witness of Our Own Spirit” (1746), par. 4; *Works*, V, 135.
- 84 Ibid, § 8; *Works*, v, 137-138.
- 85 Sermon: “The Law Established Through Faith: Discourse II” (1749), § II, 6; *Works*, V, 464. On the restoration of conscience, see Sermon: “The Original, Nature, Property, and Use of the Law” (1749), § I, 4-5; *Works*, I, 436.

- 86 Sermon: “Witness of the Spirit, Discourse I” (1746), I, 4; *Works* V, 114.
- 87 Discourse II, (1767), part IV, 8; *Works*, V, 131.
- 88 Sermon: “The Witness of the Spirit, Discourse I” (1746), § II, 12; *works*, V, 122.
- 89 Letter to Middleton (Jan. 4, 1748-49), VI, III, 1; *Works*, X, 75.
- 90 Letter to Rutherford (March 28, 1768), III, 1; *Works*, XIV, 353-354; *Letters*, V, 363.
- 91 Sermons; “Preface,” § 5; *Works*, V, 3.
- 92 Letter to Rutherford; *Works*, XIV, 354; *Letters*, V, 364.
- 93 Letter to Rutherford, § II, 7; *Works*, XIV, 352.
- 94 *Ibid*, § II, 10; p. 353.
- 95 “Sermons on Several Occasions,” First Series, “Preface,” (1747) § 5; *Works*, V, 3.
- 96 Letter to Rutherford, § II, 6; *Letters*, V, 361; *Works*, XIV, 351-352.
- 97 “A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion,” Part III (Dec. 18, 1745), § III, 9; *Works*, VIII, 220.
- 98 Letter, “To Thomas Maxfield” § 1; *Works*, III, 119-120; *Letters*, IV, 192-193.
- 99 § 3; *Works*, V, 248.
- 100 “Minutes of Some Late Conversations: Conversation II,” (Aug. 2, 1745), Q. 4; *Works*, VIII, 285.
- 101 Notes on the New Testament.
- 102 Sermon: “Christian Perfection” (1740), § 14; *Works*, VI, 11; and “Plain Account of Christian Perfection: (1766), § 12, (2); *Works*, XI, 375.
- 103 Sermon: “The Original, Nature, Property, and Use of the Law” (1749), II, 2; *Works*, V, 437.
- 104 *Ibid*, I, 5-11; 3; *Works*, 437-438.
- 105 Sermon: “. . . Sermon on the Mount: Discourse XXV” (1740, Smith), I, 4; *Works*, V, 312.
- 106 Sermon: “Free Grace” (1740), 26; *Works*, VII, 383.
- 107 John Wesley, “Preface,” 4, *The Sunday Services of the Methodist Churches with Other Occasional Services* (London, 1786), p. 2.
- 108 Letter, “To Mary Bishop” (Feb. 7, 1778); *Letters*, VI, 298.
- 109 “Extract of a Letter to the Rev. Mr. Law” (Jan. 6, 1756), § 7; *Works*, IX, 508.
- 110 (1747), II, 4; *Works*, V, 350.
- 111 *Ibid*.
- 112 Discourse VII, 3; *Works*, V, 345.
- 113 *Works*, V. 342-343.

- 114 Discourse VIII (1747), 2, 4; *Works*, V, 362, 363.
- 115 Sermon on the Mount: Discourse VIII (1747), 27-28; *Works*, V, 376-377.
- 116 Sermon: "The Law Established Through Faith," II,6; *Works*, V, 464.
- 117 Sermon: "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse I," § I, 11; *Works*, V, 256.
- 118 *Ibid.*, II, 4; 259.
- 119 ". . . Sermon on the Mount, Discourse II" (1739), II,5; *Works*, V, 269.
- 120 "Reason, Scripture or Authority" "A Farther Appeal . . . Part I," § V, 32; *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, Vol. XI: The Appeals to Men of Reason and Religion and Certain Related Open Letters. Ed. Gerald R. Cragg (Oxford: The Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 176. Hereinafter referred to as *Works*—Oxford, XI; *Works*, VIII.
- 121 "A Farther Appeal . . . Part III" (1745), § III, 28; *Works*—Oxford, XI, p. 310; *Works*, VIII.
- 122 "An Earnest Appeal," § 32; Oxford, XI, 32; *Works*, VIII.
- 123 Letter to Rutherford (March 28, 1768), § III, 4; *Letters*, V, 364.
- 124 Letter, "To Thomas Maxfield" (Nov. 2, 1762), § 2; *Works*, III, 120; *Letters*, IV, 193.
- 125 "An Earnest Appeal" (1743), par. 30; *Works*—Oxford, XI, 56; *Works*, VIII, 12-13.
- 126 *Ibid*
- 127 "Journal," (June 15, 1741); *Works*, I, 315.
- 128 "An Earnest Appeal" (1743), § 32, *Works*—Oxford, XI, 56; *Works*, VIII, 12.
- 129 *Ibid*, § 30; *Works*—Oxford, XI, 56; *Works*, VIII, 12.
- 130 Sermon: "The Case of Reason Impartially Considered" (1781), § I, 2; *Works*, VI, 353.
- 131 *Ibid*
- 132 "An Earnest Appeal" (1743), § 32; *Works*—Oxford, XI, 56; *Works*, VIII, 13.
- 133 Sermon, "The Case of Reason Impartially Considered" (1781), § II, 1; *Works*, VI, 355-359.
- 134 *Ibid*, § 9; p. 359.
- 135 "An Earnest Appeal" (1743), § 32; *Works*—Oxford, XI, 56; *Works*, VIII, 13.
- 136 *Ibid*, § 12, 13; *Works*—Oxford, XI, 49; *Works*, VIII, 6.
- 137 *Ibid*, § 2; *Works*—Oxford, XI, 45; *Works*, VIII, 2.
- 138 *Ibid*, § 19; *Works*—Oxford, 51; *Works*, VIII, 8.
- 139 *Ibid*. § 15; *Works*—Oxford, XI. 49-50; *Works*, VIII, 7.

- 140 Ibid, Sect 15; *Works*—Oxford, XI, 49-50; *Works*, VIII, 7.
- 141 Ibid., Sects. 20-21; *Works*—Oxford, XI, 51-52; *Works*, VIII, 8-9.
- 142 Ibid, § 21; *Works*—Oxford, 52; *Works*, VIII, 9.
- 143 Ibid, § 28; *Works*—Oxford, XI, 55; *Works*, VIII, 12.
- 144 Ibid, § 24; *Works*—Oxford, XI, 53; *Works*, VIII, 10.
- 145 Ibid, § 39; *Works*—Oxford, XI, p. 59; *Works*, VIII, 15.
- 146 Ibid, § 40; *Works*—Oxford, XI, 59; *Works*, VIII, 15-16.
- 147 Ibid, § 46, 48; *Works*—Oxford, XI, 62, 63; *Works*, VIII, 18, 19.
- 148 “A Farther Appeal . . ., Part II,” § III,6; *Works*—Oxford, XI, 256; *Works*, VIII, 186.
- 149 Ibid, § III,7, footnote; *Works*—Oxford, XI, 257; *Works*, VIII,187. The insert is the variation from the Jackson edition.
- 150 “A Farther Appeal . . ., Part III,” § I, 9-10; *Works*—Oxford, XI, 277; *Works*, VIII, 206.
- 151 Sermon, “On Patience” (1748 AM; 1761 Smith), § 10; *Works*, VI, 488.
- 152 Sermon, “On Zeal” (1781 AM; 1761 Smith), § 10; *Works*, VI, 488.
- 153 Ibid, § III, 7; p. 64.
- 154 “The Instructor,” Book I, ch. VI; *Ante Nicene Fathers* (New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1885), Vol. II, p. 216.
- 155 Sermon: “The Law Established Through Faith, II,” (1749) 2; *Works*, V, 462.
- 156 Ibid, § II, 3, 4; *Works*, V, 463.
- 157 Ibid
- 158 Ibid, II, 3.
- 159 Ibid, II, 5.
- 160 Ibid, p. 464.
- 161 Ibid, III, 3; *Works*, V, 465.
- 162 Ibid, II, 3-4; *Works*, V, 463.
- 163 “Sermon on the Mount: Discourse VIII,” (1747), 2; *Works*, V, 362; and “The Law Established Through Faith, II” III, 2; *Works*, V, 464.
- 164 “Sermon on the Mount: Discourse VIII,” (1747), 4; *Works*, V, 363.
- 165 “The Law Established Through Faith, II” III, 2; *Works*, V, 465.
- 166 Ibid II, 5; *Works*, V, 463.
- 167 Ibid, III, 2; *Works*, V, 465.
- 168 Ibid III, 3; *Works*, V, 365.
- 169 Ibid, II, 6; *Works*, V, 464.
- 170 Ibid, III, 3; *Works*, V, 465.

- 171 “Farther Thoughts on Christian Perfection” (1761): “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection,” § 25, Q. 33; *Works*, XI, 430.
- 172 *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament* (1755), I John 4:8.
- 173 “The Original, Nature, Property, and Use of the Law” (1749), II,1, 2; *Works*, V, 437-438.
- 174 *Ibid*, II, 2; V, 438.
- 175 *Ibid*, II, 3; *Works*, V, 438.
- 176 *Ibid*, II, 4; V, 438.
- 177 *Ibid*, IV, 9; *Works*, V, 446.
- 178 *Ibid*, § IV, 10; p. 446.
- 179 *Ibid*, II, 4; *Works*, V, 438.
- 180 *Ibid*, IV, 9; *Works*, V, 446.
- 181 *Ibid*, IV, 10; *Works*, V, 446.
- 182 *Ibid.*, II, 3; V, 438.
- 183 “The law Established Through Faith, II,” II, 3; *Works*, V, 463.
- 184 “The Original, Nature, Property, and Use of the Law” I, 4; *Works*, V, 436.
- 185 Wesley, *Notes*.
- 186 “The Law Established Through Faith, II” II, 1; *Works*, V, 462.
- 187 “The Original, Nature, Property and Use of the Law,” II, 3; *Works*, V, 438.
- 188 1; *Works*, V, 435.
- 189 Ed. by Christopher Tolkien; Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1977.
- 190 Sermon: “The Law Established Through Faith, II” (1749), II, 1; *Works*, V, 462.
- 191 Journal, October 23, 1739; *Works*, I, p. 234.
- 192 “The General Spread of the Gospel” (1738, AM), §20; *Works*, VI, 284.
- 193 Sermon: “A Caution Against Bigotry” (1749), Sec. II (1); *Works*, V, 484.
- 194 Sermon: “Catholic Spirit” (1749), Sec. 4; *Works*, V, 493.
- 195 “A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists” (1748), Sec. V; *Works*, VIII, 257.
- 196 “Letter to a Roman Catholic” (July 18, 1749), Sec. 15; *Works*, X, 85.
- 197 See endnote 4.

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Called Unto Holiness, Volume 2, The Story of the Nazarenes, The Second twenty-five Years, 1933-58*, by W. T Purkiser, Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 1983, 356 pages. Reviewed by Melvin E. Deiter, Vice Provost and Professor of Church History, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky.

Few people would be as well qualified as W. T. Purkiser to write the type of denominational history portrayed in this second volume of official history of the Church of the Nazarene. The comprehensive insights he has gained through his long personal involvement in the inner workings of the institutional life of the church, give him certain real advantages in understanding and communicating the story. The author seems to tell the story well from that vantage point; however only one who has some equal sense of all the intricacies of the official life of the church could accurately evaluate how well he has walked the tightrope between the extremes of objectivity and subjectivity in his selection of events and his interpretation of them. To the outsider who reads the work, he seems to make the conscious effort to keep the need for objectivity before him as he threads his way through the complex web of personalities and events. His presentation of those personalities and events gives us an invaluable account of the life and accomplishment of his denomination over this quarter century.

The title of this second volume of the official history of the Church of the Nazarene, however, quickly impresses the reader with two factors which become essential elements in any critical review of the work. The phrase, the Second Twenty five Years, “highlights the youth of holiness churches like the Church of the Nazarene. It reminds us that it was only in the early decades of our own century that these churches gathered together the adherents of the holiness revival who were separating from or being separated from main-line Methodism. We are somewhat surprised to realize that the story of these second twenty five years as a denomination actually brings us up to within a generation of our own. The brief period which intervenes makes it difficult to step away far enough in time to see people and events with true historical perspicacity. For holiness people the “good old days” are not very old, and that fact has to still find its proper place in their understanding of themselves. The fact that even holiness historians still tend to regard the Pentecostal churches as newer churches than the holiness churches, demonstrates how this tends to affect the understanding

and interpretation of the story. In fact the major institutionalization phases of the two movements occurred at about the same period, making them contemporaries and in many ways the mutually abrasive competitors they often became. The seventy yearlong history of the holiness revival which preceded the rise of the holiness denominations often has transferred undue venerability to the holiness denominations which eventually institutionalized its values.

The other immediate impression is the dramatic difference between the style and content of this volume and that of the first volume in this historical series written by Timothy L. Smith. The nature of the time and the context of the events under consideration, in some measure at least, may necessitate such differences. There are special pitfalls for writers as they attempt to make the adjustments required in moving from an understanding of the dynamics of a loosely organized movement to the interpretation of the direction and confinement of most of those dynamics within the development of a tightly knit denomination. The author is conscious, as any scholar would have to be, of these factors and notes them in the "Preface." They involve the difference one might experience between writing the early history of the Standard Oil Corporation in the period when the story centered mainly on the life of the company's eccentric founder, John D. Rockefeller, and the account of the later years when the corporate organization was "set-in-concrete." Then the entrepreneurial genius of someone like the founder would have been stifled long before he could ever have gotten the enterprise on its way. The early period which centers on persons rather than systems naturally carries wider and more engaging interest. The presence of both of these realities—time and historical context make it difficult if not unfair for any reviewer to allow the acclaim given to the first volume to overshadow evaluation of the second one on its own merits or demerits.

The "Preface" raises other issues with which the historian must struggle when writing denominational history. One basic dilemma comes to sharp focus in the statement that, "All churches live and work in a broader context than their own individual histories." This is explicitly official denominational history written by someone who has been very close to the institutional heart of the church over an extended period of time. It would be difficult to express surprise that the major part of the book is taken up almost exclusively with the organization's life and development. General superintendents, general assemblies, and the official actions of general agencies fill in the story of what the Church of the Nazarene was during this period. The author acknowledges that his account may be faulted at that point. His rationale for that kind of methodology is one which might be given by anyone of us who try to write history from within a church where representative agents and agencies are responsible for interpreting the "will of the body."

The difficulty is that history which dwells too exclusively upon the activity of persons in leadership often fails to demonstrate the subtle processes of transferal by which the "will of the established leadership" very easily becomes the "will of the body"; this is especially true in conservative groups. It is of some abiding significance in such traditions that the history can appear, as it does here, without a specific chapter devoted to life in the local Nazarene congregations lived and related to the communities and

local cultures in which they ministered. This volume, and it is certainly not alone in this imbalance, still leaves or even adds to the pervasive impression in holiness churches that everything important happens, or at least originates, “at the top.” Church historians need to be more faithful to the author’s excellent insight that, “Church history is the life of the pilgrim people of God on earth lived in the dust and heat of the common lot of man” (p. 8). The heartbeat of the “dust and heat” of common Nazarene life rarely enters into this story except as it somehow filters up through the official life of the church.

Another basic insight of the “Preface” is that “No denomination exists in a vacuum. All churches live and work in a broader context than their own individual histories” (p. 11). The value of any history of the Church of the Nazarene during these years would have been greatly enhanced by giving some space in the story to trying to assess the role or non role of the denomination in its relationship with other holiness bodies and the holiness movement itself. How much truth there is to the common perception of many of the smaller denominations of the movement that the Nazarenes, during these years, regarded themselves as the mainstream into which all smaller units should and would eventually flow, remains to be researched and evaluated. Another closely related point of interest is to determine how conscious the Nazarene leadership was of the effects of the movement of this significantly larger and relatively self-sufficient force among the many smaller holiness bodies struggling to solidify their denominational organizations during this same twenty-five years. For example, the subtleties of the relationships between the Pilgrim Holiness and Nazarene churches from their respective origins through to the period under review in this volume may well reveal much more about the nature of the Holiness movement and both denominations than any in-house history can produce. Such research would go a long way to answering the prime question raised by Dr. Timothy Smith in the first volume as to whether or not the Church of the Nazarene was aware of its responsibility to turn away from the self-centeredness justifiably required during the development phase of any institution to the openness of leadership and statesmanship just as justly expected by the movement as a whole as it sought to maintain its identity in the post World War II church and world. It is of extreme significance to the holiness movement’s history that during this period the Church of the Nazarene was still occupied mainly with its own interests. It was not part of the active mix of the National Holiness Association, the one holiness agency where most other holiness institutions found an arena for interaction and coordination, at the time that NHA (now CHA) leadership passed from Methodist hands into those of the smaller holiness churches. Perhaps the lack of any significant recognition of such issues within this volume is some indication of the validity of the question being raised. The need for progressive leadership called for by some in the church (as pointed out on pp. 70 and 84) was as great in the movement of which the Church of the Nazarene was by right the bell sheep as in that denomination itself.

Everyone in the Church of the Nazarene and in the holiness movement is indebted to Dr. Purkiser for this new history. It will always fill an essential role in understanding his church. Others will have to build on this



account as they write another quite different kind of history in response to questions such as those raised above.

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*A Spectrum of Thought: Essays in Honor of Dennis F. Kinlaw*, edited by Michael L. Peterson. Francis Asbury Publishing Company, Inc., 1982, 188 pp. Reviewed by David L. Thompson, Ph.D., Pastor, Aspen Hill Wesleyan Church, Rockville, Maryland.

Presented to Dr. Kinlaw in honor of his sixtieth birthday by colleagues, former students and professional associates, this Festschrift succeeds in its goal of paying tribute to this great man. Beyond the fine essays themselves, two features contribute to that success. The breadth of the topics treated reflects the wide ranging, learned interests of this scholar who still seeks to bring all truth under the integrating revelation of God. "Christian Scholarship and Service," "Methodist History and Doctrine," and "Old Testament Studies" title the three parts of the work. Fourteen writers study topics as far afield as the significance of "the first and great commandment" for life values, features of the life and thought of Asa Mahan, Francis Asbury and John Wesley, the meaning of Christian scholarship itself, Biblical studies and third millennium B. C. Ebla. That contributors include Presbyterian, Quaker, United Methodist, Nazarene, Wesleyan, Catholic and Jewish scholars mirrors Dr. Kinlaw's own catholicity. The obvious, genuine respect and even affection with which these friends and scholars regard the honor is also a tribute to Dr. Kinlaw, a feature which will enable many of his other students and colleagues who read the work to find themselves joining in the intended tribute to him.

The text of Edward L. R. Elson's 1978 Baccalaureate address at Asbury College opens the section on "Christian Scholarship and Service." To the tenth class to graduate under Dr. Kinlaw's presidency at Asbury College the retired Chaplain of the United States Senate commended Matthew 22:37-39 as setting "Life's Single Vocation," to be pursued with dignity of work, exaltation of the intellect and complete Christian commitment. In chapter two Harold B. Kuhn, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy of Religion at Asbury Theological Seminary, offers an essay on "The Christian Scholar" in which he attempts to isolate those features of the Christian scholar's mind, scope and heart which distinguish him or her from "Man Thinking," described in Emerson's 1837 lecture on "The American Scholar."

Two chapters in the book deal with the stimulating and pioneering 19th century educator theologian, Asa Mahan. This is in part an accident of the interests of Dr. Kinlaw's acquaintances, but is also due in part to the similarities between the great men, Kinlaw and Mahan. In chapter three, James E. Hamilton, Professor of Philosophy at Asbury College, studies "Intellectual Independence in the life of Asa Mahan." Chapter eight is by Edward H. Madden, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy, State University of New York at Buffalo, an Asa Mahan scholar and Hamilton's advisor at SUNY (Buffalo). "Asa Mahan on Freedom and Grace" is Dr. Madden's

topic. In both essays Mahan's intellectual, spiritual and professional career are powerful commendations both of intellectual independence in Christian education and of the doctrines of freedom and grace "forced" upon Mahan by real life over against the high Calvinism of his childhood.

The Christian liberal arts college's task of integrating faith and learning (as opposed merely to juxtaposing the two) is the subject of Michael L. Peterson's address to the Asbury College Faculty retreat (Fall, 1981) which appears as chapter 4, "The Lord of Truth." Dr. Peterson, Associate Professor of Philosophy at Asbury College and editor of the book, also writes the excellent introduction of the honoree and the individual contributors to the work. While the inclusion of this chapter and the opening address by Elson run the risk of giving the collection an overly "in house" cast, it is not offensively so, especially in view of the fact that the topics in question are well treated and so close to Dr. Kinlaw's life concerns.

Part two, "Methodist History and Doctrine" is introduced by John C. Cho's contribution, "John Wesley's View of Fallen Man." Except for the introduction and brief concluding remarks on possible implications for a theology of missions, one has the feeling of having read it all before in works of persons well known to WTJ readers.

Theological pluralism dependent upon an alleged "Wesleyan quadrilateral" will have to look elsewhere for support than to Mr. Wesley himself, according to Dr. Kinlaw's son-in-law, Allan Coppedge, Associate Professor of Theology at Asbury Theological Seminary. In his chapter six "John Wesley and the Issue of Authority in Theological Pluralism," he examines the relative authority of Scripture, tradition, experience and reason in Mr. Wesley's writings and shows the latter three to be subordinate not co-ordinate criteria with Scripture for matters of faith and practice in Mr. Wesley.

In the most eloquently written chapter, Timothy L. Smith presents "Francis Asbury: the Making of a Bishop and the Americanization of a Loyalist," chapter seven. The Professor of History at The Johns Hopkins University reviews Asbury's handling of the crises related 1) to the tensions between him and Mr. Wesley, 2) to problems caused by Wesley's intemperate criticism of the rebelling colonists, 3) to increasing distrust by patriots of the Methodist ministers, and 4) to division among Methodists over the founding of a separate American denomination. From all of these crises Asbury emerged the undisputed leader of Methodism through the magnitude of his own spiritual integrity, his devotedness to Christ, his pastoral passion and patience. Smith supports the contention that not only Asbury but many Anglican clergy as well became true Americans in the main through their commitments to stay with their congregations, not from patriotic rhetoric or threats of violence. He also takes strong exception to Sidney Mead's reading of the role of Methodists and other religionists in the shaping of America, arguing that religious experience not political expediency best explains their participation in the "lively experiment."

Part three, "Old Testament Studies," opens with an essay on "Ebla and Genesis 11" by Cyrus H. Gordon, Dr. Kinlaw's Brandeis University mentor. Now Professor of Hebraic Studies at New York University, Dr. Gordon counsels against allowing misguided enthusiasm and early

misleading information about the Ebla materials to denigrate the true significance of the finds there for opening new vistas in Biblical prehistory. The Ebla archives present a world in which Sumerian was the lingua franca, a fact Dr. Gordon seeks unconventionally to explain. The wide Sumerization occurred through “a loose, far-flung network of operational outposts for securing various raw materials to be processed at a ‘national center,’ which in prehistoric times shifted locations, but eventually situated in Southern Mesopotamia (p. 128). Whether civilizations in the founding go searching for raw materials for higher culture needs (gold, decorative stone) or, on the contrary, develop the needs of their lower culture even along the lines supported by raw materials nearer at hand is the question. That the post flood world’s international speech order seen at the tower of Babel (Genesis 11) was Sumerian as reflected in third millennium B.C. Ebla is convincing. And in view of the Sumerization at Ebla, the derivation of the ancient name of David’s capital, Jerusalem, in part from Sumerian (not Hebrew or West Semitic), yeru- = URU, “city,” (of peace) appears correct, as claimed nearly a century ago by Sayce (cited in *BDB*).

Dr. Kinlaw’s student and successor as president at Asbury College, John N. Oswalt, clarifies the idea of myth in his study, “A Myth Is a Myth Is a Myth: Toward a Working Definition.” The writer critiques and rejects definitions which 1) assume a judgment on the truthfulness of the materials because of a pre-scientific world view of the composition (etymological), 2) take the expression of ultimate truth in this world’s imagery to be myth and so suffer from undue breadth and from the problem of truth conveyed in imagery judged untrue (sociological), 3) make myth the use of story to convey values but cannot determine why the term “myth” should be applied to some stories and not others without reverting to the truth—falsehood issue (literacy), Dr. Oswalt supports a “phenomenological” use of the term “myth,” borrowing from B. S. Childs. Here myth is a form which “identifies deity with this world in order to control deity” (p. 141). It assumes a whole cluster of “common features found in completely unrelated myths around the world” (p. 141). Dr. Oswalt is able to distinguish the Old Testament’s world view from this, showing its denial in fact of the very features common to myth. He therefore concludes, with Weiser, Childs, Bright and Frankfort, that the Old Testament is not mythmaking, quite apart from issues of truth or falsehood.

Victor P. Hamilton is Professor of Religion and Chairman of the Division of Philosophy and Religion at Asbury College. In chapter eleven. “Recent Studies in Leviticus and Their Contributions to a Further Understanding of Wesleyan Theology,” Dr. Hamilton follows J. Milgrom and others in contending that in Leviticus—Numbers it is not the deliberate sinner but rather the unrepentant sinner who is excluded from sacrificial expiation. The evidence supports the idea that in both the Old Testament and New sacrifice was for both inadvertent and intentional sin, if the latter were confessed. Thus, Wesley’s definition of sin as “voluntary transgression of a known law of God” falls within the parameters of the priestly teaching on sin and its forgiveness.

For this reviewer the most provocative entry in the work was John F. X. Sheehan’s “Remarks on Some Recent Writing About Liturgical

Evidences in Jeremiah,” chapter 12. Interacting with Berridge, Bright and Reventlow, he dares ask what one seldom sees asked in Biblical scholarship—”What is the evidence?” Anyone frustrated with reading interlocking structures built with a confusing combination of careful research and completely vacuous “evidences” like “obviously,” “naturally,” and “who can doubt but . . .” will be heartened to read Sheehan’s response to Bright’s objection that a Reventlow idea is “unthinkable.” “What argument has Bright advanced for his position other than that these phrases are ‘unthinkable’ in the liturgy? Unthinkable for whom? . . . The question, of course, is not whether they suit my experience or that of John Bright. Are they suited to the experience of Jeremiah?” (p. 164). The article is a positive and judicious use of form critical information to study possible liturgical features in Jeremiah. It has the great strength of admitting and showing that present methodologies simply do not allow definitive answers on the precise nature of the liturgical dimensions that may lie behind selected Jeremiah texts, and also of refusing to give answers for which evidence is wanting.

Edwin M. Yamauchi, a fellow graduate student with Dr. Kinlaw at Brandeis and now Professor of History and Director of Graduate studies in that department at Miami University of Ohio, concludes the tributes with a study of “Nehemiah, A Model Leader.” This thirteenth chapter is a valuable collection of historical information for the understanding of Nehemiah and his period, a stretch of Old Testament history often a blur to readers of Scripture.

Following the thirteen essays, Paul Vincent, Associate Professor of Literature at Asbury College, gives “Representative Selections from the Writings of Dennis F. Kinlaw,” annotating bibliographic notes on thirty of Dr. Kinlaw’s writings under the headings, “Old Testament Studies,” “Basic Christian Doctrines,” “Theology and Society,” “Christian and Education.”

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*Practical Divinity: Theology in the Wesleyan Tradition*, by Thomas A. Langford. Abingdon Press, 1983. 303 pp. Reviewed by Rob L. Staples, Th.D., Professor of Theology, Nazarene Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Missouri.

This book by the Professor of Systematic Theology at the Duke University Divinity School is valuable reading for any Wesleyan interested in understanding not only his “roots” but also the growth of the trunk and the branches which make up the living “tree” of the Wesleyan faith.

The term “practical divinity” is John Wesley’s own, describing his understanding of the purpose of theology—it must be practical. Intended as a survey of the development of the Wesleyan tradition from John Wesley down to the present day, the book covers much ground and does not go into great detail at any point. But it is admirably accurate in summarizing the thought of the many theologians who have contributed to the Wesleyan tradition.

The dynamic of this multi-faceted tradition unfolds as the author treats thinkers as diverse as Adam Clarke and John B. Cobb, Jr., Richard Watson and Geoffrey Wainwright, or H. Orton Wiley and James H. Cone. The book is more descriptive than critical, most of the theologians surveyed being presented in a favorable light. At points one wishes the author had been more incisive in examining the weakness of the thinkers under discussion, and questioning their compatibility with original Wesleyanism. But this defect is outweighed by the way Langford shows how each theologian has made his own unique contribution to this living tradition.

The opening chapter deals with the origins of the tradition in John Wesley's own thought. Langford follows Albert Outler in describing Wesley's contribution to the history of Christian thought as the recognition that

the older Reformation tendency to polarize 'faith alone' and 'holy living' truncated the full Christian message. Wesley was convinced that the two must be held together and he attempted to speak for this larger vision (p. 22).

Chapter two, entitled "Scriptural Christianity: John Wesley's Theology of Grace," depicts Wesley's doctrines of justification, prevenient grace, assurance, Christian perfection, and the church. In his discussion of Christian perfection, Langford rightly states that, for Wesley, holiness is a gift of grace, not an achievement (p. 41) and he calls attention to Wesley's "strong emphasis on entire sanctification" and to his dual emphasis on gradual and instantaneous sanctification. He says, putting much of Wesley's *ordo salutis* in a nutshell:

New birth, which occurs instantaneously, is followed by a gradual sanctification, which may lead to an instantaneous event of entire sanctification. A subsequent gradual development should also follow this event (p. 41).

Chapters 3 through 11 trace the spread of Wesleyanism in Britain and America in the 19th and 20th centuries, viewing it against the background of changing cultural environments, and analyzing the teaching of each significant theologian responsible for the development of the tradition.

Of special interest to WTJ readers will be chapter 6, entitled "Holiness Theology." Here the author surveys the contribution of the Holiness Movement to the ongoing spread of Wesley's message. The Holiness Movement is seen as a vital and valid part of historic Methodism. Langford assesses the work of some representative holiness scholars, past and present, and shows an acute awareness of the creative theological discussions now being carried on in holiness circles. He says:

Holiness theologians are now assessing the roots of their doctrine of sanctification and are relating the implications of their positions to actual experience. Whatever the final conclusions, and whether or not consensus is achieved, the discussion has enriched the historical understanding of the teaching of Christian perfection (p. 143).

Langford adds the observation that "holiness theology is alive, and it

remains a partner with others who claim Wesleyan roots and who wish to continue in the Wesleyan spirit” (p. 146).

Langford’s treatment of holiness theology is just one among many recent indications that Methodist scholars are looking at the holiness movement with renewed appreciation for its faithfulness to a part of Wesley’s message which modern Methodism has too much neglected. Such scholars are graciously inviting us to work with them in the re-examination of this neglected theme. Let us hope that we in the holiness movement can, with equal graciousness, enter such dialogues with renewed appreciation for the Methodist soil out of which our distinguishing message sprang.

The final chapter, on “The Character of Wesleyan Theology,” enumerates the themes which, according to Langford, constitute the nucleus of the Wesleyan tradition—”biblical witness to Jesus Christ, vital experience of God in Christ as Savior and Sanctifier, commitment to human freedom and ethical discipleship, and the shaping of church life around missional responsibility” (p. 263).

The entire book could be called an enlargement of Langford’s vision, described on page 23, that “from John Wesley’s life and thought, a tradition was born. By him, a past was reshaped. >From him, a stream still flows, seeking to express, in changing contexts, his concern for practical divinity.”